

Edu World 2016
7th International Conference

**THEORETICAL BENCHMARKS AND PRACTICAL OPTIONS
RELATED TO TEACHING CAREER FORMATION AND
DEVELOPMENT**

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Abstract

Deep-seated social changes cause major changes within the Romanian educational system in general, and to requirements relating to the teaching profession, in particular. From the perspective of many reforms of education, we find significant concerns about the process of professionalisation of the teaching career, building methodologies of initial and continuous training for teachers, definition and description of professional skills/standards, of placement of the training system in the European context of continuous professional development, learning and training throughout life. Today, teachers' assessment focuses on skills, capabilities to make, solve concrete problems, specific to education, but also to students' results, to their performance, plus the opinions of parents and pupils, thus formulating new visions on the professionalism and expertise of teachers. Theoretical contributions on the formation and development of the teaching career in Romania, allow us to make certain analyses and correlations with the students and teachers participating in initial and continuous training programmes. Thus, in this article, we wish to identify the decisive elements of professional development related to the options being considered : identification and analysis of individual options or those based on collaboration and partnership but also of those based on corporate culture in teachers' professional development; on appreciation of the importance of initial and continuous training, both from the perspective of theoretical elements and pedagogical practice; on identification of the most effective or successful ways of continuous training; analysis of the role and functions of evaluation and self-assessment from the perspective of a career in teaching and professional development.

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Keywords: Professionalization; teacher training; professional development; assessment/self-assessment.



1. Introduction

1.1 Paper Rationale

Within the Education Congress (2013) Steliana Toma and Dan Potolea propose A new model of definition and description of professional standards/skills, highlighting the fact that the professionalization of the teaching career means placing the system in the context of continuous professional development, lifelong learning and training and orientation of the system of mobility and career development and professional development.

Professionalization consists in the process of constituting an ensemble of skills and abilities in a given domain based on the assimilation of a system of theoretical and practical knowledge, a process deductively controlled by a template of the concerned profession (Păun, E., in Gliga, coord., 2002).

These considerations constitute the premise of the research we propose, respectively, it highlights the theoretical and practical options with regard to training and career development.

1.2. Paper Theoretical Foundation and Related Literature

Deep-seated social changes cause major changes within the Romanian educational system in general, and of the requirements relating to the teaching profession, in particular. From the perspective of the many reforms of education, we find significant concerns regarding the process of professionalization of the teaching career, because educational activity was long dominated by empiricism, improvisation and procedures crafted (Păun, E., in Gliga, coord., 2002, p. 20).

Professionalization, a dominant way of socialization refers to the explicit, descriptive component of actions specific to a field of human activity and involves the rigor, seriousness, competence, overcoming the status of amateur or craftsman. It can be concluded that it is a process of building a set of skills that allow the deployment of a profession.

The professionalization of teaching involves the acquisition of skills necessary for carrying out a specific instructive-educational activity, training in relation to the following topics: activities for teaching, training and education of students; activities at the institutional level; activities and relationships with the community (counseling, cultural action, in partnership with other institutions during the students' free time, etc.); other activities and documentation, participation in social life (Maciuc, 2005, p. 313).

For these reasons, we view the definition of career professionalization as a process of formation of an ensemble of capacities and skills in a given field, based on the assimilation of one set of knowledge (theoretical and practical), a process controlled by a deductive model of that profession (Păun, E., in Gliga, coord., 2002 p. 21).

The angles of professionalization can be summarized in: description or elaboration of professional identity, so as to outline a set of knowledge and skills in a structured professional model (professional standards), which can be assimilated to a systematic, scientific basis; making an effort to legitimize the teaching profession in the field of social activities and professions with the help of this model of the teaching profession (Șerbănescu, 2011, p. 180).

The same author emphasizes that it is essential that, in the context of programmes for teacher training, activities have to take place in relation to the skills of the profession, established and regulated, to legitimize the teaching profession.

In this context, we view concern for the teaching career training as a priority of the education system and training in our country. Some examples in this regard are the PhD research themes of the first two decades of the twenty-first century, of which we list: The professionalization of the teaching career. Psycho-pedagogical skills, PhD Sanda Onutz (2011), scientific coordinator: Prof. dr. Vasile Chiş; Continuous training – the premise of professionalization of the teaching career, PhD Elena Nicoleta Mircea (2011), scientific coordinator Emil Păun; Evaluation of training programs for teachers, PhD Iuliana Marinela Niţulescu, scientific coordinator Prof. Univ. Dr. Marin Manolescu; The educator and social-professional requirements, scientific coordinator Prof. dr. Emil Paun; Counseling for career in higher technical education PhD Elena Sorina Barboiu (2012), scientific coordinator: Prof. dr. Gheorghe Tomsa.

Exemplifying these contributions demonstrates both concern for the professionalization of the teaching career in Romania, and especially optimizing professional standards for the development of a template of the teaching profession that must contain both the standardized, measurable and observable skills, and non-standard skills, with high a coefficient of subjectivity. In the paper Training teachers. Systems, policies, strategies, a template of professionalizing the teaching career, Romiţa Iucu presents the main roles of the professional teacher from the perspective of several planes of teacher activities: specific person; social actor; technician; encyclopedian; artisan practitioner; reflective practitioner. The author emphasizes that the set of skills that are to be formed through training programs for prospective teachers, the quality of these programs can be evaluated following two criteria: quality of theoretical training, on the one hand, and the organization and the duration of working hours, on the assumption of guidance on the other hand. It should be kept in mind the fact that professional training means building intellectual, physical, moral, and conjectural structures and not adding to existing structures (Iucu, 2004, p. 37).

Initial teacher training programs should be tailored so as to deal with all the components of a professional in education, aiming to develop each side equally (Şerbănescu, 2011, p. 184).

From the point of view of the curriculum, the current model of, training skills of teachers at the undergraduate level, is compatible with the European systems. But there are some dysfunctions generated by the organization, share of the disciplines, program status in the university, students' attitude. The most important sources of initial training deficiencies are: not using effective ways of selection, depending on the skills and motivation of those who want to go through the program; the students' option for the program is one of damage and not one motivated specifically by interest in teaching career; psycho-pedagogical disciplines have a residential position in the general plan of academic studies; training is dispersed over a quite long period of time and does not favor the integration of theory and practice; pedagogical practice is insufficient, not varied, fragmentary, made among the classes, so the acquisition and strengthening of skills are badly affected; certifying the development of psycho-pedagogical skills is irrelevant (Onutz, 2011).

In terms of the Methodology of training teaching staff from preuniversity education we mention models for continuous training of teachers. They are based on the recognition and quantifying of the following types of experiences and training programs of formal, non-formal and informal types, through

the following types of study loans: Professional academic programs (completion of undergraduate training programs after completion of minimum legal conditions stipulated for certification in the training/teaching career; completion of a program of masters belonging to the fundamental domain or a domain related to the specialty; completion of a program of doctoral studies (professional, scientific doctorate); completion of a postgraduate academic program valued with academic study credits (courses must be accredited at University level by the Senate by the rector's decision or by the National Qualification Agency); completing a postdoctoral study program in the country or abroad; lifelong learning programs (LLL); international mobility programs (participation in mobility programs carried out with the consent of the National Agency for Community Programs in Education and Training: Comenius, Grundtvig, Leonardo etc; participation in interinstitutional partnership projects-bilateral or multilateral collaboration accords between school institutions in the program of which training sessions are included; periodic improvement programs (graduation of courses/training programs accredited or approved by the competent authorities determined by the legislation in force- MECTS accredited). Theoretical contributions, in terms of training and career development for teaching in Romania, allow us to create some analyses and correlations, with students and teachers who attend initial training and continuous training programs within "1 Decembrie 1918" University in Alba Iulia.

1.3. Objective:

We intend to identify, at the level of our geographical area of teacher training, the decisive elements of professional development related to the options being considered, namely:

- the identification and analysis of individual options or those based on collaboration and partnership and organizational culture in the professional development of teachers;
- appreciation of the importance of initial and continuous training, both from the perspective of theoretical elements and pedagogical practice;
- identification of the most effective or successful ways of continuous training;
- analysis of the role and functions of evaluation and self-assessment from the perspective of a career in teaching and professional development;

2. Methodology

2.1. Sample

In this study 70 people were tested, having the age between 18-44 years. The experience variable has identified which people have experience in teaching. In our sample 25 persons have teaching experience, 16 people have a one year experience and nine people have an experience of more than one year. The seniority variable refers to the length of service (years) gained by people active in the teaching career. This variable had values between one year and 32 years. The degree variable identified four categories (0-None 1-final degree 2-2nd degree 3-1st degree).

Table 1. Mean and SD for the variables: age, experience and seniority

	age	experience	seniority
Mean	22,70	0,36	1,13
SD	5,622	0,483	3,345

Table 2. Frequencies for the variable "degree"

0-none	1-final degree	2-2nd degree	3- 1st degree
N = 66 (94,3%)	N = 1 (1,4%)	N = 2 (2,8%)	N = 1 (1,4%)

2.2. Instruments

The study was based on data collected through a questionnaire. The questionnaire applied has collected several types of information:

- demographic and professional achievements (age, experience, seniority, degree)
- opinions about continuous formation in the teaching career (options for career development, existing organizational culture, utility of continuous formation)
- opinions about assessment and self-assessment in relation to the teaching career (courses taken, theoretical/practical balance, knowledge/competencies balance, etc.)

The answer supposed more types of different tasks (choosing a value on a continuum, ranking the answering options or completing an open answer)

2.3. Statistical Analyses

For the processing of the data collected was used the SPSS 15 software.

Missing data have not been replaced. The statistic methods used were: descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, frequency) and correlations.

3. Results

3.1. Descriptive Statistics

Related to the existing options for teaching career development (question 3), in our sample 62% checked positions 7, 8, 9 or 10 (M = 6.54, SD = 2,655).

For next question, the preferred option for teaching career development, 50% has chosen the individual plan as first option and 36% has chosen collaboration as the first option.

The question about which approach is facilitated by present organizational culture indicated that almost half of the sample (N=34, 47.9%) feels that a collaborative approach is existing and that, a smaller proportion of the sample (N=28, 39.4%) feels the opposite, that an individual development is favored.

Continuous formation was considered necessary by the majority (N=56, 78.9%), but a smaller proportion of the sample (N=9, 12.7%) had a mixed view and, an even smaller subgroup (N=4, 5.6%) was opposing the idea of continuous formation utility. These results were confirmed by the answers to the

next question (number seven), where the majority considered that continuous formation was more important than initial formation ($M = 7.31$, $SD = 2,566$).

Question 8 and 10 were also about continuous formation, the first one asking for courses taken and the second one about courses proposed. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Crosstabs. Courses taken vs. courses proposed

		Course proposals		Total
		without	with	
Courses	Not participating	41	7	48
	Participating	8	14	22
Total		49	21	70

In our sample most people preferred practical pedagogy comparing theoretical pedagogy (question 9). For results, please see Figure 1 (1- strongly preferred practical pedagogy and 5- strongly preferred theoretical pedagogy).

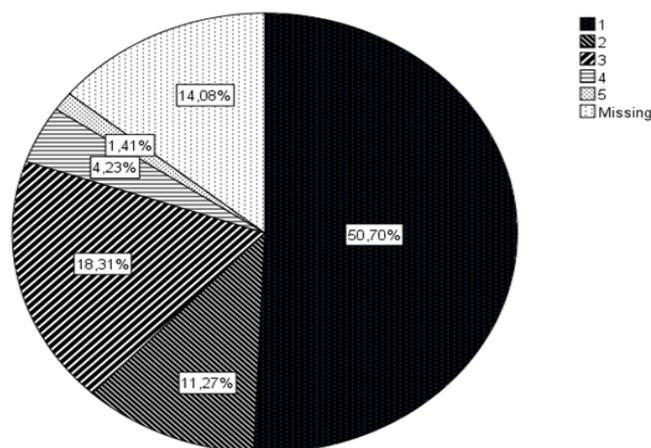


Figure 1. Preference for practical vs. theoretical pedagogy

In line with these results, answers to question 12 revealed that in this sample competencies were seen a little more important than knowledge $M = 6.19$, $SD = 2,678$; the value of 5 being the middle of the scale.

The relationship between self-evaluation and evaluation was assessed through two questions. The first one (question 11) was asking about the importance of these two evaluations in teaching career and the second one (question 14) was asking how important are seen from a personal perspective. For both of them, the answer could choose any point on a continuum from 1 to 10, where 1 was the self-evaluation pole and 10 was the evaluation pole. The results had close values, $M = 6.00$, $SD = 2,456$ (question 11) and $M = 5.35$, $SD = 2,528$ (question 14).

A last item was questioning what aspects could have the strongest influence on the results of professional evaluations. There have been enumerated four options: "context", "definition of the objectives", "subjective aspects", "the methods of evaluation". The "definition of the objectives" was

chosen as most important by 32 people (45.1%), "context" had been on the same first position for 13 people (18.3%) followed by "methods of evaluation" with 12 people (16.9%) and "subjective aspects" which was chosen as the first option by 5 people (7%).

3.2. Correlations

In this sample more variables had statistical significant correlations:

- age correlated with variable "context" from question 13, ($r = -.393$, $p = .010$).
- experience correlated with variable "subjective aspects" from question 13 ($r = .362$, $p = .025$).
- both seniority and degree correlate with number of courses taken ($r = .360$, $p = .002$ and $r = .290$, $p = .015$) and with the number of courses proposed ($r = .322$, $p = .007$ and $r = .290$, $p = .015$)
- the option perceived as available for teaching career development correlated with two variables: perceived relevance of initial vs continuous formation ($r = .501$, $p = .000$) and perceived relevance of self-evaluation vs evaluation ($r = .311$, $p = .011$)
- the variable of practical pedagogy vs theoretical pedagogy correlated with the variable that measured the personal significance for self-evaluation vs evaluation (question 14), $r = .357$, $p = .006$.

4. Discussions

A first point of interest of this study was to identify and analyse how present or future teachers want to develop their career and what options they perceive to have. Results obtained indicated that the preferred option for teaching career development was the individual plan as first option for half of this sample and another third of it has chosen collaboration as their first option.

Related to the existing options for teaching career development, in this study, results indicate that most often the collaboration/partnership option was perceived as being available. This result is confirmed by the fact that also the organizational culture is perceived by the majority as favoring the collaborative approach.

A second point of interest was to find out which is the perception related to initial and continuous formation. Continuous formation was considered necessary by the large majority and also was seen to be more relevant than initial formation. Even more, people who were involved in courses related to continuous formation had more often and more proposals for future such courses. Also, seniority and degree variables, but not age, had strong correlations with number of courses taken and with the number of courses proposed. Starting from these results could be speculated that involving people in more courses, making them wish to have a higher degree and keeping them longer involved in the teaching career would make them be more interested in continuous formation. As an interesting fact, correlation coefficients indicated that those that believe more often that they have the possibility to develop their teaching career through collaborations and partnerships are also those that believe that continuous formation is more important than initial formation.

The last objective of this study was to identify efficient and successful ways to implement continuous formation and to analyse how evaluation is perceived. Related to the first aspect, the results in this sample revealed that courses of continuous formation should focus on practical aspects and should lead to building of competencies. Related to the second aspect, self-evaluation was perceived, marginally,

as a preferred option in this sample. Considering the small difference between how self-evaluation and evaluation have been perceived perhaps a more realistic interpretation could be that both of them play an important role in the teaching career development.

But, results obtained could lead to some clues that partially explain why self-evaluation is preferred to evaluation. In the last one, "definition of the objectives" was chosen as most influential. Still, "context" and "methods of evaluation", together, were seen as being most relevant for almost one third in this sample and only "subjective aspects" was chosen as the first option by less than 10% of the sample.

Even more, these options are not completely static. Looking over the correlation coefficients it can be seen that age correlated with variable "context"; older people thought that results of professional assessments are more influenced by the context in which these assessments are happening. And, experience variable correlated with variable "subjective aspects"; more experienced teachers consider that "subjective aspects" have less influence on the results of professional assessments.

Also, correlation coefficients indicated that those that believe more often that they have the possibility to develop their teaching career through collaborations and partnerships or consider that pedagogical theory is more important than practical pedagogy are also those that perceive evaluation as more important than self-evaluation.

5. Conclusions

Despite its limitations the present study have been able to address its objectives, being able to identify how teaching career development is perceived both from a personal and institutional perspective. Also, it have been able to assess how evaluation and self-evaluation are perceived and to identify aspects that could help future courses dedicated to continuous formation.

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