Developing the methodological instructions of art education supporting key competences and subject-specific competence

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Summary

In recent decades, the implementation of competence-based education grounded in educational strategies (Halász & Michel, 2011; Kikas, 2020; OECD, 2003) has been a key factor in contemporary education. The literature has similarly followed this trend, portraying art education as a complex learning activity wherein various competences are interwoven (Rostan, 2010). As part of the ongoing renewal of the national curricula of comprehensive education in Estonia (2023), subject-specific competences have been revised, placing a greater emphasis on developing key competences alongside subject-specific instruction (Liiv-Tellmann, 2023).

Estonian teachers often prioritise subject-specific skills (Kikas, 2016) and perceive the general guidelines, especially key competences, as lacking real support (Erss et al., 2014). Introducing the new national curriculum has raised concerns among art teachers regarding its implementation and translation of high-level competences into learning strategies (Raudla, 2023; Mändveer, 2023).

Methodology

The study is rooted in the process of updating the National Curriculum (2023). The first two authors of the article are also members of the working group for updating the methodological descriptions of subject-specific learning instructions. Therefore, the study also contributes information to the curriculum implementation recommendations.

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The research questions are posed as follows:

1. How are key competences highlighted in the National Curriculum and the Art Syllabus?

2. What implementation recommendations are provided for curriculum implementation regarding the support of key competences in the field of art education?

3. How can recommendations for supporting key competences be enhanced in the context of art education?

We base our analysis on the curriculum versions published in March 2023. The sample also includes the published descriptions of learning processes (Kunsti-õpetus põhikoolis, n.d; Mändmaa et al., n.d.) and the guideline „Üldpädevuste kujundamisest kunstiõpetuses" (Laanemäe, 2017) from the previous national curricula development cycle (2014–2017).

The research is divided into two stages: the document analysis stage and the development stage of application recommendations. The objective of the document analysis stage is to identify the manifest and latent content of the curriculum and accompanying methodological recommendations for forming key competences in art education. Two researchers conducted the document analysis, and each document was read three times. We utilised deductive coding (Mayring, 2019) as the coding technique, with the units of analysis focusing on the eight key competences and their specific components. The stability of coding was verified through a second coding cycle, wherein coding was initiated anew without considering connections found in the previous cycle (Mayring, 2014). Through joint discussions, consensus was reached, leading to final associations.

Key findings

Examining the explicit consideration of key competences in the subject area "Art Subjects" (2023), it is evident how a high-level comprehensiveness is emphasised: the art education process supports (i.e., should be designed to support) the acquisition and comprehensive feedback of all key competences. Employing such broad conceptual terms sets high expectations for the educational process.

The comparison with the components of key competences highlights the strongest connections with cultural and value competence, emphasising both cultural heritage and contemporary culture, creative activities, and engagement with creativity. The subject area text places the greatest emphasis on

learning competence (22 times), cultural and value competence (14 times), and entrepreneurial competence (12 times). The least connections were found with mathematical, scientific, and technological competence (3 times) and social and civic competence (2 times).

Based on the results of document analysis and theoretical foundations, we formulated more precise objectives for the development of key competences in the context of art education:

1. We aim to enhance the comprehensive model of art education with a more detailed focus on key competences, emphasising foundational competences such as learning competence, self-definition competence, and social competence combined with communication competence.

2. We aim to provide guidelines for planning the support of key competences in the regular art teaching process.

Drawing on Kikas's (2020) conceptualisation of learning competence, self-determination competence, and social competence (combined with communication competence) as foundational competences, we position these at the core of the comprehensive model of art education (Figure 2). This underscores the learner's personal skills as a prerequisite for creating meaningful learning and taking responsibility in the learning process.

Considering that key competences must be supported across subjects and that learning outcomes must align with the targeted competences, we recommend integrating subject-specific learning outcomes with key competences. Additionally, we propose incorporating the perspective of supporting key competences not only into the school curricula but also into teachers' work and lesson plans.

Discussion and conclusion

While we found few explicit connections for supporting key competences in the arts subject area descriptions, the latent qualitative analysis highlighted more associations. In addition to knowledge, an emphasis on forming attitudes and values was found. Thus, we recognise that the conceptualisation of the arts has embraced a competence-based shift in education (Halász & Michel, 2011; Kikas, 2020; OECD, 2003).

We found a need for more procedural recommendations for key competence support in subject instruction. With the further development of the comprehensive model of art education, we established a foundation for integrating key competences into the process of visual art instruction. With that, we hope to foster an understanding that key competences are not additional skills detached

from the subject area but rather support the achievement of subject-specific competences.

In the implementation process of the curriculum, it has been observed that the greater the divergence between institutional guidelines and teachers' beliefs and practices, the more teachers distance themselves from the curriculum (Bümen & Holmqvist, 2022). Interpretation depends on the interpreter's experiences and context (März & Kelchtermanz, 2013). Analysing both the manifest and latent content of curriculum documents, we conclude that the opportunities for supporting key competences manifest mostly when considering the components of key competences and deliberately seeking for those connections. However, if the competence framework is not familiar to the teacher or if direct connections are not sought, the guidelines may not manifest in such a diverse manner. Future research should focus on how subject teachers engage with the national curriculum and key competences, as well as analysing the planning process of subject teachers.

Keywords: key competences, art competence, curriculum implementation