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**THE FAILURE OF THE TEACHERS TRAINING POLICIES IN**  
**ROMANIA TODAY**

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*Abstract*

The public policies concerning the teachers training have made their debut in Romania starting with 1996, by the creation, through the Ministry Order No 4356 from 7.11.1996, of the Teacher Training Departments situated in a limited number of universities in the country.

Up to the year 2007, the time of the " Presidential Commission Report for the analysis and policy development in the fields of education and research", called "Romania of education, Romania of research", the concerns on the training of future teacher students were marginal, the only perceptible change being the introduction, together with the Bologna System, of Level II of the Teacher Training Programme, and thus the completion of the Bachelor-level training with a Master-level preparation.

After the issuing of the National Educational Law in January 3, 2011, teacher training has become a subject of major interest for the universities in the context of the significant decrease of student population and the reduction of the budgetary resources. Today we can speak of a failure of vocational teacher training policies, and in this paper, we intend to capture the steps which have led to this failure.

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## 1. Introduction

The pedagogical and didactical training of future teacher students represents one of the fundamental pillars of the initial academic tuition that, along with the specialty training, insures the development of competences required for a successful teaching profession. It is then understandable that this specific complementary training raises the interest of both the factors directly involved in the initial teacher training as well as of the direct and indirect beneficiaries of these educational services.

Until 1996 the initial teacher training has been considered as integral part of the student's specialization. The curricula included the psycho-pedagogical and didactical disciplines as parts of quasi-compulsory education, similarly as with the main specialization disciplines. A direct consequence of this politics implied that all students and graduates potentially became teachers. Thus, the graduates of traditional universities were naturally trained for the teaching profession when they followed the package of disciplines included in the teacher training module of study.

For an early exemplification, we list the comparative situation of the total number of students' enrolled at Babeş-Bolyai University (BBU) in 1989 and in 2016. In 1989, the total number of students at BBU was that of 5619 (\*\*\*, 2016a). It was the most probable then that more or less the total number of 5619 students would become potential teachers after graduation. In 2016 the total number of students at BBU is roughly of 41,000 (\*\*\*, 2016b). Out of this number, according to the Teacher Training Department of BBU, the total number of students that follow the teacher training programme is of approximately 8000. Obviously, this number that represent about 20% of the total number of students, but we expect this is the percentage of total number of students that genuinely wish to practice this profession.

## 2. Problem Statement

The recent history of Romanian public policies on teacher training had their debut in 1996 together with the Ministry Order no. 4356 from 11.07.1996, regarding the organization and functioning of the Teacher Training Department.

The curriculum of the recently founded Teacher training department was structured around six disciplines and integrated into the specialty curricula of the students. The status of the program was quasi-compulsory, and the Teacher training department only had the attribution to issue the certificates of didactic competences on the bases of the study results registered in different students' faculties.

Through the above-mentioned Ministry order, nine Teacher training departments were founded at national level. They were to offer services not only for the universities where they were installed but also for other higher education institutions.

Starting with year 1996, in the Teacher raining departments specialty chairs were organized and later specialty departments were structured. They included specialists in didactics together with specialists in educational psychology and in educational sciences. It was a moment that marked the professionalization of specialists in didactics.

Until 2007, the moment when the Presidential Commission report for the analysis and elaboration of educational and research policies – Romania of Education, Romania of Research – was issued, the interest for teacher training became secondary, the only important change in this period being the

implementation, together with the Bologna System, of the Level II of psycho-pedagogical training, a level of study that completed the Bachelor level with the Master level training.

The problem stated then (in association with the failure of the preceding policies), was the insufficient psycho-pedagogical and didactical training offered to students through the Bologna system. Consequently, two solutions were implemented: the introduction of an admission examination for the psycho-pedagogical training programme and the introduction of the non-compulsory status of the programme. It was also decided the completion of Level I (Bachelor) programme with Level II (master) programme.

Yet, the result of these changes was not the one expected by the legal authorities. Becoming non-compulsory, the psycho-pedagogical training becomes an appendix of the specialty training, with an obviously weaker impact on the professional training. The paradoxical situation of less trained teachers with a more complex training programme occurred.

## **2.1. The Phantom of the Didactic Master programme**

After the issuing of National Education Law no. 1/2011, the training of teachers became a topic of major interest, in the context of student population decrease and of the reduction of budgetary resources. The main legislative decision regarding the psycho-pedagogical training was the abolishment of Teacher Training Departments and the setting up of the Didactic Master programme, a type of programme places somehow outside the Teacher Training Departments but without a clear structure in charge with its accreditation and management.

In fact, the didactic master was firstly mentioned in the Presidential Commission report for the analysis and elaboration of educational and research policies – Romania of Education, Romania of Research, also known as Miclea Commission Report from 2007:

*“The reform of human resources*

*2. The initial and continuing training quality enhancement. The state must impose rigorous standards for the didactic career. We mention some which we consider very important. Only the students who completed all credits successfully are allowed to follow courses for the didactic career; only students who obtained a minimum mark of 7 are allowed to access the Definitive Degree exam. Only the graduates of a didactic master will have access to obtaining the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> didactic degree. The didactic career will not finalize with the obtainment of the 1<sup>st</sup> degree, as excellence degrees will be available. Ministry of Education will establish rigorous standards for the authorities who can deliver initial and continuing training. The ministry will act as the main subsidizer of the training and as the main employer of the graduate of these courses, so, consequently, will only subsidize the courses and respective institutions that meet the quality requirements” (Miclea, 2007, p. 20).*

## **2.2. Curriculum projects for the didactic Master programme. The era of the 7 didactics**

Immediately after 2011 diverse curriculum design projects for the Didactic Master programme were proposed. The majority of the propositions were exaggerated or biased, culminating with the plan that included no less than seven didactic disciplines, simply named Didactics, with no connection with the main domain of students' specialization. Thus, specific academic specialties such as Psychology or

Philosophy that only have a single pre-university level corresponding subject-matter that is to be studied in a single school year were supposed to study seven distinct Didactics. The main argument for the educational policies changes in the direction of the Didactic Master programmes and the abolition of the psycho-pedagogical training programme was the weak level of training the teachers proved at the national examinations for a permanent position in the educational system, on one hand, and the low results students obtained in the external examination (National Examination, Baccalaureate, PISA, TIMMS, PIRLS tests), on the other hand.

It is interesting to notice the recent data included in a 2013 report issued by the National Centre of Evaluation and Examination in collaboration with TALIS Centre, named The analysis of the educational environment in Romania, regarding the feeling on the level of professional training teachers declare (on a scale from very well prepared to not prepared at all), in relation with the contents of the school subject they teach by comparison with the preparation in the field of didactics of school discipline they teach. The results of the study contradict the arguments mentioned above. Generally, teachers declare that their formal education offered them a good training for the teaching profession. At the international level, 93% of the questioned teachers declare that they are well or very well prepared in the contents of their specific subject matter, while 89% consider themselves well and very well prepared in the field of pedagogy and practice of their school subject. At their turn, the Romanian teachers feel the most well prepared in comparison with the teachers of other participating countries (99.8% of teachers feel well or very well prepared regarding the contents of the subject matter they teach, while 98.5% of them declare that they feel well and very well prepared in the field of didactics of their school subject. The percentages are over the averages of the international data, which are 93.2% on the contents of the subject and 88.9% on the didactics of the school subject (Mirescu et al., 2013).

The personal perspective of Romanian teachers on their professional competences is that they are very well prepared, a perception which we evaluate as overrated as it is in a direct contradiction with the actual results teachers register at their national examination and also in an indirect contrast with the general tendency of students' results at the national evaluations.)

### **3. Research Questions**

Our research question is how can we structure and implement a coherent teacher training program that combines the Bachelor-level training with a Master-level preparation, in accordance with the National Educational Law. After January 3, 2011, teacher training has become a subject of major interest for the universities in the context of the significant decrease of student population and the reduction of the budgetary resources. Today, unfortunately, we can speak of a failure of vocational teacher training policies, and we intend to capture the steps which have led to this failure, in order to offer a solution.

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

In the present moment, in the context of school population and, implicitly, of financial resources decrement we sense the increase of faculties efforts for attracting the teacher training associated

resources, a fact that does not necessarily indicate their respective interest for focusing on teacher training itself.

The faculties that do not have a didactic focus, that is they do not have academic disciplines that have a correspondent in the pre-university curricula, express their interest for organizing the master study programmes in the field of Didactics. On the other hand, not only faculties are interested in teacher training, but also the NGOs that wish to earn the right for decision in the initial as well as in the continuing teacher training. Given this complex national architecture of teacher training programs evolution, in the present paper we consider the subtle implications it had in the educational system as well as the potential implications of the alternative solutions.

## **5. Research Methods**

In order to achieving the set goals, we used qualitative research methods, focusing on the analysis of the legislative and educational policies papers, and significant research papers in relation to the area of interest.

## **6. Findings**

We identified three areas of risk which can become active in the case the teacher training master program will be implemented. To them, certain risks for the continuing teacher training were also reported in the following.

### **6.1. Risks that may conduct to the failure of the present policies:**

- The de-professionalization of the specialists in the didactics of different school subjects. The transfer of the academic activities associate with the Didactic of school subject to the faculties that may have academic personnel that is not focused on this field, for the sake of attracting the resources.
- Transformation of the courses and practical activities associate with the discipline named Computer assisted instruction (part of the actual pedagogical training programme) into courses of Information and Communication Technologies or even Computer Science.
- The decrease of number of graduates prepared to become teachers.
- He increased manifestation of the discrepancies between the initial training of teachers for secondary school and high school level and the training of teachers for preschool and primary school level (the former will follow from the very beginning an academic programme of master level, while the later will be still regarded as of the second category)

### **6.2. The Ex-Ante analysis of the risk factors of the political decisions**

In the case when the didactic Master programme will be places in the Teacher Training Departments and in different faculties of the universities:

- The already existing disfunctionalities between the Teacher Training Departments and different faculties of the university will be even enlarged on issues related with the management of the common resources.
- The Teacher Training Departments as well as the Faculties of Psychology and Educational Sciences will encounter difficulties in the accreditation of the master programmes without the help of the other faculties, on the issue of faculty personnel provision as well as on other technical issues such as the management of a large number of didactic master programmes, the limited number of admission places, the high accreditation taxes. In the present, the Teacher Training

Department of BBU has about 650 students enrolled in each academic year for Level II of studies and about 1900 students per year for Level I. The covering of the very number of second level students would require about 20 didactic master programmes if it is to meet the present requirements of the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS).

It is impossible to deliver the didactic activities that are specific to the Teacher Training Departments and to the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences without the direct support of the other faculties and of the university management in the issue of providing teaching spaces and laboratories (ex. Computer rooms). We estimate a necessary of a minimum of 10 laboratories for the above-mentioned number of students actually involved in the existing programmes.

In the case when the Master Programme will be placed in different faculties:

We anticipate that:

- The focus of the curriculum will be on faculties' specialty field, without it being connected with the pre-university curricula.
- The faculties lack the qualified personnel for the delivery of teaching activities on the Didactics of different school disciplines as well as of the specific disciplines Educational Psychology and Pedagogy.
- Difficulties in the accreditation of the programmes, given that programmes should meet the ARACIS requirements that are specific for the field of Administrative Sciences, Education and Psychology.

### **6.3. The situation of the continuing teacher training**

The case of continuing teacher training is similar. Since 2010, the examination for a permanent place in the educational system is organized almost exclusively without the involvement of universities (with some small exceptions, regarding for instance the examination commissions' presidents). Since then, the examination table of contents, subjects and evaluation was conducted at the university level. The local educational authorities (County school Inspectorates) were only involved in the organization of the examination.

Starting with 2012, on the bases of National Educational Law no. 1/ 2011, the Definitive Degree in the teaching profession examination was transferred from the Teacher Training Departments of the

universities under the County School Inspectorates authority (with the same exception of the examination commission president).

Thus, at the level of continuing teacher training, universities are no longer involved in the management of these examination forms. The situation creates a risk for a gap between the initial teacher training in students' specialty as well as in the psycho-pedagogical field and the expectancies of the pre-university system evaluators. It can well be that a very good student according to the academic standards may obtain unsatisfactory results in the examination for a permanent place in the school system, as it is also possible for an academically medium student with some years of practical training to obtain a very good result to the same examination. It would be an example for the importance of the practical stage/ internship for the training of teachers (Salajan et al., 2016).

## 7. Conclusion

We consider that the problem of teacher training solutions is fundamentally wrongly formulated. In order for the attractiveness of the teaching profession to be increased, a more satisfactory payment system must be implemented. This must be correlated with some specific factors such as the professional stress involved by the teaching profession, the social pressure and exposure to mass-media associated with the field. In the present, given the context of the above mentioned restrains, the teaching profession tends not to attract the very well prepared students. This is, in our opinion the most relevant expression of the failure of present policies regarding the recruitment and the training of teachers.

We also identify a lack of social cohesion for education. The educational Policy decisions imply the involvement of a significantly large number of stakeholders for a legislation project to be supported. Yet, all the present teacher training projects polarized not only the opinions of the specialists in educational sciences, but also the opinions of the potential beneficiaries of the decisions. The whole present process of initial teacher training programmes optimization is carried on in the unfavorable context of teaching profession social devalorisation. The solution we envision for the present state of crises of initial teacher training policies is the in-depth professionalization of teaching profession in a School of Education. It is a model of teacher training that proved to be successful in many educational systems in the world and we trust that it may offer a qualitative vocational training for the future teacher. In this case, the student can initially express is option for a teaching career and can select a teacher training faculty. In a School of Education, the didactic master programme may become an in-depth didactic specialization, which will complete the relevant training of the future teacher.

An initial training institution with the status of a School of Education could offer a vocational didactic path for all the teaching specialties and in relation with all the teaching disciplines. A modular structure would allow candidates to choose for specific packages of disciplines, so they can take into consideration individual training interests as well as the specific needs of the practical teaching field. Different specialty faculties could in this case offer modular packages of disciplines in order to insure their specialty training in relation with the exigencies of the pre-university level curricula.

Unfortunately, while for the psycho-pedagogical part of the teachers training programme, this approach could be attractive, for the involved faculties it could imply a risk. The probability for a significant migration of students from the academic specialization in different scientific fields towards the

programmes offered by a School of Education is high. However, certain compensating solutions can be identified as this model proved to be functional and remains the option of different countries.

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