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Investigation into Teachers' European Competences[1]

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Abstract. Nowadays, more than ever before, development of the European competences has become extremely important. These competences are especially significant for the young generation, thus they became an important field for education researchers. The European competences are of particular importance to teachers who not only use them as citizens, but also influence others to develop them.

In order to develop the European competences Europe as a learning environment is necessary and it is being purposefully developed: the European Commission has established a broad range of programmes which help teachers to develop the necessary competences. Projects in the area have produced a significant amount of knowledge as asset which may be and is applied for the better Europe. The knowledge has become an open source of information for the teachers in the development of their European competences.

The aim of the current paper is to reveal what specific European competences teachers from EU countries recognize by self-reflection as an "asset in-use" in their professional daily lives. A survey was used as the main research method supported by the analysis of the scholarly literature.

Keywords: *teachers' European competences, intercultural education, European literacy, European projects.*

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Introduction

In order to ensure integration, open movement and deeper mutual understanding of the EU member states citizens, the European Union pays a lot of attention to development of the European Competences.

Nowadays, more than ever before, development of the European competences has become extremely important.The migrant crisis and other global issues present a great challenge to the EU's internal integration processes. Mutual understanding between the EU member states and even on the level of individual people is now more relevant than ever before. Such understanding will be difficult to achieve if people do not have a common competence for living in Europe.

A number of people still have to acquire these competences. They are especially significant for the young generation.It is a task to be addressed by education and teachers implementing education. However, it is first of all, imperative for the teachers to have these competences. The European competences are of particular importance to teachers, who not only use them as citizens but also influence others to develop them.

The issues of European and international competences have been investigated by researchers for some time now. These problems have been investigated on the theoretical level (Crick, 2008; Oonk, 2011b; Caena, 2014), cases of particular countries were studied (Oonk, 2011a) and compared against each other (Maslowski, Van der Werf, & Oonk, 2011). The issue was also studied through the dimension of secondary (Van der Werf & Oonk, 2011) and professional education (Kaleja & Egetenmeyer, 2017).

Theoreticians understand that in order to develop European competences Europe as a learning environment is necessary (Ondrušková, 2012). Not only does such an environment exist, it is being purposefully developed: the European Commission has established a broad range of programmes which help teachers develop the necessary competences. The most recent one is ERASMUS+ programme. The ELICIT-PLUSproject represents the ERASMUS+ programme as one of the latest works. The full title of the project is*European Literacy and Citizenship-Plus*, as it is the continuation of the previous ELICIT project. It is also possible to find some connection with several Comenius projects, which resulted in the creation of ELOS schools European network (ELOS - Schools as European learning organizations) and its knowledge basis. ELICIT-PLUS isalso a consortium of people from different European countries (23 Partners from 13 Member States). All the partners have significant experience in European education and learning issues and implementation of projects revolving around these questions. The projects have produced a significant amount of knowledge as asset which may and is applied for the better Europe. In particular, the knowledge was and is aimed at the development of teachers' European competences. The knowledge has become an open source of information not only in Europe but also on a world-wide scale.

We would like to assume that Europe as a learning environment has already had a significant impact on teachers in developing their European competences. Unfortunately, there has been a lack of at least pilot empirical studies to prove this. Thus, the research problem can be formulated as the following question: what European competences of teachers are developed in the learning environments in the EU?

This question is addressed in the current paper, the aim of which is to reveal what specific European competences teachers from EU countries recognize by self-reflection as an "asset in-use" in their professional daily lives.

The theoretical background is based on the structure of the Teachers' European competences as revealed by ELICIT project action research.

The survey was used as the main research method supported by the analysis of scholarly literature. The data was processed using statistical analysis.

The paper consists of six chapters. The teachers' European competences as a conceptual background for the research are introduced in the first chapter. The second chapter outlines the empirical research methodology. The analysis of data on the European competences of the teachers who participated in this study is carried out in the third chapter. Chapter four deals with discussion of the problems revealed from the perspective of teachers' European competences. Conclusions are presented in the final chapter of the paper.

1. Conceptual background: teachers' European competences

Competences are always associated with successful behaviour, work, and activity: 'Competences are understood as wide-ranging combinations of know-how – composites of knowledge, skills and attitudes possessed by an individual. Competences illustrate the person's proficiency, capacity and ability to perform in professional tasks' (ARENE, 2007, pp. 30–31). However, it is only possible to assure efficacy of know-how by proving the capability to act successfully. Therefore, competenceis defined as such knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, other qualities of a personality that were used in the action and *determined* successful result in a particular context.

According to the general description of a competence, teachers' European competences may be described as knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, other personal qualities that were used for various activities Europe-centred and *determined* successful result in a particular context. The European Commission contributed by creating the so called *Common European Principles for Teacher Competences and Qualifications* (EK, 2005). Researchers (Gordon, Halász, Krawczyk et al., 2009; Halász, Michel, 2011; Caena, Margiotta, 2010, etc.) have created several versions of teachers' European competences by stressing slightly different contexts. The researchers and practitioners involved in ELICIT project have created the Teachers' European competence structure based on Europe as

a learning environment. As highlighted on the website for ELICIT project[2], "seven areas of competences for teachers have been addressed in this Reference framework: 1. Curriculum Design. 2. European Literacy. 3. Intercultural Education. 4. Students' personal development and motivation. 5. Use of ICT 6. School Ethos. 7. Evaluation". This intellectual product is used as a conceptual basis for the teachers' European competences structure, which is fundamental for the aim of this paper.

2. Research methodology

Research on competences is a complex task. The problem is that "the assessment of competences and the predictive value of such assessments for future performances is highly questionable" (Westera, 2001, p. 86). How is it possible to assess *know-how*? In other words, how do we know that this know-how actually is the *know-how that delivers and shall continue to deliver a solid result*? Therefore, it is rational to assess competences when the performance or behaviour is already finished and the results prove the success (Juceviciene et al., 2010). Self-assessment based on the reconstruction of the successful behaviour/performance/activity is one of the most reasonable methods for reflective practise and at the same time for gathering of information about individual's competence. It is particularly relevant for assessing teachers' competence, as they are trained to be reflective practitioners (Larrivee, 2008).

Questionnaire construction. The questionnaire has been created according to the ELICIT project product – Reference Framework of Competences for Teaching European Citizenship Literacy. The questionnaire consists of nine parts: seven of them are targeted at teachers' European competences and the rest are of varied nature.

The first seven parts comprise the structure of teachers' European competences as follows: 1) Curriculum design (7 questions); 2) European Literacy (10 questions); 3) Intercultural Education (3 questions); 4) Students' personal development and motivation (7 questions); 5) Use of Information and communication technology (ICT) (7 questions); 6) School ethos (3 questions); 7) Evaluation (6 questions).

The eighth one was the shortest and included the only question: "Have you participated in any training courses or project activities involving the development of European competences?"

The ninth question was demographic: it was directed at discovering the respondent's country, school type, pedagogical position and teaching experience.

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[2] Retrieved from http://www.elicitplus.eu/sites/default/files/fichiers/elicit-booklet-multi_0.pdf.

The sampling. The undertaken methodological position was as follows: it was not expected to get the results which may be generalized in the perspective of Europe as a whole. The aim of this empirical study was to collect data from the accidental respondents who were: a) teachers, and b) interested in the European issues. The study was expected to reveal some tendencies in the teachers' European competences.

The non-probability sample was based on the random sampling approach with some features of the purposive sampling. The latter means that we anticipated that the decision to answer the e-questionnaire (presented as an enquiry on teachers' self-reflection on their European competences) will be made by those teachers who are interested in the European issues.

Research ethics. To assure their confidentiality, the respondents were informed that this questionnaire was anonymous in the introductory part of the questionnaire. They were free to choose to answer the questionnaire or not.

Collecting data and the respondents. The questionnaire was created using Google's online app Google Forms. Link to it: https://goo.gl/forms/0kPOqQNq20SFNnTq2

The data was collected from 87 respondents, who answered the questions during the period of 2 weeks (2017 May). They represented 25 EU countries (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia). The majority of respondents were from general education and professional schools, 14.4% worked with other types of education, e.g. non-formal.

Most of the respondents were teachers (42.2%); senior teachers constituted 30.0% of the respondents, "other" accounted for 13.3%, head teachers were in the fourth place (12.2%); see Table 1.

Table 1
Pedagogical positions of the respondents

Pedagogical positions of the respondents	%
Assistant teacher	2.3
Teacher	42.2
Senior teacher	30.0
Head teacher	12.2
Other	13.3

More experienced teachers prevailed over the less experienced (see Table 2).

Table 2
Teaching experience (in years)

Teaching experience (in years)	% of the respondents
More than 25	25.6
21–25	18.9
16–20	22.2
11–15	21.1
Less than 10	12.2

By subject: foreign language teachers constituted the majority of the respondents (60%). Special attention was paid to foreign language teachers because foreign languages are recognized as an intercultural and communicative factor of particular significance on the European scale (Byram, 2008; Byram & Zarate, 1996).

3. Teachers' European competences: data analysis

The data is presented according to the same structure as the European competences were listed in the questionnaire. We considered answers 'yes' and 'yes, partially' as positive answers. In the explanations below they are presented in brackets: the first number indicates the percentage of 'yes' and 'partially' answers in sum while the second one is the percentage of 'yes' answers only.

Curriculum Design. Most of the teachers identify different European viewpoints in their subject curriculum (99%; 54%), recognize the European dimensions within the national or school curriculum (96%; 60%), identify and update European and international orientation (EIO) elements in the curriculum in order to create continuity as regards the curriculum topics (90%; 40%), promote changes in the curriculum in order to introduce the European dimension in subject-matter knowledge (87%; 47%),include students' mobility periods and experiential knowledge in the curriculum (87%; 44%), promote recognition and equivalence of national or school curricula on a European scale in order to facilitate teachers and students mobility in the EU (80%; 41%), promote the introduction of 'European studies' in the school curriculum (74%; 28%).

It is evident that teachers recognise their European competence on the curriculum matters and within teaching processes of their own subject. Fewer teachers are optimistic about their European competence of school or national curricula matters.

European Literacy. High numbers of teachers raise and sustain students' motivation, curiosity and interest in European topics and issues, including languages (99%; 81%), help students with accessing and processing information about European matters (98%; 62%), foster students' knowledge of European values and principles of democracy (97%; 59%), raise students' awareness of their civic duties as European citizens (94%; 51%); encourage students' mobility within the EU and other countries (93%; 68%), inspire students' collaboration on national, European and International (other, not European) levels (92%; 64%); promote themselves to speak two foreign (EU) languages (89%; 74%); participate, initiate and/or manage a European project (88%; 64%), promote their students to speak two foreign (EU) languages (86%; 61%), manage a European school network (66%; 26%).

It is obvious that teachers are most active in promoting European literacy issues which have a direct impacton their students in particular situations. Less teachers are involved into activities which require long-term endeavour from them or their students (e.g., learning the second foreign language), or large-scale international work (e.g. manage a European school network). At the same time it does not mean that the number of teachers involved in those activities is small.

Intercultural education. The numbers within this section are extremely high. Teachers develop students' intercultural competence (98%; 66%), raise students' awareness of the need for intercultural attitudes within a multicultural Europe (97%; 68%), show intercultural competence in everyday practice and even recognize that they have a large repertoire of strategies for dealing with differences in values, customs and practices among members of the intercultural group (96%; 50%).

Students' personal development and motivation. Teachers show high level of involvement with their students' personal development and motivation: they encourage students' self-reflection on their practice (99%; 68%), engage students in life-long learning and encourage them to take advantage of the European opportunities (96%; 62%), encourage students to generate creative ideas and transform them into effective actions (96%; 61%); develop students' self-confidence and self-esteem regarding their perception of themselves as European citizens (93%; 60%), make students aware that education is not a duty but a privilege and that motivation is a condition to perform as entrepreneurs (both in and outside school) (93%; 51%). Somewhat fewer teachers raise awareness of the realities of the European labour market (85%; 29%)and inform students about study and job opportunities in other EU countries (84%; 33%).

As was the case withthe previous parts, this part also shows the same tendency: teachers practise their competences more actively concerning the issues directly related to students, but they are not so knowledgeable and skilful when dealing with large-scale information (e.g. European labour market and its opportunities, etc.).

Use of Information and communication technology (ICT). This section had somewhat lower scores in comparison with the other sections, but also shows rather high numbers: as many as 97% ('yes' and 'yes, partially' answers in sum) and 63% ('yes'

answers only) of the teachers claim that they raise students' awareness of the ethics on the Internet and social networks; accordingly, 96% and 51% find and process information relevant to their teaching of European matters; 91% and 61% act as a moderator/coach in the formal and informal learning process facilitating use of on-line tools for students. But lower number of teachers use the tools needed for international project work (blogs, wikis, etc.) (84%; 50%), establish interactive and communicative learning situations with the European partners (84%; 41%), are members of and participate in European educational networks (81%; 41%), identify and deal with the 'dark side' of the Internet (80%; 39%).

It is possible to notice a slight tendency: higher frequency in use of the Internet for teaching and learning purposes, but not as high for communication with the European partners.

School ethos. This competence is less manifested in comparison with those analysed previously: 88% of teachers confirm more or less ('yes' and 'yes,partially') and 66% are sure ('yes') that they promote European projects for the school; respectively, 88% and 40% make efforts to strengthen the European dimension in the school curriculum; 81% and 37% identify the European dimension of the Mission statement of his/her school, which should integrate the European values (Menéndez, 2002).

Evaluation. This competence means that a teacher knows, is able to use and uses European tools for the evaluation and assessment, as well as is able to apply the results of the European and International assessment in his/her work.

Unfortunately, the competence of evaluation is less manifested in comparison with the previously analysed competences. Though, it does not mean that the negative answers prevail over the positives ones. About ¾ of teachers stated that they: determine students' level of mastery of European literacy at the beginning, during and at the end of specific learning episodes ('yes' and 'yes, partially' – 88%; 'yes' 66%), use the European tools (e.g. EuroPass, ECVET, ECTS, CFEC, CEFR, MICE, INCA) for evaluation of skills and competences, respectively, 77% and 34%, use the European tools for evaluation and certification (74%; 34%), encourage students to use the European tools for self-evaluation (72%; 26%).

It could be mentioned that teachers are likely to assess the European literacy developed during the educational process implemented by themselves. It can be observed that teachers prefer their own assessment tools over the ones recognised in Europe.

Discussion

In order to investigate deeper into the results of the survey it is necessary to discuss why some teachers feel the lack of competence.

In general, from about 100% to about ¾ of the teachers have evaluated their European competences positively or partially positively. But it does not mean that there were no

teachers who evaluated their European competences negatively. It is necessary to analyse this data in more detail.

We processed only the data received from the negative evaluation of the particular competences given by 20% and more teachers. The data was organized according to several variables: a) teachers whose experience is 10 years and less, and those whose experience is more than 10 years; b) foreign language teachers and others (see Table 3).

Problems with the European competences among teachers (according to their experience)

Higher number of less experienced in comparison to more experienced teachers (we counted only those who gave negative answers in the self-evaluation) evaluated the following competences negatively:

- Promote the introduction of 'European studies' in the school curriculum;
- Promote recognition and equivalence of national or school curricula on a European scale in order to facilitate teachers and students' mobility in the EU;
- Manage a European school network;
- Identify and deal with the 'dark side' of the Internet;
- Use the European tools for evaluation and certification; encourage students to use the European tools for self-evaluation;
- Take into account European and international assessment processes, such as PISA).

It is evident that teachers need more time and practice to develop the competences mentioned above.

The only exception was the competence 'to use the European tools for evaluation of skills and competences'. Bigger number of more experienced than less experienced teachers gave negative evaluation for this part of the European competences. M. Tschannen-Moran and A. W. Hoy (2007) suggested that more experienced teachers are more confident with their self-efficacy than novice teachers. Thus, it is possible that more experienced teachers are more likely to use those tools for evaluation of skills and competences they are used to rather than using the new ones developed on the European scale. On the contrary less experienced teachers aiming for self-efficacy rely on the tools recommended by the European-level structures.

Teachers' problems with European competences (according to their subject)

We divided teachers into two groups by their subject: 1) foreign language as a subject; 2) other subjects. There were two reasons for this classification: a) foreign language (as usually, representing one of the EU languages) teachers take active part in European issues at their schools, and b) foreign language teachers made the significant part (60%) of our respondents.

As it can be seen in Table 3, negative answers of the 'other subject' teachers prevail over the foreign language teachers (with two exceptions). It means that there are more problems with the following European competences among 'other subject' teachers:

- Promote the introduction of 'European studies' in the school curriculum;
- Promote recognition and equivalence of national or school curricula on a European scale in order to facilitate teachers and students' mobility in the EU;
- Manage a European school network;
- Use the European tools for evaluation of skills and competences;
- Use the European tools for evaluation and certification;
- Encourage students to use the European tools for self-evaluation.

Table 3

The European competences which were self-evaluated negatively by teachers (according to their experience and subject taught)

No in the questi-on-naire	The European compe-tence	Teachers according to their experience (in years)		Teachers according to their subject	
		10 and less	More than 10	Foreign language	Other subjects
1.5	Promote the intro-duction of 'European studies' in the school curriculum	36.4	25.3	25.0	27.8
1.7	Promote recognition and equivalence of national or school curricula on a Euro-pean scale in order to facilitate teachers and students' mobility in the EU	36.4	17.8	19.4	20.4
2.10	Manage a European school network	45.4	32.9	27.8	38.9
5.6	Identify and deal with the 'dark side' of the Internet	27.3	19.0	25.0	16.7
7.2	Use the European tools (for example, Euro Pass, ECVET, ECTS, CFEC, CEFR, MICE, INCA, etc.) for evaluation of skills and competences	18.2	24.1	13.9	29.6

No in the questi-on-naire	The European compe-tence	Teachers according to their experience (in years)		Teachers according to their subject	
		10 and less	More than 10	Foreign language	Other subjects
7.3	Use the European tools for evaluation and certification	27.3	25.3	19.4	29.7
7.4	Encourage students to use the European tools for self-evaluation	45.4	25.3	22.2	31.5
7.6	Take into account European and interna-tional assessment pro-cesses, such as PISA	45.4	24.1	27.8	25.9

The numbers show that foreign language teachers already had more possibilities to be involved into the European issues (projects and other activities). This created positive conditions to develop the competences by 'learning by doing'. According to L. Sercu (2006), contemporary foreign language teacher is not only a foreign language teacher, but also a teacher of intercultural competence. While teachers delivering courses in, for instance, natural science often have a rather narrow understanding of their purpose: helping students to master scientific knowledge and skills but not the social implications.

We found rather strong links between 'other subject' teachers negative self-evalua-tion of their competences 'Promote recognition and equivalence of national or school curricula on a European scale in order to facilitate teachers and students' mobility in the EU' (Pearson Chi-Square $p =$ 0.004) as well as 'Encourage students to use the European tools for self-evaluation' ($p = 0.01$) *and their experience which was more than 10 years. It seems that two activities mentioned above are rather complex and require significant efforts. More experienced teachers also are older teachers. Age factor sometimes is related to health and other factors (e.g. stress) which may influence motivation to choose more simple activities (*Tye & O'Brien, 2002).

As far as the two mentioned exceptions are concerned, they mean that bigger number of foreign language teachers feelthe lack of particular European competences (to compare with 'other subject' teachers). These competences are as follows:

- Identify and deal with the 'dark side' of the Internet;
- Take into account European and international assessment processes, such as PISA.

It is questionable if foreign language teachers were less competent in two fields men-tioned above, or they were more (broader and deeper) involved into these two activities and facedmore challenges to compare with 'other subject' teachers. Naturally, these bigger challenges require more competences.

Development of teachers' European competences

The results revealed that teachers' work experience in many cases is linked with the European competences. It is widely recognized that competence may be developed by involvement of the individual into particular activities (in our case – European projects) and by his/her participation inworkshops and seminars. Therefore, we asked the respondents: Have you participated in any training courses or project activities involving the development of European competences? (see Table 4). About 58% of them answered 'yes'and additionally 20% – 'yes, partially'.

Table 4
Have you participated in any training courses or project activities involving the development of European competences?

Teachers' answers	%
Yes	57.8
Partially	20.0
No	22.2

Only less than ¼ of the teachers did not participate in project activities or training activities. The question is: how have they developed their European competence? The answer could be as simple as: by conductingtheir daily activities at school. Personal efforts, as well as collaboration with colleagues and organizational learning in the school community may be highly effectivefor the development of European competences.

No doubt, the involvement into European projects and specialised training courses are the factors which influenced the biggest part of the respondents. According to S. D. Brookfield (2017), teacher as a learning practitioner in most cases develops his/her competence by 'learning by doing'.

Conclusion

Teachers evaluate their European competences on the curriculum matters and teaching process of their own subject positively. Smaller number of teachers is optimistic about their European competence of school or national curricula matters.

Teachers are most active in promoting the European literacy issues directly influencing their students in concrete situations, but less so when dealing with large-scale information (e.g. European labour market and its opportunities, etc.), lower number (but still significant) of teachers is involved in the activities which require long-term endeavour for them or for their students (e.g., learning the second foreign language), or large-scale international work (e.g. manage a European school network).

The research results show that foreign language teachers are extremely competent in the European issues (with two exceptions)due to their knowledge offoreign languages. They have had more possibilities to be involved into the European issues (projects, other activities) than 'other subject' teachers. This created positive conditions to develop the European competences.

On the other hand, there were two exceptions: foreign language teachers (to compare with other subject teachers) feel greater lack of the particular European competences for the identification and dealing with the 'dark side' of the Internet, as well as taking into account the European and international assessment processes, such as PISA.It is questionable whether the foreign language teachers were less competent in two fields mentioned above, or they were more (broader and deeper) involved in these two activities, and faced more challenges to compare with 'other subject' teachers. Naturally, these greater challenges require more competences.

'Other subject' (not foreign language) teachers with more than 10 years of experience have competence problems in terms of promoting recognition and equivalence of national or school curricula on the European scale to facilitate teachers and students' mobility in the EU as well as encouraging students to use the European tools for self-evaluation.

In most cases, teachers develop their European competence by participating in projects which revolve around the European issues as well as in the training workshops or seminars. At the same time, teachers' personal learning (from information sources, 'learning by doing', etc.), as well as collaboration with colleagues and organizational learning in the school community may be highly effective for the development of European competences.

The results of the European projectsas information sources are of great value for the informal development of European competences.

Researchers should further focus on investigating ways to motivate the 'other subject' teachers (particularly, the older teachers) to take interest in and practice European dimensions not only in the teaching process directly, but also while taking part in the process of developing school's curriculum on a European scale and applying European tools. The question "Why bigger number of foreign language teachers (to compare to subject teachers) feel lack of the particular European competences for the identification and dealing with the 'dark side' of the Internet, as well as taking into account the European and international assessment processes" also should be valuable for the researchers.

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Mokytojų europinių kompetencijų tyrimas

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Santrauka

Straipsnio tikslas – nustatyti, kokias europines kompetencijas ES šalių mokytojai pripažįsta kaip „naudojamą turtą" jų kasdieniame darbe. Kuriant apklausos raštu klausimyną vadovautasi mokytojų europinių kompetencijų struktūra (žr. *Reference Framework of Competences for Teaching European Citizenship Literary*). Tyrimo metodai – apklausa raštu, derinama su mokslinės literatūros analize. Empirinio tyrimo pagrindas buvo EK finansuojamo ELICITplus projekto partnerių tinklas. Klausimyną, pateiktą virtualiojoje erdvėje, užpildė 87 informantai iš 25 šalių. Dauguma atsakiusiųjų atstovavo bendrojo ugdymo ir profesinėms mokykloms.

Empirinių duomenų analizė ir gautų rezultatų diskusija leido pastebėti, jog į klausimyną atsakę mokytojai nevienodai vertina savo turimą europinę kompetenciją. Straipsnio išvadose pateikti išryškėję ypatumai.

Straipsnį sudaro santykinės šešios dalys. Pirma dalis skirta įvadui. Antroje apibrėžiamos mokytojų europinės kompetencijos, kuriomis autorė rėmėsi kaip konceptualiomis vykdydama empirinį tyrimą. Trečioje dalyje pristatoma empirinio tyrimo metodologija. Ketvirtoje – analizuojami įvairių ES šalių mokytojų sau priskiriamų europinių kompetencijų duomenys, gauti empirinio tyrimo metu. Straipsnio pabaigoje pateikiama diskusija, siekiant nustatyti tam tikras sąsajas ar tendencijas, ir išvados.