

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF RA NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK AND PEDAGOGY SECTORAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

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ABSTRACT

This article undertakes a comparative analysis of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) of the Republic of Armenia and Pedagogy Sectoral Qualifications Framework (SQF) from the viewpoint of vertical alignment of descriptors as a precondition for valid assessment and qualification award. The aim of this article is to identify the degree of structural and substantive alignment of master's degree NQF descriptors with the narrower statements for the same level in SQF.

The analysis undertaken herein demonstrates that, even though the SQF mainly reflects the requirements of the NQF, there still remain notable gaps, particularly in the domains of research competencies, data analysis, and independent professional practice. The findings may serve as a basis for improving the Pedagogy SQF upon revision.

Keywords: *European Higher Education Area, National Qualifications Framework, Sectoral Qualifications Framework, pedagogy, higher education, research competencies, master's degree, descriptor, mapping exercise*

INTRODUCTION

In the context of a unified European Higher Education Area (EHEA) (Bologna Process, 1999; European Commission, 2017), a National Qualifications Framework (NQF) comes afore as a domestic context provider. The NQF in Armenia is no exception and bridges the international document with lower level and more specific Sectoral Qualifications Frameworks.

The hierarchy among these documents implies that the requirements set for various levels at the European level, meant for uniformity and consistency of education substance and quality, shall be inherited by lower-level domestic frameworks. Such cascading shall not omit important components, to ensure full vertical alignment, since any such omission will compromise the logic of a single and unified education space where education qualifications are mutually recognized, thus undermining the philosophy of the Bologna Declaration. (Cedefop, 2018)

A revised Armenian NQF (Republic of Armenia Government, 2011, Republic of Armenia Government, 2016) with closer alignment to the European framework was adopted in 2016. This exercise was followed by the drafting and adoption of a number of SQFs to narrow the gap between a national level tool and individual academic programs, incorporating specific elements, pertinent to

professional practice in various sectors. (European Training Foundation [ETF], 2025). Therefore, *Pedagogy* SQF (Republic of Armenia Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sports, 2022) is an instrument to regulate and guide the transition from and translation of generic NQF descriptors to academic program level learning outcomes. (Karakhanyan et al., 2017)

The aim of the article is to conduct a comparative analysis of the Level 7 descriptors in the RA NQF and *Pedagogy* SQF, identifying the extent to which master's degree Pedagogy academic programs meet the general requirements commonly shared in the EHEA/EQF and contribute to the validation of awarded qualifications under the NQF-SFQ umbrella.

METHODS

Comparative content analysis, descriptor mapping and gap analysis have been used as methods to determine the degree of alignment between the NQF and Pedagogy SQF descriptors. (Cedefop, 2018)

This study employed qualitative comparative document analysis. The primary units of analysis were the descriptors in NQF and Pedagogy SQF, conducted at three interrelated levels: 1) study duration and number of ECTS at the MA qualification level; 2) descriptor domains, including knowledge, skills, and competences; 3) individual statements, describing learning outcomes, and key terms, naming professional functions and expected levels of performance. The analysis was guided by the principles of equivalence (similarity in the meaning and intended outcomes of the descriptors albeit the use of a different terminology), consistency (the logical correspondence between the general expectations of the RA NQF and pedagogy-specific requirements of the Pedagogy SQF), professional relevance (applicability of each descriptor to pedagogical roles and functions), and measurability (the extent to which the described competence can be demonstrated and assessed through observable performance).

The comparative approach involved the juxtaposition of each NQF descriptor with its corresponding statement in the SQF. The matrices have allowed the identification of key NQF terms, which were used as assessment headings by a four-level scale of Strong – Weak – Expanded - Partial Alignment, with each of the levels of alignment characterized as follows:

1. **Strong alignment** – the descriptors in both frameworks demonstrate a high degree of semantic and functional correspondence. They address the same competency domain and express comparable expectations regarding scope, complexity, responsibility, autonomy and professional performance. Minor differences in the wording do not alter their essential meaning.
2. **Partial alignment** – the descriptors address the same or a closely related competency domain but correspond only in certain elements. They may differ in scope, specificity, complexity, context of application, or expected degree of responsibility and autonomy. One descriptor may include some, but not all, of the essential components expressed in the corresponding descriptor.
3. **Expanded alignment** – the Pedagogy SQF descriptor incorporates the essential meaning and requirements of the corresponding NQF descriptor, but develops them in greater detail for the pedagogy sector. It may add sector-specific knowledge, skills, professional functions, contexts of

application, performance expectations and ethical responsibilities. Expanded alignment therefore represents correspondence accompanied by professional elaboration rather than inconsistency between the frameworks.

4. **Weak alignment** – the descriptors demonstrate only limited, indirect, or general correspondence. They may refer broadly to a similar domain, but their intended outcomes, level of complexity, scope of application, or expectations concerning responsibility and autonomy differ substantially. The relationship is insufficient to establish clear semantic and functional equivalence.

The **scientific novelty** of this study lies in the systematic comparative examination of the NQF and the Pedagogy SQF at the Master's degree level. Unlike studies that consider national and sectoral frameworks separately, this research analyzes their vertical and horizontal alignment within a unified analytical model. The comparison covers the learning outcomes, knowledge, skills, and competences for graduates of Master's degree programs. The original contributions of this study include a set of criteria for the structural and substantive evaluation of both documents; the areas of convergence, partial correspondence, duplication, and inconsistency between the two. The novel contributions also reveal how the NQF descriptors have been translated into measurable competences and learning outcomes for pedagogical qualifications. The article also proposes an evaluation scale and a matrix of comparison, based on the key terms used in NQF and Pedagogy SQF.

The study has several limitations. First, the analysis was confined to Level 7 of the RA NQF and *Pedagogy* SQF; therefore, its findings do not reflect how these frameworks are implemented in educational programs, assessment practices, teacher certification, or professional development. Second, the classification of descriptor pairs per degree of alignment was based on qualitative interpretation and may consequently involve a degree of researcher subjectivity. Future research shall expand the comparative analysis to cover more levels and a wider scope of teacher activity.

The tables below demonstrate the formal structural as well as substantive alignment between the RA NQF and *Pedagogy* SQF at level 7, with *Pedagogy* SQF consistently positioned within the broader architecture of the national qualifications system.

DISCUSSION:

Table 1.

RA National Qualifications Framework (NQF)	Sectoral Qualifications Framework (SQF) – Pedagogy
Level 7 – Master's Degree	Level 7 – Master's Degree
Master's Educational Program	Master's Educational Program
Minimum duration: 1 year (60–120 ECTS)	Minimum duration: 1 year (60–120 ECTS)

RESULT

The tables below represent an attempt at juxtaposing the RA NQF and Pedagogy SQF descriptors in English to reveal the degree of alignment, coherence, and correspondence between the two frameworks.

More specifically, such a comparative presentation aims to identify conceptual similarities and differences per rubric – Knowledge, Skills – Competencies, reveal the degree of terminological consistency, gaps or omissions in descriptor formulation, and the extent to which the SQF operationalizes the generic expectations of the NQF within the field of pedagogy. This exercise may support further initiatives of validating the internal coherence of the SQF, assessing vertical alignment across qualification levels, benchmarking against national and European standards, improving transparency and comparability of qualifications, and supporting curriculum modernization and quality enhancement.

The effort invested in the English translation of the Armenian-language descriptors creates added value as it enables international comparability and facilitates benchmarking against broader European qualifications discourse, particularly within the context of the European Qualifications Framework and the Bologna Process.

Table 2.

	RA NQF	Pedagogy SQF
Knowledge	Highly specialized knowledge, including knowledge of the latest achievements in the field, applied in learning, research, and professional practice.	Discusses advanced achievements, challenges, and paradigms in pedagogy and related disciplines within national and global contexts, including the legal frameworks of contemporary pedagogical activity.
	Knowledge of theories, advanced principles, and methods in the professional and interdisciplinary fields.	Interprets the pedagogical process considering age-related, psychological and pedagogical, and socialization patterns of learners and adults against contemporary socio-cultural developments, as well as methods and technologies for working with this population.
		Presents the mission and philosophy of education, socio-pedagogical issues, and the role of collaborative and creative educational environments while forecasting educational development trends and possible solutions to emerging problems.
		Presents the characteristics of research activity and reporting research findings in the form of articles or reports.

SKILLS

Table 3.

Application of Knowledge	RA NQF	Pedagogy SQF
	Core professional skills required for conducting research and innovation, integrating knowledge from different fields, and generating new knowledge.	Conducts qualitative and quantitative research to diagnose developmental characteristics, educational needs, achievements, and self-development capacities, while improving applied strategies.
	Ability to solve theoretical and practical problems in new and unfamiliar situations.	Solves theoretical and practical problems in pedagogical activity through the creative application of conceptual and methodological principles.
		Applies quality management tools in pedagogical practice.
		Develops projects and research initiatives in general, higher, special, and vocational education institutions, childcare institutions, social service centers, military units, penitentiary institutions, and healthcare settings.
		Analyzes scientific problems in pedagogy and formulates scientific hypotheses based on research findings.
		Applies innovative pedagogical technologies adapted to challenges within the education system.
		Evaluates new entrepreneurial opportunities in education and develops innovative project packages for their implementation.
		Develops corporate, operational, and sectoral pedagogical strategies and projects.

Table 4.

Communication, ICT, and Data Skills	RA NQF	Pedagogy SQF
	Ability to clearly and systematically communicate conclusions, justifications, and research findings to professional and non-professional audiences.	Uses ICT and media tools in pedagogical and interdisciplinary research to solve complex professional problems and disseminate research results to stakeholders.
	Ability to effectively use ICT in solving complex problems and conducting research.	Evaluates the completeness of information required in specific pedagogical situations and proposes measures for its application.
	Skills required for deep analysis and	Uses principles of pedagogical discourse in

on, IC T, and	RA NQF	Pedagogy SQF
	evaluation of quantitative and qualitative data under conditions of incomplete or limited information for decision-making purposes.	teaching and learning processes.

Table 5.

General Cognitive Skills	RA NQF	Pedagogy SQF
	Skills necessary for researching professional problems, generating innovative ideas and approaches, and proposing creative and innovative solutions aimed at expanding knowledge and practice.	Uses at least one foreign language while working with professional materials and studying international educational experience.
		Formulates professional development needs and acquires new competencies through continuing education and diverse strategies.
		Proposes new approaches for solving non-standard pedagogical problems.
		Applies pedagogical process management methods and technologies to ensure continuous improvement of educational outcomes.
		Formulates learning outcomes while ensuring alignment with objectives, assessment, and feedback.

COMPETENCIES

Table 6.

	RA NQF	Pedagogy SQF
(Autonomy and Responsibility)	Independently performs professional activities requiring strategic approaches for managing and transforming complex and unfamiliar situations.	Applies key competencies of research, practical application of knowledge, independent work, collaboration, teamwork management, and lifelong self-education in professional practice.
	Contributes to the development of professional knowledge.	Organizes professional activity based on national and universal human values.

	RA NQF	Pedagogy SQF
	Assumes responsibility for supervising achievement of strategic team objectives.	
	Evaluates continuing education and professional development needs within the context of technological advancement.	
	Contributes to the development of civil society.	
	Operates by integrating Armenian national values and historical-cultural experience with universal human values.	

Though the benchmarking exercise demonstrates that the *Pedagogy SQF* is broadly aligned with the RA NQF and indirectly with the EQF Level 7 descriptors (European Commission, 2017) and operationalizes many of the generic NQF descriptors into pedagogy-specific competencies, a thorough keyword level mapping effort indicates both over-specification and partial omissions.

The table below is the structured result of the mapping and keyword matching exercise to reveal the degree of alignment between the NQF and SFQ terms.

Table 7.

NQF Key Terms	Corresponding SQF Terms	Alignment Assessment
Highly specialized knowledge	Advanced achievements, paradigms, legal framework	Strong alignment
Interdisciplinary knowledge	Related disciplines, socio-cultural context	Strong alignment
Research	Qualitative and quantitative research, scientific hypotheses	Strong alignment
Innovation	Innovative pedagogical technologies, entrepreneurial opportunities	Strong alignment
Problem-solving	Solving theoretical and practical pedagogical problems	Strong alignment
ICT skills	ICT and media tools	Strong alignment

NQF Key Terms	Corresponding SQF Terms	Alignment Assessment
Data analysis	Evaluation of information completeness	Partial alignment
Quantitative and qualitative data evaluation	Qualitative and quantitative research	Partial alignment
Communication	Pedagogical discourse	Partial alignment
Lifelong learning	Continuing education, self-education	Strong alignment
Creativity	New approaches, innovative solutions	Strong alignment
Strategic management	Corporate and sectoral strategies	Expanded alignment
Teamwork	Collaboration and teamwork management	Strong alignment
Civil society	National and universal values	Partial alignment
Democratic competence	Not explicitly articulated	Weak alignment
Autonomy	Independent work	Strong alignment
Decision-making under uncertainty	<i>*Not clearly operationalized</i>	Weak alignment

The above-presented tables indicate that the SQF effectively contextualizes descriptors within pedagogical practice and strongly operationalizes the following NQF dimensions:

- Research competences,
- Pedagogical innovation,
- Professional problem-solving,
- ICT integration,
- Lifelong learning, and
- Interdisciplinary application of knowledge.

However, along with the strongly aligned areas (10), there are four areas of partial alignment, 2 areas of weak alignment and 1 area of expanded alignment. These areas may require further attention and stronger alignment, should a revision of the *Pedagogy* SQF be undertaken.

The six partially or weakly aligned areas may be grouped under the *Data Literacy*, *Communication Competence* and *Democratic and Civic Competence* subheadings.

As for *Data Literacy*, the NQF explicitly requires deep analysis and evaluation of quantitative and qualitative data under incomplete information conditions. Even though the SQF does reference research

and evaluation of information completeness, it does not sufficiently operationalize the following aspects that are detailed in the NQF:

- advanced analytical competence,
- evidence-based decision-making,
- data interpretation under uncertainty.

Partial alignment in case of *Communication Competence* is due to the mismatch of the NQF's emphasis on both professional and non-professional audiences and the SQF's narrow interpretation of communication, largely confined to pedagogical discourse and instructional communication which means that broader public and interdisciplinary communication dimensions are underdeveloped.

As for *Democratic and Civic Competence*, the NQF explicitly includes contribution to civil society and integration of national and universal values, whereas the SQF makes a general reference to national and universal values, however lacking any explicit descriptors concerning civic agency and democratic participation or inclusive educational governance or human-rights based pedagogy.

As mentioned above, the SQF contains some over-specifications which extend beyond the generic NQF framework, making reference to the following aspects:

- corporate strategy development,
- entrepreneurial project packaging,
- sectoral strategic planning.

While these types of activity may enrich individual professional practice, they may be detrimental to the effective and targeted operationalization of the SQF overloading it, reducing descriptor clarity and complicating curriculum implementation and assessment down the line.

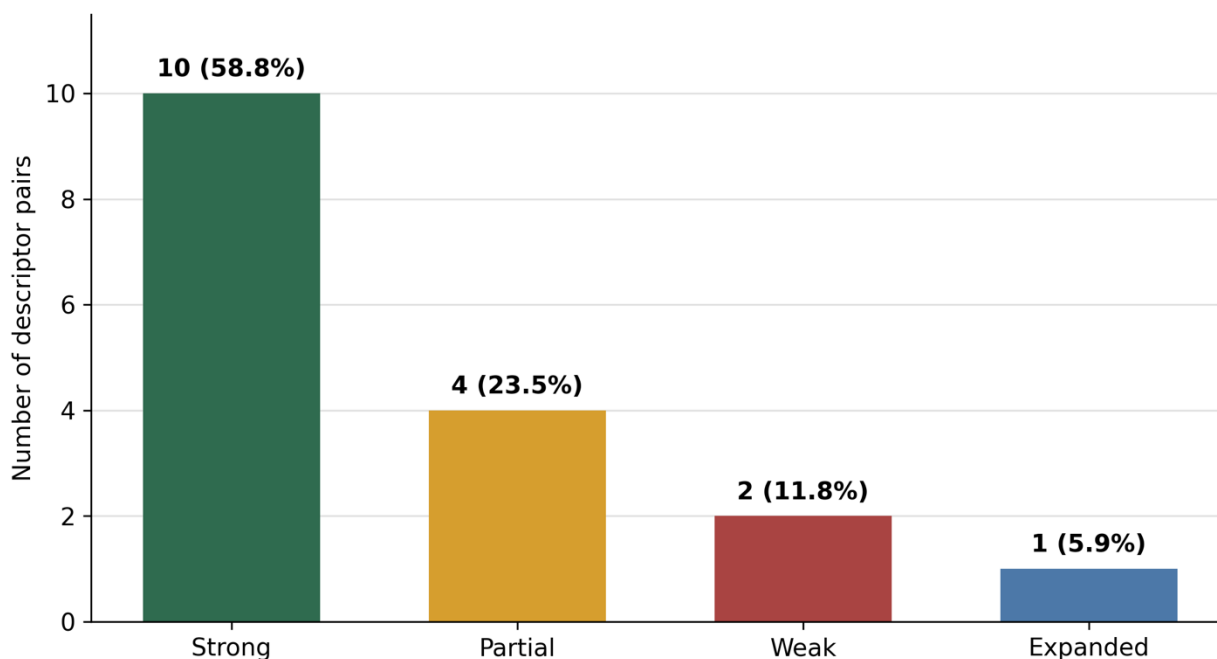
Thus, the quantitative analysis of the 17 competency-descriptor comparisons demonstrates a generally high level of correspondence between the NQF and the SQF. Strong alignment was identified in 10 cases (58.8%), representing the majority of the descriptors examined. Partial alignment was found in 4 cases (23.5%), indicating that the frameworks address similar competency domains but differ in their scope, specificity, or operationalization. Two descriptors (11.8%) exhibited weak alignment: democratic competence was not explicitly articulated in the SQF, while decision making under uncertainty was not clearly operationalized. Expanded alignment occurred in one case (5.9%) where the SQF elaborated strategic management through more specific references to corporate and sectoral strategies.

Overall, 88.2% of the comparisons demonstrated at least partial correspondence when strong, partial, and expanded alignment categories were combined. These findings indicate substantial coherence

between the frameworks, albeit with identifiable gaps concerning civic-democratic competence, decision-making under uncertainty, data analysis, communication, and civil-society-related outcomes.

Figure 1.

Distribution of NQF-SQF Descriptor Alignment



Note. N = 17 competency-descriptor comparisons.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the empirical findings indicate that strong alignment is the predominant relationship between the two frameworks. Nevertheless, the distribution of the alignment categories also demonstrates that correspondence is not uniform across all competency domains.

Based on the foregoing analysis, it may be concluded that from an NQF validation perspective, the *Pedagogy* SQF demonstrates substantial vertical alignment, conceptual consistency with Level 7 expectations, and strong professional contextualization.

However, future revisions of the *Pedagogy* SQF should address the validation gaps remaining in democratic competencies, data literacy, communication breadth, and strategic decision-making under uncertainty. Such a revision should focus on strengthening transversal competencies, harmonizing terminology, improving descriptor measurability, aligning data-analysis competencies with NQF expectations, explicitly integrating democratic and civic competencies.

The mapping exercise above hints at the potential benefits of such a revision which would enhance framework coherence, improve curriculum alignment, strengthen quality assurance and international comparability of pedagogical qualifications as the primary goal of the Bologna process.

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