

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS AND IDENTIFICATION OF GENERAL COMPETENCES OF COUNSELORS IN PENAL INSTITUTIONS

Original Scientific Article

DOI: 10.7251/DEFEN1740002D	COBISS.RS-ID 6881048	UDK 371.13:303.1]:001.981
----------------------------	----------------------	---------------------------

Gordana Dukic¹, MSc in Pedagogy

Ministry of Education and Culture of Republic of Srpska

Abstract:

General competences are a dynamic combination of knowledge, understanding, skills, abilities, attitudes and values that are necessary for personal achievement and development. They are typical of every person regardless of their scope of work. They develop during the period of formal education and represent the basis for further learning and development as an integral part of lifelong learning. Counselors in penal institutions have already formed attitudes and opinions on general competences. Counselors consider systemic competences (ability to adapt to new situations, learning ability, ability for practical application of knowledge, ability for persistence when achieving highest quality of work and creativity) to have a slight advantage over interpersonal, instrumental and general specific competences and to represent a fine basis for further learning and development. Owing to the complexity of competences and the complex process of identification, testing and comparison of competences as to the fact that counselors value systemic ones more, which are known to be more complex, it is advisable to check these results on a larger sample and to open a qualitative discussion on counselors' competences in penal institutions within the context of lifelong learning.

Key words: *general competences, lifelong learning, professional development, counselors, penal institutions.*

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, in the era of socio-economic changes and rapid transition of the society into “the society of knowledge”, competences acquired and improved during life are

¹ Correspondent: Gordana Dukic, e-mail: goga.dukic@gmail.com

increasingly becoming the topic for discussion. In this respect, we recognized the need for counselors' adjustment to new situations in penal institutions requiring new knowledge, skills and abilities in order to be more efficient in their work. In such circumstances, we have examined general competences considered as the prerequisite for adequate personal attitude towards life, work and further learning. They are necessary for everyone, for their personal development, participation in society and employment. Generic competences are transferable and multifunctional. They are used for achieving several aims, solving various problems and performing different kinds of task. Therefore, they represent a fine basis for further professional development and new challenges in the form of a lifelong learning concept. Related to that is our expectation to identify instrumental, interpersonal, systemic and specific general competences which represent a fine basis for further learning, professional training and advancement, i.e. professional development of counselors according to the attitudes and opinions of counselors in penal institutions.

THEORETICAL APPROACH

According to the contemporary apprehension of the foundations of competences and their constructs, it is possible to identify and develop competences of every individual even beside the fact that they are a theoretical and methodological challenge which is still the focus of attention of the academic community. As a notion and concept, they represent a reaction to changes and demands in the world of work which strives to develop the abilities of employees. Not denying the complexity of the conceptual definition, in the text titled "Definition of the competences of teachers in class-subject teaching" Drago Brankovic thoroughly explains the notion of competence and states that the term was borrowed from the English language (eng. competences) and introduced to our pedagogy. Furthermore, he claims that it has several meanings without precise conceptual definitions and that the terms adequacy (eng. competency) and competences regardless of their terminological similarity cannot be used as synonyms. As a wider notion than adequacy, competence refers to integrity of engagement in order to achieve the set aim. However, the notion of adequacy represents already formed competence (knowledge and skills) for performance of certain jobs. Brankovic mentions more comprehensive definitions, used to address the certain structural elements (constructs) of competences (behavior, knowledge, skills, judgment and attitudes). The same author finds a more precise relation towards the constructs of competences in the definitions according to which, the notion of competence involves certain knowledge, skills and abilities of a person. Logically thinking, it is considered that these constructs can be treated as pedagogical principles which should be built into the main constructs of competences (knowledge, skills, judgment and attitudes) among which there are special connections and relations such as psycho-physical abilities and personality traits (Brankovic, 2011).

According to the Oxford Encyclopedic Dictionary, a competence is defined as "a combination of knowledge, skills, postures, values and habits which enable an individual to act in certain specific situation, i.e. profession actively and efficiently. A competence implies having necessary abilities, authority, skill and knowledge." (Oxford Advanced

Learners' Encyclopedic Dictionary, 1989, p. 183). On a general level, the notion of competence means "jurisdiction, authority, ability" (Vujaklija, 2004). Understanding of competence is more often adopted in various frames of reference, which perceives attitudes and values as the integral parts of a competence. European Tuning Project offered the following definition: "A competence represents a dynamic combination of knowledge, understanding, skills, abilities and values. Encouraging the development of these competences is the subject matter of education curricula. Competences are formed in various training units on different levels. Competencies are acquired by students" (Gonzales, J., Wagenaar, R., 2005 on "Tuning Counselor Education Curricula in the Western Balkans", 2008, p.35). A number of authors perceive competences as a combination of all these features. Furthermore, in their works they describe the levels at which competences can be used by individuals.

Even though competences are often identified with qualifications (knowledge + skills), the actual dimension of competences is much wider and includes personal characteristics, opinions, motives and values which guide someone through work. Competences are also viewed as the transformation of knowledge into practical work and actions. Therefore, a competent person is the person who knows and who knows how to do something with what they know. Therefore, to be competent means to make something usable, i.e. to know how to put something into practice when it is necessary and in certain instances. Hence, this definition of competences as a combination of knowledge, skills, opinions, values and habits which enable an individual to act actively and efficiently in certain situation, i.e. profession, is agreed by most people and can be accepted.

Terminological and conceptual problems of competences are considered to be complex. However, theoretical and methodological problems of determining the types of competences and their classification criteria are even more complex. Different types of competences are cited in scientific-professional literature and numerous documents. We will mention the competences which Nenad Suzic considers as key personality competences such as: cognitive, affective, social and work-action related competences. Philip Abrami views cognitive abilities as processes involved in studying, including the ability to process information, determine the relations and make reasonable assumptions and decisions (Abrami, F. 1995, according to Suzic, 2000). Suzic and a majority of authors accept the notion of emotional competence within the context of complete functioning of a person and claim that it is not possible to view emotionality without a moral aspect or without altruism and empathy as social aspects of emotionality. Thereat, the syntagm of emotional competence does not have the same meaning as emotionality because the emphasis is on the competences which enable a person to master their own emotionality even though the mastering process can be hardly imagined in an ideal form. When it comes to social competences, Suzic claims that they arise from the apprehension that people have the need to be bonded to other people. The same author considers work-action related competences to imply the individual ability of executing tasks. "No matter how compact and capable the group is for the realization of tasks, only individuals can achieve results. For example, without individual action, group is a fiction, just a theoretical construct" (Suzic, 2000, p.103). By analyzing these competences, the author talks about another 28 competences for the 21st century.

As a result of the Tuning Project, (Kleut, 2006) there is a classification of competences on general (or generic) and professional. All those who complete a certain level of education regardless of the science or the profession (e.g. the knowledge of a foreign language, practical application of knowledge, computer literacy) should have general competences (also known as generic competences) which can be used in different areas of operation. Professional competences (also known as subject specific competences) are identified for every subject, field or profession and, therefore, they are narrower (Kleut, 2006, p10). Beside the notion of profession, the notion of field is also often used. Therefore, according to Drazenko Jorgic a generalization can be made: "Professional competences are systems of knowledge and abilities of successful functioning of an individual within certain field" (Jorgic, 2008, p.114).

Since general competences are closely related to the key competences that are usually connected to a new concept of learning known as lifelong learning. The European Framework of Reference states that key competences (skills) for lifelong learning consist of knowledge, skills and attitudes. They are used on all levels of education and have a practical value because they are based on the goals which are built in all the subjects and oblige counselors to accomplish them. From the analysis of the given documents, it is possible to accept the definition that key competences represent transferable, multifunctional package of knowledge, skills and attitudes that all individuals need for personal fulfillment and development, inclusion and employment. They should develop until the completion of compulsory education or training and therefore, they represent a basis for further learning as a part of long term learning. Key competences comprise communication in the mother tongue, communication in foreign language, mathematical, scientific and technological literacy, digital competence, training for learning, interpersonal and civic competences, entrepreneurship and cultural expression (European Commission, 2010).

Therefore, competences are very important for the individual to function successfully in social environment. In order to identify the competences of counselors in penal institutions, beside the mentioned constructs, it is necessary to involve some other abilities which are presented in our work in which the classification of already-mentioned Tuning Project is used, according to which *general (generic)* competences are divided into three groups of general competences: *instrumental*, *interpersonal* and *systemic*. General specific competences are added to this classification of competences after studying relevant literature and data and discussion with counselors and other experts from this field. After a series of preparatory work, the following general competences are chosen for the object of study (Dukic, 2011).

General instrumental competences: ability for analysis and synthesis, planning and organizing skills, ability of application of main professional knowledge, information management skill, problem solving ability;

General interpersonal competences: ability of criticism and self-criticism, team work, ability of building trust and empathy in other people, interdisciplinary team working ability, understanding of professional ethics;

General systemic competences: practical application of knowledge ability, learning ability, ability for adaptation to new situations, creativity, persistence ability when achieving the highest quality of work;

General specific competences: critical thinking and reading, understanding of gender and gender relations, ability for evaluation of cultural content, learning desire, acquiring professional work abilities.

It should also be pointed out that it is possible to observe the gradation of certain, especially general competences, which means that the same competence can be supplemented, and further developed and the level of development of the competence can be observed, which is important for our research.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In addition to theoretical research of relevant literature, methodological bases which are the focus of this empirical work were conceived.

Problem: theoretical-methodological definition of general competences of counselors in penal institutions.

Subject-matter: identification of attitudes of counselors in penal institutions towards general competences. According to the defined object of study, the purpose of the research was defined and research tasks were made concrete.

Purpose: identification, analysis and interpretation of attitudes of counselors in penal institutions towards general competences.

Tasks:

1. identifying counselors' attitudes towards general (instrumental, interpersonal, systemic and general specific) competences;
2. analyzing statistical indicators for each group of the mentioned general competences and interpreting their significance and role within the context of lifelong learning and professional development of counselors in penal institutions.

Main hypothesis: It is assumed that counselors have already formed attitudes towards general (instrumental, interpersonal, systemic and general specific) competences of counselors in penal institutions.

1. auxiliary hypothesis: counselors are expected to have already formed attitudes towards instrumental competences of counselors in penal institutions;
2. auxiliary hypothesis: counselors are expected to have already formed attitudes towards interpersonal competences of counselors in penal institutions;
3. auxiliary hypothesis: counselors are expected to have formed attitudes towards systemic competences of counselors in penal institutions;
4. auxiliary hypothesis: counselors are expected to have already formed attitudes towards general specific competences of counselors in penal institutions;

The following scientific methods were used for the study and research of competences and lifelong learning of counselors in penal institutions: method of theoretical analysis and synthesis and survey-research method. In accordance to the mentioned re-

search methods, the following research techniques were also used: content analysis, data analysis, interview, survey and scaling-ranking. (Bndjur, Potkonjak, 2014). The following instruments used in the research were: protocol for the content analysis, protocol for the data analysis, questions related to the interview, scale of self-evaluation of general competences of counselors in penal institutions: INSOK, INTOK, SISOK and SPECOK. Scale of self-evaluation of general competences is meant for the self-evaluation of only few of the most representative indicators of these competences. In addition to the general data related to the name of the institution, the task that counselors perform within the correctional treatment, level of education, years of professional work experience and the gender of the counselor, the scale also includes indicators for general instrumental competences such as: ability for analysis and synthesis, planning and organizing skills, ability of applying basic professional knowledge, information management skill, problem solving ability; for general interpersonal competences such as: ability of criticism and self-criticism, team work, ability of building trust and empathy in other people, interdisciplinary team working ability, understanding of professional ethics; for general systemic competences such as: practical application of knowledge ability, learning ability, ability for adaptation to new situations, creativity, ability for persistence when achieving the highest quality of work; for general specific competences such as: critical thinking and reading, understanding of gender and gender relations, ability of evaluation of cultural content, learning desire, acquiring professional work abilities.

Reliability $\alpha=0.85$ (Cronbach's alpha quotient) was established on the whole scale. Reliability of the first quarter of the scale – indicators of general instrumental competences is $\alpha=0.79$, reliability of the second quarter of the scale – indicators of general interpersonal competences is $\alpha=0.86$, reliability of the third quarter of the scale – indicators of general systemic competences is $\alpha=0.86$, reliability of the fourth quarter of the scale – indicators of general specific competences is $\alpha=0.89$. The final version of the scale had 20 items. Each item was marked with numbers 1-5. The numbers had the following meanings: 1 – not competent at all; 2 – not competent enough; 3 – partially competent; 4 – competent; 5 – fully competent.

In order to identify general competences, we analyzed the level of the counselors' assessment of those competences. For conclusion, the following were analyzed: frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation and quotient of variability. The acquired results were presented descriptively and in the form of a table. The results of the research were processed with the use of the software package for statistical data processing, SPSS 10.0 for Windows. The research population included the employees in penal institutions of Republic of Srpska involved in the correction of the conduct and who were in direct contact with the convicted people: social pedagogues, special pedagogue, pedagogues, doctors, psychologists, social workers, counselors, sociologists, teachers, professors, and others whose scope of action was multidisciplinary towards the same goal, which was resocialization of convicted people. For the purposes of our work, the term counselor is used within the context of the above-mentioned professions. The research sample involved counselors from the two detention and rehabilitation facilities: 44 from Banja Luka and 22 from East Sarajevo (Serb. Istocno Sarajevo)

which is 66 counselors in total. Counselors with higher or high education comprise over 50 % of the sample. The research comprised 86.4% of counselors who had less than 20 years of work experience. When it comes to gender structure, 36.4% of the counselors were women and 63.6% were men (Dukic, 2011).

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF RESEARCH RESULTS

Our work assumes that counselors had already formed attitudes (Rot,1994) towards general (instrumental, interpersonal, systemic and general specific) competences.

Attitudes of counselors towards general instrumental competences

For the subject-matter of our research it is crucially important to identify and analyze general instrumental competences. These competences represent an “instrument” (or base, ground) for the development of all the other levels of both general and specific competences. Table 1 shows empirical data on the counselors’ evaluation of the level of their competency for each of the general instrumental competence.

Table 1: *General instrumental competences- frequencies, percentages and statistical parameters*

General instrumental competences	Ability of analysis and synthesis		Planning and organization ability (skills)		Ability of applying basic professional knowledge		Information management skill		Problem solving ability	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1	2	3,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	1	1,5	1	1,5
2	7	10,6	1	1,5	1	1,5	6	9,1	2	3,0
3	20	30,3	18	27,3	12	18,2	20	30,3	6	9,1
4	29	43,3	26	39,4	33	50,0	21	31,8	42	63,6
5	8	12,1	21	31,8	20	30,3	18	27,3	15	22,7
Total:	66	100	66	100	66	100	66	100	66	100
M	3,52		4,02		4,09		3,74		4,03	
SD	0,95		0,81		0,74		1,01		0,76	
V	26,99		20,15		18,09		27,01		18,86	
N	66		66		66		66		66	

Level of competence: 1 – not competent at all; 2 – not competent enough; 3 – partially competent; 4 – competent; 5 – fully competent.

The table shows that over 50% of the counselors assume to be competent or fully competent for all instrumental competences. The highest level of competence is

perceived in the problem solving ability and the ability of applying basic professional knowledge. Ability of analysis and synthesis and information management ability are valued slightly lower than the other general instrumental abilities. How to explain the acquired results? The competences that the counselors assessed themselves qualified for are probably more developed because they can be directly applied in practice (e.g. problem solving ability and ability for the applying professional knowledge). Working with prisoners, counselors are obliged to solve various problems on a daily basis and use their entire professional knowledge and skills (Prodanovic, et al. 2005). It could be said that these competences are “less general” (close to professional ones) than some other competencies which were studied in the subscales. These competences are regarded by us, the researchers, as general and instrumental. However, they could be experienced and assessed by counselors as professional and specific ones. Since a great connection (both logical and statistical) was expected among some of the instrumental competences, the collected data is “difficult” to interpret. Therefore, over 40% of the counselors assume not to be competent or at least to be partially competent for the analysis and synthesis. However, on the other hand, almost 90% of them assume to be competent or even fully competent for problem solving tasks. Without the developed abilities of analysis and synthesis, how can counselors solve problems? These dilemmas can be the basis for further studies.

The variability of results seem interesting. It is noticeable that the results are most homogenous in highest-valued competencies. Significantly lower degree of homogeneity and higher level of variability can be detected in the low-valued competences. Regardless of the small and heterogeneous research sample, these results led us to a conclusion that counselors have instrumental competence, which includes cognitive, methodological, technical and linguistic abilities acquired during the education process which enable them meet the demands of the penal treatment. However, the answer to the question about to what extent was the competence acquired during formal education before employment or subsequent non-formal and informal education after the employment. Lower-valued analysis and synthesis and information management skill make us think about actual changes in education and advantages of the concept of lifelong learning. In comparison to traditional concept of education, focused on education contents, cognitive processes which lead to reproductive knowledge within the concept of lifelong learning, studying results and the development of competences are established (Maravic, 2003). Learning approach based on the development of competences means quality way out of the too loaded educational content in the conditions of geometrical progression of scientific knowledge and too excessive amount of educational contents in curriculums. Having in mind initial education of counselors (traditional manner), it can be expected that the abilities of analysis and synthesis and information management skills can be slightly lower-valued.

Attitudes of counselors towards general interpersonal competences

These competences are based on the attitude of cooperation, self-confidence and integrity. They imply the ability of a constructive communication in different environments, demonstrate tolerance, express and understand different opinions and negotiate

about the ability of building trust and empathy. It is equally important to know the main concepts related to individuals, groups, work organization, equality of gender, nondiscrimination, society and culture. It is important for counselors that these abilities have a significant impact on distinguishing between personal and professional sphere as well as on expressing stress and frustration in a constructive and acceptable manner. Table 2 shows empirical data on counselors' assessment of the level of their adequacy for each general interpersonal competence.

Table 2: *General interpersonal competences – frequencies, percentages and statistical parameters*

General interpersonal competences	Ability for criticism and self-criticism		Team work ability		Ability for building trust and empathy		Multi-disciplinary team working ability		Understanding of prof. ethics	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1	2	3,0	1	1,5	1	1,5	1	1,5	2	3,0
2	3	4,5	0	0,0	1	1,5	4	6,1	0	0,0
3	9	13,6	7	10,6	9	13,6	13	19,7	7	10,6
4	36	54,5	18	27,3	36	54,5	28	42,4	28	42,4
5	16	24,2	40	60,6	19	28,8	20	30,3	29	43,9
Total	66	100	66	100	66	100	66	100	66	100
M	3,92		4,45		4,08		3,94		4,24	
SD	0,92		0,81		0,79		0,94		0,88	
V	23,47		18,20		19,36		23,86		20,75	
N	66		66		66		66		66	

Level of competence: 1 – not competent at all; 2 – not competent enough; 3 – partially competent; 4 – competent; 5 – fully competent.

The table shows that over 70% of the counselors assume to be competent or fully competent for all interpersonal competences. The highest level of competence is perceived in the team work ability (87.9%), followed by understanding of professional ethics (86.3%) and building trust and empathy in other people (83.3%). Ability for criticism and self-criticism (78.7%) and interdisciplinary team working ability (72.7%) are assessed slightly lower than the general interpersonal abilities. The competences that the counselors assessed themselves qualified for are assumed to be probably more developed because they can be directly applied in practice (e.g. understanding of professional ethics and building trust and empathy in other people, team work). Throughout their work, counselors are obliged to obey the code of conduct with prisoners in a manner obliged by legal norms. Furthermore, they also must abide professional ethics even though they must have a feeling of empathy developed and the ability to build trust among colleagues and among prisoners for who trust is one of the presumption for a successful resocialization. For these competences as well as for the previous ones, it could be said that they are close to professional competences and that these competences

es could have been experienced and assessed by counselors as professional specific competences which is quite understandable given the nature of general competences (flexible, generic and transferrable). Lower assessment value of the ability for criticism and self-criticism and interdisciplinary team working ability may be a result of work experience (45.5% of the people conducted in the research have less than 10 years of work experience) and not enough work on strengthening personal and professional capacities. During the interview the counselors gave the statements such as the following: “I have not had a chance to work in interdisciplinary teams so far” or “Criticism and self-criticism are not my strong point” (Dukic, 2011, p.104).

High assessment value of these competences was expected. Theoretical test results show that counselors have predispositions for these competences which reflect in forms of qualities, i.e. personal characteristics of counselors (Rot, 1994). In that sense, in addition to having the traits of a highly moral person, a counselor should have the traits such as: humanity, enthusiasm, devotion, altruism, empathy, trust, etc. (Dojder Trbojevic, 2009). Some of the traits were emphasized during the interview which was conducted during our research, like for example: “A good professional should be a highly moral person”, or “This job can be performed by only those with strong personalities who are patient and who understand the problems of the convicted” (Dukic, 2011, p.105). Everything foregoing implies that counselors have already formed attitudes towards competences and characteristics of counselors. It should also be pointed out that a connection was established between the characteristics and competences in the theoretical research. Namely competences are often equated with qualifications as a connection of knowledge and skills. However, actual dimension of competences is much wider and includes personal characteristics, attitudes (beliefs) and values which guide someone throughout work. Even the functioning area affects this segment of competences, which leads to a conclusion that a competence is a “product” of an individual or a group in a given professional environment (Zvonarevic, 1985). Therefore it is directly connected to the work environment because it is directly defined and confirmed by the environment. To remind ourselves, a competence is not measurable directly but indirectly with the use of indicators. For example, it is expressed through knowledge, skills and attitudes and manifested through signs of conduct: positive → (demonstration, affection), negative → (lack of something, resistance, blockage). It is assumed that these competences were not supported and developed enough by traditional school, hence the high rate of assessment. Therefore, the development of these competences is a result of counselors’ predispositions and their non-formal, informal and less formal education which should definitely be examined.

Attitudes of counselors towards general systemic competences

The identification and analysis of general systemic competences is important because they represent a combination of understanding, sensibility and knowledge and imply prior acquiring or instrumental and interpersonal competences. Table 3 displays empiric data of the counselors’ assessment of the level of their adequacy for each general specific competence.

Table 3: General systemic competences- frequencies, percentages and statistical parameters

General systemic competences	Practical application of knowledge ability		Learning ability		Ability for adaptation to new situations		Ability for creating new ideas – creativity		Persistence ability when achieving highest quality of work	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
1	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0	0	0,0
2	0	0,0	1	1,5	2	3,0	3	4,5	2	3,0
3	14	21,2	8	12,1	4	6,1	12	18,2	9	13,6
4	29	43,9	30	45,5	30	45,5	30	45,5	34	51,5
5	23	34,8	27	40,9	30	45,5	21	31,8	21	31,8
Total:	66	100	66	100	66	100	66	100	66	100
M	4,14		4,26		4,33		4,05		4,12	
SD	0,74		0,73		0,73		0,83		0,75	
V	17,87		17,14		16,86		20,49		18,20	
N	66		66		66		66		66	

Level of competence: 1 – not competent at all; 2 – not competent enough; 3 – partially competent; 4 – competent; 5 – fully competent.

The table shows that over 75% of counselors assume to be competent or fully competent for all systemic competences. Although the differences are very small, the highest level of competence is perceived in the ability for adaptation to new situations (91%) and learning abilities (86,4%). Ability for creating new ideas-creativity (77.3%) and persistence ability when achieving highest quality of work (83,3%) are graded slightly “poorer” in comparison to the other systemic competences. The competences that the counselors assessed themselves qualified for are probably more developed because they can be directly applied in practice (for example, adaptation to new situations and the ability to learn). The nature of work, i.e. working with prisoners requires counselors to apply their acquired knowledge, learn constantly and to be able to identify and adequately respond to different situations in penal institutions (Macanovic, 2014). Highly assessed learning ability competence which is interesting from the aspect of lifelong learning is set aside as it represents the ability and art of planning and organization of proper learning. It involves the art of efficient use of time, solving problems, acquiring, assessing and evaluating knowledge and the use of the new knowledge and skills in different contexts. In general, learning ability has a significant contribution to the professional development and successful personal career management. The variability of results data, as in previous cases, is most homogenous in the most valued competences and lower homogeneousness with higher variability in “lower” valued competences.

To conclude, counselors assess general systemic competences high. The differences in frequency, i.e. percentage among certain systemic abilities are very small and not so significant for our research as the fact that general systemic competences are most valued among general competences. High value of general systemic competences is usu-

ally attributed to initial (formal) education of counselors. However, it should be kept in mind that due to the nature of work, counselors are obliged to adjust to new situations, learn and apply new knowledge to practice. Therefore, it is assumed that high systemic competence was under the influence of experienced learning and self-education as informal and professional training as non-formal modes of lifelong learning. The research cannot define the size of that influence but it can inspire the creators of the program regarding certain components of lifelong education. There is also a dilemma regarding the research results in which counselors value systemic competences more than instrumental ones which serve, together with interpersonal competences as an assumption for the existence of systemic competences which are known to be more complex since they represent a combination of understanding, sensibility and knowledge. The response to this dilemma can be a basis for further studies.

Attitudes of counselors towards general specific competences

General specific competences are identified as extremely important and subsequently added to general competences as “regional” (Kleut, 2006). Given the transitional character of our society and recent past, they are important. Within these competences, we can single out the ability for evaluation of cultural content. It implies a strong sense for identity connected to culture, including the culture of people as an important testimony from our history. Critical thinking and reading ability, understanding of gender and gender relations as well as learning desire and abilities for professional work are added to this ability.

Table 4: *General specific competences- frequencies, percentages and statistical parameters*

General specific competences	Critical thinking and reading ability		Understanding of gender and gender relations		Ability of evaluation of cultural content		Learning desire		Acquiring the professional work abilities	
	F	%	F	%	f	%	F	%	F	%
1	1	1,5	1	1,5	2	3,0	2	3,0	2	3,0
2	6	9,1	5	7,6	4	6,1	2	3,0	1	1,5
3	15	22,7	13	19,7	8	12,1	18	27,3	10	15,2
4	25	37,9	28	42,4	31	47,0	19	28,8	30	45,5
5	19	28,8	19	28,8	21	31,8	25	37,9	23	34,8
Total:	66	100	66	100	66	100	66	100	66	100
M	3,83		3,89		3,98		3,95		4,08	
SD	1,00		0,96		0,98		1,03		0,92	
V	26,11		24,68		24,62		26,08		22,55	
N	66		66		66		66		66	

Level of competence: 1 – not competent at all; 2 – not competent enough; 3 – partially competent; 4 – competent; 5 – fully competent.

The table shows that over 65% of the counselors assume to be competent or fully competent for all general specific competences. The highest level of competence is perceived in the acquiring professional work abilities (80,3%) followed by the ability for cultural content evaluation (78.8%) and understanding of gender and gender relations (71.2%). Learning desire and critical thinking and reading ability are valued “lower” in comparison to these general specific competences (66.7%). Acquiring the professional work abilities, that the counselors assessed themselves qualified for is probably a more developed competence. This is probably due to the demands of practice, that is, a dynamic development of penal treatment which “forces” a counselor to acquire new abilities. This result is, to certain extent, consistent with the results of the interview in which counselors said they have adequate education for their work in penal institutions although they acquired a lot of specific knowledge after the employment. Therefore, they were acquired through experience – informal and personal development and training – non-formal and less through the initial formal education. Counselors also assessed the ability for evaluation of cultural content high, which could mean that they have an extensive sense for identity connected to the sense for the respect of differences and the basic knowledge on most important cultural achievements including the culture of their people as an important testimony from recent and distant past.

Acquiring the professional work abilities was given priority to among the other general specific competences from the group, by counselors and was identified and analyzed. Research results partially correspond with the data of the Institute of Statistics, Chamber of Commerce and Industry and other organizations in which existential premises are specified as priorities in which we can recognize acquiring professional work abilities in order to find a job on the job market, i.e. provide employment and existence. Most people in our environment are assumed to think like this. In the context of lifelong learning, our research finds the data related to the desire for learning important. It is indicative that the desire exists in most people included in the research, which means that it could contribute to the professional development and successful management of their career. Counselors are aware of the advantages and disadvantages of their skills and qualifications and they have already formed attitude towards the need for change and further development of competences and their own motivation for achieving success. With the analysis of statistical indicator R – the rank of identified general competences, it can be perceived that the higher-valued systemic and interpersonal competences are slightly ahead of general instrumental and specific competences, which is presented in Table 5.

Table 5: *Rank – general competences*

General competences	M	SD	V	R
Systemic	4.18	0.76	18.09	1.
Interpersonal	4.13	0.87	21.04	2.
Instrumental	3.89	0.85	21.95	3.
Specific	3.95	0.98	24.78	4.

CONCLUSION

The research identified counselors' attitudes towards general (instrumental, interpersonal, systemic and general specific) competences, analyzed descriptive statistical indicators for each group of the mentioned general competences and interpreted their significance and role within the context of counselors' work in penal institutions. Furthermore, our research showed that general competences are high-valued by counselors. It means that counselors possess a corresponding multifunctional system of knowledge, skills, abilities and attitudes necessary for personal development, inclusion into society and employment. As a reminder, these competences have universal character and are usually not connected with specific knowledge. They are considered as innovation by education which emphasizes mutual development of knowledge, skills and attitudes by most authors. They are related to more efficient management of personal learning, coping in the world of technological changes, social and interpersonal relations and communication and they reflect the general shift of interest from teaching to the process of learning. Their importance derives from the fact that these competences acquired until the completion of compulsory education, represent the base for lifelong learning and their constant development throughout life.

Due to the lack of similar research, related to the professional development of counselors in penal institutions and possibility of comparing the results as well as the perception-based manner of research, which is a more subjective than objective experience of competences, the issue of relevance and verification of these results could be taken into account to some extent. Furthermore, the result acquired in the analysis of statistical indicators seem interesting and lead to the slight advantage of systemic and interpersonal competences compared to instrumental and general specific (Table 5). The results should be tested on a larger sample including a larger number of general competences. In that way, dilemmas around the complexity of competences and the facts that they are measurable indirectly and expressed through knowledge, skills and attitudes and manifested through the forms of behavior, i.e. conduct, would be removed. All of that implies a complex process of identification, measurement and comparison.

Although the fact that counselors gave priority to general systemic competences (ability for adaptation to new situations, learning ability, practical application of knowledge ability, persistence ability when achieving the highest quality of work and creativity) seemed expected and justified at first, considering their initial formal education, a question remains of whether it is just "a merit" of initial formal or other forms of education such as non-formal and informal education. There is also a dilemma around the question if it is logical that counselors assess systemic competences higher than instrumental ones which are together with interpersonal competences a presupposition for the existence of systemic competences which are known to be more complex since they represent a combination of understanding, sensibility and knowledge.

Unlike systemic and instrumental competences, which raised several questions and dilemmas, high value of interpersonal competences (team work ability, understanding of professional ethics, ability to build trust and empathy in other people, ability of criticism and self-criticism and interdisciplinary team working ability) was expected given the counselors' predispositions. Counselors' occupation in penal institutions implies working with people who have socialization problems. Therefore, counselor's interper-

sonal abilities which have an important significance in resocialization will be expressed (Macanovic, 2011).

When it comes to the general specific competences and paying more attention to acquiring professional abilities, we can conclude that those are the competences which were identified in one region and they express a way of thinking of not only counselors in penal institution but also of the majority of people living in that region. Learning ability (systemic) and desire for learning (general specific) will be singled out as they are high-valued competences and represent one of the most important presuppositions for further training and professional development. Considering the education and age of counselors, such result could have been expected.

To sum up, general competences of counselors considered as generic and transferable by many authors, are necessary for every individual and their personal development, inclusion into society and employment and they represent a fine basis for further professional development of counselors during their lifelong learning.

REFERENCE

- Bandjur, V. and Potkonjak, N. (2004), *Istrazivacki rad u skoli. (Research Work at School)*. Srpsko Sarajevo: Ministry of Education and Culture and the University in Srpsko Sarajevo.
- Brankovic, D. (2011), *Definisanje kompetencija nastavnika razredno-predmetne nastave. (Definition of Competences for Teachers of Class-Subject Teachers)*. Nova skola 8/11. Bijeljina: Faculty of Pedagogy.
- Vujaklija, M. (2004), *Leksikon stranih rijeci i izraza. (A Lexicon of Foreign Words and Phrases)*. Belgrade: Prosveta Publishing House.
- Dukic, G. (2011), *Kompetencije i cjelozivotno ucenje vaspitaca u penalnim ustanovama. (Competences and Lifelong Learning of Counselors in Penal Institutions)*. Unpublished master thesis. Banja Luka: Faculty of Philosophy.
- Dojder Trbojevic, M. (2009), *Supervizija-oblik profesionalne pomoći osoblju u penalnim ustanovama. (Supervision-forms of professional assistance in penal institutions)*. Master thesis. Banja Luka: Faculty of Philosophy. University of Banja Luka.
- European Commission (2010), *Obrazovanje i obuka. Ključne sposobnosti za dugoročno ucenje. (Education and Training. Key Abilities for Long-term Learning)*. Brussels: European Commission.
- Jorgic, D. (2008), *Utjecaj interaktivnog strucnog usavršavanja nastavnika na njihove profesionalne kompetencije. (Effect of Teacher Interactive Professional Development on their Professional Competences)*. Doctoral thesis. Banja Luka: Faculty of Philosophy.
- Kleut, Jelena (2006), *Regionalno usaglasavanje kurikuluma - ka Evropskom prostoru visokog obrazovanja. (Regional Tuning of the Curricula - Towards European Higher Education Area)*. Belgrade: Alternative Academic Educational Network.
- Oxfords Advanced Learner's Encyclopedic Dictionary. Oxford University, 1989.
- Maravic, J. (2003), *Cjelozivotno ucenje. (Lifelong Learning)*. III/ISSN 1333-5987

- Macanovic, N. (2011a), *Resocijalizacija osudjenih lica.* (Resocialization of convicted persons) Banja Luka: Besjeda.
- Prodanovic, M. et al. (2005), *Osnovni prirucnik za obuku zatvorskog osoblja.* (Basic Penitentiary Staff Training Manual). Strasbourg: CE.
- Rot, N. (1994), *Psihologija licnosti.* (Personality Psychology). Belgrade: Institute for Textbook Publishing and Teaching Aids.
- Suzic, N. (2000), *Devedeset osam kompetencija za XXI vijek.* (Ninety-eight Competences for XXI Century). Banja Luka: Republic Pedagogical Institute.
- Zvonarevic, M. (1985), *Socijalna psihologija.* (Social Psychology). Zagreb: Skolska knjiga.
- Center for Education Policy (2008), *saglasavanje programa obrazovanja prosvetnih radnika u zemljama Zapadnog Balkana.* (Tuning Teacher Education Curricula in the Western Balkans). Project. Belgrade: Dossier ISBN 978-86-87753-00-6

Paper Received: 4. 7. 2017
Paper Approved: 6. 11. 2017