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Model for developing competencies for pedagogical work with children and youth with deviant and delinquent behaviour

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Abstract: The paper addresses the problem of preparing future pedagogical specialists for work with children and young people with deviant and delinquent behaviour in the context of contemporary social dynamics and increasing demands for practically applicable competences. The purpose of the study is to develop and approbate a model for the formation of professional competences for pedagogical preventive and corrective-educational work, implemented through the academic discipline "Methods for Working with Children and Young People with Deviant and Delinquent Behaviour" in the Pedagogy programme, profile "Preventive and Corrective Pedagogy", at the Faculty of Education of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". The research is based on pedagogical modelling and didactic design, complemented by empirical methods, including direct pedagogical observation, analysis of students' performance, and generalisation of pedagogical experience from the implementation of the model in the period 2019–2026. The model integrates lecture-based instruction and seminar-based activities, aimed at developing theoretical knowledge and practical competences through the analysis of case studies, normative acts and pedagogical situations. The results indicate that the interaction between theoretical preparation and practice-oriented training contributes to the development of competences for diagnosing deviant behaviour, analysing cases, and applying appropriate methods for pedagogical preventive and corrective-educational work. The findings confirm the effectiveness of the model and its applicability in preparing pedagogical specialists for work in educational and socio-pedagogical contexts.

Keywords: pedagogical competence, deviant behaviour, delinquent behaviour, preventive and corrective-educational work, university education

Introduction

Contemporary social processes, associated with increasing social dynamics, digitalisation, transformations in values and risky models of socialisation, place new demands on the preparation of pedagogical specialists. This presupposes that university education should go beyond the traditional theoretical model and create conditions for the development of practically applicable competences.

An essential component of the academic preparation of future pedagogues is associated with the development of competences for work with children and young people displaying deviant and delinquent behaviour. This is an area that requires integration between pedagogical, psychological, social and legal knowledge, as well as skills for the diagnosis, prevention and correction of behavioural deviations.

Within this context, a model for developing competencies for pedagogical work with children and youth with deviant and delinquent behaviour has been designed. The model is the conceptual framework of the authors' syllabus for the course on Methods for Working with Children and Youth with Deviant and Delinquent Behaviour. Its main idea is to ensure unity between theoretical preparation, realised through lectures, and practical preparation, implemented through seminars. This interaction aims to form comprehensive professional readiness for pedagogical work in the field of preventive and corrective pedagogy. A similar logic of combining theoretical knowledge with practical activity can be found in the classical pedagogical concept of Jan Amos Comenius, according to whom everything should be taught by examples, precepts, and practice (Comenius, 1907, p. 194). In a contemporary pedagogical context, this principle may be regarded as an early theoretical foundation of competence-oriented education, in which knowledge is understood through its practical application.

Methodology of the study

The methodological framework of the study is oriented towards the development and approbation of a model for the formation of professional competences for pedagogical work with children and young people with deviant and delinquent behaviour under the conditions of university preparation.

The object of the study is the university preparation of future pedagogical specialists in the field of preventive and corrective pedagogy.

The subject of the study is the model for the development of competences for pedagogical work with children and young people with deviant and delinquent behaviour, implemented through the interaction between lecture-based instruction and seminar classes within the framework of the academic discipline.

The aim of the study is to develop and approbate a model of university education directed towards the formation of practically applicable professional competences for pedagogical preventive and corrective work with children and young people with behavioural deviations.

For the achievement of the stated aim, the following *research tasks* were formulated:

- development of a conceptual model of the training within the framework of the academic discipline;
- didactic structuring of the curriculum in accordance with the competence-based approach;
- ensuring interaction between the theoretical and practical preparation;
- approbation of the model in a real university educational environment;
- analysis of the results from the application of the model.

The main method of the study is **pedagogical modelling**, through which the structure of the training was constructed, the relations between its basic components were determined, and the expected educational outcomes were projected.

As a supplementary method, **didactic design (curriculum programming)** was used, through which the aims of the training, the expected outcomes, the competence profile of the preparation, and the logical sequence of the educational modules were formulated.

In the process of approbating the model, empirical methods were also used, related to **direct pedagogical observation** of the students' work within the educational process, **analysis of the results of the ongoing assessment**, and **generalisation of pedagogical experience** from the application of the model in the period 2019–2026.

The combination of these methods makes it possible to trace both the theoretical substantiation of the model and its practical applicability in the preparation of future pedagogical specialists in the field of preventive and corrective pedagogy.

The model was approbated with 99 students from the speciality “Pedagogy”, profile “Preventive and Corrective Pedagogy”, at the Faculty of Education of Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” in the period 2019–2026. The study cohort includes students in full-time and part-time forms of education, which makes it possible to trace the applicability of the model in different organisational forms of university preparation (Table 1).

Table 1. Number of students who completed the course by academic year and form of study

Academic year	Full-time education	Part-time education
2019/2020	11	-
2020/2021	20	11
2021/2022	-	11
2022/2023	-	-
2023/2024	14	6
2024/2025	-	4
2025/2026	22	-
TOTAL	67	32

Competence profile of the preparation within the discipline

The academic discipline Methods for Working with Children and Young People with Deviant and Delinquent Behaviour is oriented towards the formation of a complex of professional competences, including a cognitive, practical and value-based component. The preparation of the students is directed towards the acquisition of systematic knowledge about: the historical development of preventive and corrective pedagogical activity, the international experience, the normative framework, the factors for the emergence of

deviant and delinquent behaviour, as well as the basic pedagogical principles, diagnostic methods and approaches to pedagogical work. In this respect, particular importance is attached to the formation of an understanding of psycho-pedagogical and legal concepts, which is “an important condition for the development of thinking and a prerequisite for improving the quality of education of students prepared to work in the sphere of prevention and correction of deviant and illegal behaviour” (Polihronov, 2023, p. 7).

At the same time, the education is directed towards the development of practical skills for the analysis and application of normative documents, diagnosis of specific cases, identification of risk factors and selection of adequate pedagogical methods for preventive and corrective work. In this sense, the principle is followed that learners should be guided towards direct acquaintance with and study of pedagogical phenomena through discussion of real cases from practice, which corresponds to Jan Amos Comenius’s view that students should “learn to know and investigate the things themselves” (Comenius, 1907, p. 150).

Simultaneously, in the process of education the analytical and synthetic approaches are combined, and the theoretical information is understood and verified through concrete examples and practical situations. In this way, conditions are created for the acquired theoretical information “should be authorised by actual demonstration to the senses and to the intellect” (ibid.), which corresponds to the unity between analysis and synthesis in the cognitive process.

Particular importance is attached to the development of abilities for individual and team work, as well as for the application of pedagogical approaches in different institutional and extra-institutional environments. In this context, the education is directed towards building skills for effective interaction – both within institutions and in the inter-institutional environment, which presupposes coordination of actions, mutual respect, trust and professional exactingness. Such a type of interaction is regarded as the basis for coordinated pedagogical activity and respect for different opinions and professional positions (Marinova, 2003, p. 148).

An essential element of the preparation is also the development of a value-based attitude towards pedagogical work with children and young people with deviant and delinquent behaviour, directed towards forming professional responsibility, empathy and understanding of the educational

potential of preventive and corrective pedagogy. This component is directly connected with the acquisition of knowledge and skills related to guaranteeing the best interests of the child, “regardless of his or her situational status”, as well as with protecting the child from “unprincipled, unlawful and inhumane actions” on the part of all participants in the institutional environment – pedagogical specialists, “representatives of state and non-state institutions, parents”, and other social subjects (Petrov, 1998, p. 359).

The achievement of these outcomes is ensured through a combination of lecture-based forms, practical exercises, work with national and international documents, case solving, analysis of works of art and course projects, as well as through a system of ongoing assessment (tests, course projects, presentations, case solving), which stimulates active participation and the professional development of the students. In this way, the classical didactic principle of clarity of the educational process and traceability of progress is realised, formulated as early as by Jan Amos Comenius, according to whom “everything that is taught be carefully defined and kept in its place, so that not only the teacher, but the pupil as well, may know exactly what progress he has made and what he is actually doing” (Comenius, 1907, p. 151).

Upon completion of the course, students should have acquired the necessary competences for establishing and diagnosing deviant or delinquent behaviour in children and young people; for analysing cases of manifestation of deviant behaviour in children or young people; for goal-setting, organising and carrying out pedagogical preventive and/or preventive-corrective educational work with children and young people with deviant and delinquent behaviour; for the practical application of principles, methods and means, adequate to the aims, for pedagogical preventive and corrective educational work with children and young people in school and out-of-school settings.

Theoretical and methodological framework of the preparation in the lecture course

The lecture course in the discipline has as its main aim the building of systematic theoretical preparation of the students regarding the essence, factors and mechanisms of manifestation of deviant and delinquent behaviour. Through it, the conceptual basis is created on which the practical skills formed in the seminar classes are built further.

The preparation in the lecture course presupposes the building of a systematic understanding of pedagogical activity as a purposeful and structurally organised process. In this sense, it is particularly important for students to build an understanding of the methodological organisation of pedagogical activity, insofar as the methodology of pedagogical work with children and young people with deviant and delinquent behaviour is a “scientifically grounded set of means, forms, methods and approaches, of pedagogical techniques of the specific pedagogical activity, of interaction with the child [...], with his or her parents or guardians, with the other components of the micro- and macro-environment that have a direct relation to the problem” (Rangelova, Kriviradeva, 2007, p. 36). This understanding points to the need for pedagogical interaction to be comprehended as a consciously constructed system.

The course content is constructed from 9 thematic modules. It covers the historical development of preventive and corrective pedagogical work in Bulgaria, tracing the main tendencies from the end of the XIX century to nowadays. This historical analysis enables students to understand the logic of the development of the institutional environment for prevention and resocialisation and to comprehend contemporary pedagogical practices as the result of a prolonged evolution of ideas and approaches.

International experience in working with children and young people with deviant and delinquent behaviour is also presented. Through comparative analysis, students build an understanding of the different models of intervention and of the role of educational institutions in the processes of prevention.

Particular attention is devoted to the normative framework of pedagogical activity. National and international documents regulating pedagogical work with children and young people with deviant and delinquent behaviour are examined. The basic pedagogical principles of work with this target group are also analysed. Through this combination of normative and pedagogical perspective, students build an understanding of the connection between the regulation of pedagogical activity and its practical implementation.

An important component of the lecture-based preparation is the analysis of the factors determining deviant behaviour – family, school, social and digital. This approach makes it possible to build a comprehensive understanding of the multifactorial nature of behavioural deviations. Particular

attention in this context is devoted to the family environment as a primary and long-lasting educational factor. As the results of a conducted ascertainment study among secretaries and members of local commissions for combating antisocial behaviour of minors and juveniles show, among the leading causes of deviant behaviour in adolescents are deficits in family interaction, associated above all with the “lack of parental love, care and attention”, with the “neglect of the child in the family”, and with the “unlawful behaviour of the parents” (Racheva, 2025, p. 76). This broadens the students’ understanding of the significance of functional disturbances in the family environment as preconditions for behavioural deviations.

A substantial place in the lecture course is occupied by issues related to the pedagogical diagnosis of deviant and delinquent behaviour, considered through the prism of the age-specific characteristics of development. Emphasis is placed on the peculiarities of the diagnostic approach with children in pre-school, primary school, lower secondary school and upper secondary school age, taking into account the need to adapt the pedagogical intervention to the age-related, social and behavioural characteristics of the young people. “Diagnostic procedures are an important part of pedagogical research and of the educational and upbringing process”. For this reason, “an important moment in diagnosis” is both “the theoretical understanding of the content of a specific diagnostic instrument” and the linking of “theoretical foundations and the practical use of the diagnostic method” (Vitanova, 2003, pp. 29–30). In this way, students build an understanding of the connection between behavioural diagnosis and the selection of adequate pedagogical strategies.

A logical continuation of this problem area is the consideration of the methods of pedagogical preventive and corrective educational work. They are presented as a system of pedagogical influences, including “methods of persuasion, coercion and stimulation” (Petrov, 1998, pp. 360–386).

Within the lecture-based preparation, the means of pedagogical preventive-corrective educational work are also examined, with emphasis on the educational potential of art, literature, sport and labour activity. They are analysed as pedagogical resources which make it possible to exert influence on the value system, emotional culture and social skills of children and young people, while at the same time creating conditions for socially acceptable expression and positive identification.

A significant element of the theoretical preparation is also the analysis of the forms of pedagogical preventive and corrective-educational work in school and out-of-school environments. Particular attention is devoted to the specificity of the application of pedagogical methods depending on the institutional context, emphasising the need for a flexible approach in work both in school and in out-of-school forms of pedagogical influence. In view of the significance of the fact that “for the effectiveness of the work of the institutions in the system of preventive and corrective-educational work, interaction both among the institutions themselves and between them and the external factors is of exceptional importance”, students acquire knowledge of the normative powers of all institutions that have “a bearing on the problems of children with deviant and delinquent behaviour” (Manasieva, 2010, p. 85). In this way, students build an understanding of the dependence between the environment of educational influence, the choice of pedagogical means and the expected outcomes of pedagogical activity.

Formation of practical competences through seminar classes

The seminar classes are conceptually designed as a practice-oriented component of the education through which theoretical knowledge is transformed into professional pedagogical skills. The main idea in their structuring is connected with the active involvement of students in analytical and practical activity. This approach is based on the didactic principles of Jan Amos Comenius, according to whom “education cannot attain to thoroughness without frequent and suitable repetitions of and exercises on the subjects taught” (Comenius, 1907, p. 156), and the acquisition of knowledge is inseparably linked with its practical application – “what has to be done must be learned by practice” (ibid., p. 194).

Work with normative acts occupies a particularly important place, developing skills for the pedagogical interpretation of legal texts. Students are guided towards understanding the relationship between pedagogical practice and legal regulation, as well as towards the application of different types of interpretation in the analysis of normative documents. This forms in them legal culture and the ability to orient themselves within the regulatory environment of pedagogical practice. Such preparation is significant also because “the process of forming professional competence is also connected

with taking responsibility for the performance of the social functions of the chosen profession” (Polihronov, 2023, p. 10).

A substantial methodological emphasis is placed on the solving of pedagogical case studies. In them, the diagnostic component is of particular importance, insofar as “the diagnosis of the child is of especially great importance for case work”, and its main aim is “social-pedagogical – to understand the child and his or her behaviour, so that he or she may be protected from subsequent antisocial acts and support may be provided for his or her social adaptation” (Rangelova, Kriviradeva, 2007, p. 46). Through this approach, students develop abilities for diagnosing problematic situations, identifying the factors of deviant behaviour and selecting adequate pedagogical methods – of persuasion, directed towards the formation of value attitudes and awareness of the consequences of behaviour; of coercion, related to the application of pedagogical requirements and restrictions; of stimulation, directed towards support for positive behaviour and motivation for socially acceptable models of behaviour. The solving of case studies makes it possible to form professional thinking oriented towards decision-making in real pedagogical situations.

A specific element of the seminar work is the analysis of cinematic works as a means of understanding deviant behaviour and the possibilities for its pedagogical prevention and correction. Work with film productions makes it possible for students to trace models of behaviour, social conflicts and value dilemmas in a context close to real-life situations, which creates conditions for the development of critical thinking and pedagogical interpretation of behavioural manifestations.

Within the seminar classes, the course project is linked precisely to this analytical approach. It represents an independent pedagogical analysis of a film work, in which students identify manifestations of deviant or delinquent behaviour, analyse the factors for their occurrence and formulate possibilities for pedagogical prevention and corrective-educational work. An essential part of the task is also the presentation and argumentation of the analysis made.

Through this activity, students demonstrate the capacity for independent research, systematisation of the knowledge from the lecture course and its application to a specific socio-cultural context. In this process, the integrating function of education is manifested, in which theoretical preparation and

practical analytical skills are combined into comprehensive professional competence.

Interaction between lecture-based and seminar-based education

The effectiveness of the proposed model is determined by the organic interaction between theoretical and practical preparation. The lecture course builds the conceptual and methodological framework of the preparation, while the seminar classes create conditions for the practical application of knowledge through analysis, interpretation and solving of specific pedagogical situations. In this way, a transition is ensured from theoretical knowledge to functional professional competence.

In support of this process, the bibliographical sources direct students towards selected scholarly and normative literature, which supports their independent preparation and the deepening of knowledge during the semester. This creates conditions for the development of skills for academic orientation in scholarly sources and for the independent construction of knowledge.

The model of education is also characterised by its interactivity. Through workshops, thematic discussions, presentations, case analysis and course assignments, the active participation of students in the educational process is stimulated. In this way, conditions are created for moving from passive reception of information to active participation in the construction of knowledge and the formation of professional attitudes.

Indicators of the degree of effectiveness of the course may be found in the protocolled observations from the practicum sessions following the theoretical preparation, as well as in the completed tasks in the course of the training process. In the protocols, students not only describe, but also provide a reasoned theoretical substantiation of the phenomena studied theoretically, which they recognise and ascertain in the practical activity of the specialists with whom they interact, as well as in the analysed cases from their practice. This testifies to their ability to transfer knowledge from the theoretical to the practical level.

Additional validation of the effectiveness of the training is also found in the quality of the completed tasks, which are purposefully designed with

a practice-oriented focus, with a view to stimulating analytical thinking, professional reflection, and skills for taking pedagogical decisions in real situations.

The results from the application of this model show that the combination of clearly structured theoretical preparation and practically oriented seminar classes creates favourable conditions for the formation of competences for pedagogical work with children and young people with deviant and delinquent behaviour. Particularly significant is the effect on the development of the students' professional sensitivity to the problems of this target group, as well as on the formation of readiness for pedagogical intervention in real educational situations.

Conclusion

The proposed model demonstrates the possibilities of university education to form in future pedagogues' competences for work with children and young people with deviant and delinquent behaviour. Its effectiveness is based on the balance between theoretical preparation and the practical applicability of knowledge, as well as on the systematic combination of pedagogical, social and legal aspects of professional preparation.

The lecture-based and seminar-based work have a clearly defined functional distribution, which makes possible the simultaneous building of a conceptual understanding of the issues and the development of practical skills for analysis, diagnosis and pedagogical influence. This creates prerequisites for the preparation of pedagogical specialists with a high degree of professional readiness for work in different educational and socio-pedagogical contexts.

A substantial result of the application of the model is the formation in students of a more profound understanding of the social significance of preventive and corrective pedagogical work, as well as the building of professional sensitivity to the problems of children and young people at risk. In this sense, the discipline contributes not only to the acquisition of knowledge and skills, but also to the building of a pedagogical position based on responsibility, humanity and professional commitment.

In summary, it may be pointed out that the proposed model has potential for development and application in other academic disciplines related

to preventive and corrective pedagogy, as well as for expanding the practice-oriented character of the preparation of future pedagogical specialists. It is precisely such models that create conditions for university education to respond adequately to contemporary social needs for specialists prepared to work with children and young people with behavioural deviations.

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