

## THE TRAINING OF TEACHERS IN PRE-PRIMARY AND PRIMARY EDUCATION IN CYPRUS

Mary IOANNIDES-KOUTSELINI<sup>a</sup> \*, Konstantinos KOUMI<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> University of Cyprus, 1678, Nicosia, Cyprus

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### Abstract

*This study aims to introduce the existing scheme of teachers' training in Cyprus. It consists of important information related to the preparation of teachers, the entry to the profession and the conditions of service. Focus is on the in-service training of teachers, mainly provided by the Pedagogical Institute of Cyprus, which is optional apart from some training programmes targeting specific groups of teachers and does not affect teachers' salary or employment. The different kinds of in-service training offered to Cypriot teachers are described analytically.*

**Key words:** in-service training, pre-primary education, primary education

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### 1. Initial education for teacher of pre-primary and primary education

Day nursery staff in the public sector is not required to hold any teaching qualifications. They are qualified social welfare personnel with the status of civil servant. All teachers of pre-primary and primary education are university graduates who completed their studies either in a university of Cyprus or abroad, mainly in Greece, with a minimum qualification recognised by KYSATS (Cyprus Council for the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications) as 'equivalent and corresponding' to those offered by the University of Cyprus. The admission at the public universities of Cyprus and Greece, where the courses are not charged, is based on the system of entrance examinations, namely the Pancyprian Examinations, which are set every June by the Ministry of Education and Culture. In order to be eligible for the examination, applicants must have a school-leaving certificate from a lyceum, a technical school or a recognised private secondary school.

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\* E-mail address: edmaryk@ucy.ac.cy

All teachers hold a Bachelor's degree after four years of studies with at least 240 ECTS (one credit unit corresponding to 25-30 working hours of the course per semester). During their studies they attend general courses, compulsory courses and courses of their choice. The main areas of studies are Pedagogical Science, Teaching Methodology, Content Area Courses, Specialisation and General Education. Their studies include practical training as well, which is either referred as 'school experience', and during this period they have the opportunity to teach and be responsible for a class for a period of time.

A high percentage of graduates continue their studies in the level of Master's degree. This leads to the expansion of their education and qualifications and they also get extra units, which are added to their credits for appointment in public schools. They can either attend programmes offered in the universities of Cyprus which have the duration of two years in full time course or longer in case of part time, or they can choose to study in a university abroad. The studies for this purpose in the universities of England are very popular among Cypriot students, as their post-graduate programmes last for one year.

## **2. Employment and conditions of service for teachers working in pre-primary and primary education**

Recruiting teachers in Cyprus is easy due to guaranteed employment and job security at the end of it (Phtiaka, 2002). Employment in pre-primary and primary education is considered to be an attractive profession in Cyprus and this is indicated by the students' preferences for universities offering pedagogical studies when they have to make their choices for undergraduate studies. It is also indicated by the large 'waiting lists' that have been formed for the appointment of teachers in public schools. After their degree is recognized by KY.S.A.T.S (Cyprus Council for the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications), all graduates of pedagogical universities that wish to get employed in public schools enrol a 'waiting list'. The appointment of teachers is made according to the order on the list, which is based on predetermined criteria that ensure transparency.

Teachers in the public schools of Cyprus are civil servants. Newly-appointed teachers are on probation for their first two years of work. During this period they start teaching and, at the same time, they receive support from their supervisors and mentors. After completing the probation stage, teachers become permanent members of school personnel. They begin their careers as school teachers and later can be promoted to deputy head teacher, head teacher, and inspector

with corresponding increase in their salaries. A comparative study on teachers' salaries in various countries of Europe revealed the fact that teachers' wages are reported to be widely positive in Cyprus, Portugal and Serbia as compared to other countries of Europe. The same study illustrates the fact that the working hours of Cypriot teachers are below the average of Europe and these are diminished for end-of-career teachers. (Education International, 2008) In general, Cypriot teachers work under favourable working conditions. There is a lack of motivation, though, for teachers of Cyprus derived from the permanence of their profession, because the quality or value of work carried out by them is not rewarded by additional payments as it happens in other European countries (European Commission, 2010) and because age is the factor that really matters in the promotion system and not individual qualifications or charisma (Pashiardis & Orphanou, 1999).

### **3. In-service training for teachers of pre-primary and primary education**

Teachers' in-service training in Cyprus is a responsibility of the Pedagogical Institute of Cyprus, a department of Ministry of Education and Culture. The Institute was founded in 1973 and its mission is 'to ensure the continuous training of teachers of all levels, to inform them about the most recent trends in education, to provide both theoretical and research support to the educational policy of Cyprus and to empower teachers during their professional and personal development.' (Pedagogical Institute of Cyprus, 2010)

Since 2002, the Curriculum Development Unit of the Ministry of Education and Culture has been incorporated into the Pedagogical Institute. Within the framework of the Educational reform, in 2008 the Centre of Educational Research and Evaluation was founded and its mission is to advice the Ministry of Education and Culture on matters related to the continuous professional development of teachers and to conduct research. Apart from these departments the Pedagogical Institute consists of the Department of Educational Documentation which has as main aim to supply educators with information on the new trends in education through publication of books and production of supportive material, the Department of Educational Technology which is responsible for the implementation of programmes for training in Information and Communication Technologies, the Curriculum Development Unit which, in collaboration with the Committee and the New Curriculum Office, has actively been involved in the publication of the New Curricula and the production of educational material, and the In-service Training Department which is responsible for providing support and empowering teachers at all levels of education (*Pedagogical Institute of Cyprus*, 2012).

According to the Director of the Pedagogical Institute of Cyprus, Dr Athena Michaelidou, in the last three-four years there has been a significant improvement in the training of teachers in Cyprus due to the implementation of intensive research, the study of the literature and the survey of Cypriot teachers' interests and needs. Teachers now have an active role in the construction and the evaluation of the training programmes. (Michaelidou A., personal communication, September 13, 2012). The Director of the In-service Training Department, Dr Elena Hadjidakou stated that literature and teachers' reviews refer to requests for more practical training and experiential learning and that is what the Pedagogical Institute aims at. For this purpose, during the last years, there has been an effort for a shift from central training to more decentralized actions and, when possible, to school based actions. (Hadjidakou E., personal communication, September 27, 2012).

The Department of Teachers' In-service Training organizes mandatory and voluntary courses. The compulsory courses refer to newly promoted Secondary School Head teachers, newly promoted Primary School Head teachers, Deputy-Head teachers of Secondary Education and newly appointed teachers of all levels and their mentors-Induction Programme. (Pedagogical Institute of Cyprus, 2010). There is a variety of optional courses sometimes addressing all teachers of all grades and sometimes a specific group of teachers, offered in the form of seminars, conferences or workshops.

Analytically, the Pedagogical Institute offers the following programmes and seminars: Optional In-Service Training Seminars, School-based Seminars, In-service Training Programmes on the New Curricula, The Induction Programme, In-service Training Programmes for School Leaders, Seminars for Parents etc.

### *3.1. Optional in-service training seminars*

The voluntary courses are provided in training centres in all the five districts of the island, after school hours. The seminars are open to teachers of all levels and they are defined in terms of their audience as: primary education, secondary education, vocational education and interdepartmental. Optional seminars cover a great range of educational topics like school subjects, social and psychological issues, educational research skills and information technology, and they aim to meet the needs of all teachers, as identified by the Pedagogical Institute and the Ministry of Education and Culture. (Karagiorgi et al., 2008) The handbook with the programme for the optional seminars is sent to schools at the beginning of each school year and teachers can apply to attend the courses according to their preference. Some of the subjects available to all teachers in interdepartmental level are: Health Education, Environmental Education, Educational Research, Educational Technology, Psychology, Violence, Conflict Resolution, Critical Thinking, Meta-

cognitive Skills, Education Management. etc. (Pedagogical Institute of Cyprus, 2012, Handbook for Optional Seminars).

The Pedagogical Institute considers pre-primary and primary education as a whole. Therefore, there is a separate category of optional seminars for this level. Some of the seminars from this category address only teachers of pre-primary education, some only teachers of primary education whereas some others address both pre-primary and primary education teachers. The topics of the seminars range to the following areas: Teaching of Foreign Language, Teaching of History, Teaching Mathematics, Teaching Sciences, Teaching Literature, Music Education, Educational Technology, Health Education, Physical Education, Differentiated Instruction, Psychology, Sociology, Learning Disabilities etc. (Pedagogical Institute of Cyprus, 2012, Handbook for Optional Seminars). The majority of the optional seminars are offered in five meetings during a month. Each seminar has a limited number of participants, usually 15-20 persons. The small size of the audience leads to more effective training and provides the opportunity for practical exercise and opinion exchange. (Hadjikakou E., personal communication, September 27, 2012).

Dr Athena Michaelidou said that the optional seminars constitute a special category of seminars as teachers attend them because they want to and not because they are obliged to. This is attributed to the fact that they are able to choose among a variety of subjects and instructors and to the fact that the subjects are contemporary and in accordance to the teachers' needs. (Michaelidou A., personal communication, September 13, 2012). Dr Elena Hadjidakou agrees by saying that these seminars are not obligatory and the teachers do not receive any credits for their attendance, the only reasons they attend these seminars is because they are interested in the specific subjects and because they want to improve their teaching skills or solve their problems in class (Hadjikakou E., personal communication, September 27, 2012).

### *3.2. School-based seminars*

The Pedagogical Institute of Cyprus has been practicing school-based seminars for many years but during the last two years there has been an effort for their upgrade (Hadjikakou E., personal communication, September 27, 2012). Accordingly to research in this area, it has been proven that the collaboration among peers in programmes for professional development contributes to the construction of a productive environment, the acquisition of new knowledge and experience resulting in the introduction of innovation in the working environment (Wenghofer et al., 2006).

The philosophy of the school-based seminars is to provide solutions on actual problems that teachers face in their working environment and to satisfy their specific needs. Each school has its own particularities and priorities and the main aim of these seminars is to address those needs.

The school-based seminars are carried out by the educators of the Pedagogical Institute during school hours. The groups that receive the programmes may consist of teachers of the same school or teachers of nearby schools. In the second case, a network of schools is established for the purpose of the seminars, comprising two or three schools. When these schools decide to cooperate, they apply on-line for the subject they prefer. According to Dr Hadjidakou (2012), the Pedagogical Institute responds to all applications and if the staff of the Institute cannot cover all the applications, they proceed to the purchase of external services.

For the implementation of the school-based seminars, an educator of the Pedagogical Institute visits the school during one or more meetings. The number of meetings depends on the subject and it is determined after agreement with the Head Teacher of the school. An attempt is made for these seminars to differ from the form of the central teacher training where teachers receive the new knowledge passively from the instructor (Hadjidakou E., personal communication, September 27, 2012). During the first meeting, the instructor introduces the subject, the terminology and the international trends on the specific scientific area. During the following meetings, teachers in collaboration with the instructor who acts like a facilitator, implement specific practices and action plans which provide actual solutions to problems in class or school, in general. (Pedagogical Institute of Cyprus, 2012).

During the last two-three years, there has been an effort to update the school-based seminars subjects in order to be in accordance to the teachers' needs (Hadjidakou E., personal communication, September 27, 2012). Some of the subjects are: Instruction of Specific Modules Based on the New Curricula, Evaluation of Instruction, Management of Linguistic Diversity, Life Skills, Action Research Methodology, Discrimination in School etc.

### *3.3. In-service training programmes on the New Curricula*

Since the decision for developing a New Curricula has been made on a political level, the Pedagogical Institute of Cyprus has undertaken the responsibility for the training of teachers. At the beginning, teachers' training aimed at informing a large number of teachers about the New Curricula, but gradually the effort moved to schools with sample teachings, practical experiences and seminars pursued by the schools (Michaelidou A., personal communication, September 13, 2012). The Pedagogical Institute was called to support the process of implementing the New Curricula in the educational system of Cyprus. During the first year, more than 50% of Cypriot teachers attended training programmes concerning the New Curricula. 'Our effort now is decentralized and is concentrated at the level of schools' (Hadjidakou E., personal communication, September 27, 2012). According to an officer of the Curriculum Development

Unit of the Pedagogical Institute, three thousand teachers of primary education out of four and a half thousand, and three thousand teachers of secondary education out of three and a half thousand, have so far received some kind of formal training on the New Curricula (Kyriakou K., personal communication, November 01, 2012).

For the implementation of the New Curricula in schools, the employees of the Pedagogical Institute with experience in teaching, formed special groups of educators- supporters to provide assistance in the effort of teachers' training for the New Curricula. The programme of teachers' training was divided into four stages: the first stage concerned the updating of the principals of the Ministry of Education and Culture and head teachers of primary and secondary education, the second stage referred to the training of inspectors and supporters, the third stage consisted in training one teacher per school who would be responsible for conveying his/her learning to his/her colleagues and the fourth stage contained the updating of all teachers at a district level. During the year 2011-2012, the main aim of the training was the familiarization of teachers and schools with the principles, goals and content of the New Curricula, and the provision of support for their implementation. (Ministry of Education & Culture, 2012). The concentration of the teachers' training for the year 2012-2013 is transferred to the level of schools in order to provide assistance and support during the implementation of the New Curricula in classes. 'The emphasis of the training is not given to the different subjects but more to the teaching methodology and if teachers achieve to understand the mechanism of the pedagogical approach, they will be capable of teaching any subject (Kyriakou K., personal communication, November 01, 2012).

#### *3.4. The Induction Programme*

The Pedagogical Institute has been offering the Induction Programme for newly appointed teachers and their mentors since 2008. This programme aims to provide support to newly appointed teachers and also to cultivate cooperation among peers in schools. The presence of the mentor in this process benefits both the newly appointed teacher who receives assistance from a more experienced teacher and the mentor who has the opportunity to receive training in subjects related to the effectiveness of teaching methods and the development of mentorship. (Pedagogical Institute, 2011). Mentoring, in which a new teacher is paired with a more experienced teacher for guidance and support, has been reported to have a positive impact on teacher retention (Ingersoll & Kralik in Andrews et al 2007).

According to Dr Michaelidou (2012), the Induction Programme is a necessity for the educational systems. Few European countries practice this programme and the Cypriot model was presented as an example in the European Committee. Mentoring in Cyprus is offered to teachers of primary

and secondary education. Teachers of pre-primary education are not included in the programme as they obtain the necessary experience during their studies. The planning for the year 2012-2013 provides mentors with more training compared to the newly appointed teachers and this aims at the satisfaction of newly appointed teachers' personal needs. The induction programme is also supported by the educators of the Pedagogical Institute and another goal of the programme is to have the entire school unit involved in the process as well. (Hadjikakou E., personal communication, September 27, 2012).

The programme is completed in three stages: A) the first stage contains a central training at the beginning of the programme which consists of three meetings for informing the participants about the content and the procedures of the programme. All the meetings include the active participation of the teachers and avoid the form of lectures; B) the second stage contains work in the school unit and one meeting at the central level. The work at the school level lasts for six months and during this period the newly appointed teacher has the opportunity to observe 10 teachings of his/her mentor, to be observed by his/her mentor in 10 teachings and practice 6 co-teachings with his/her mentor or another teacher. During this period, newly appointed teachers receive support from their mentors and educators of the Pedagogical Institute who visit schools periodically and provide feedback to teachers; C) the third stage includes one meeting at the central level where newly appointed teachers present their work and the programme is evaluated.

### *3.5. In-service training programmes for school leaders*

The Training Programme for School Leaders aims to develop and cultivate the necessary skills for the practice of management, leading, organization and pedagogical tasks by the school leaders. The programme is expected to lead to the professional development of both the participant and the school unit where he/she works. The programme consists of six themes: A) introductory meetings, B) the annual circle of work which is divided into three meetings one for each trimester, C) pedagogical leadership in the school unit, D) planning for the improvement and evaluation for the development of the school unit, E) educational reform and the role of the Head Teacher and F) general pedagogy and organization of the school unit. The overall aim of the programme is to provide adequate theoretical and practical training. (Pedagogical Institute, 2012).

In the last two years, there has been a significant reform and improvement of the Programmes for School Leaders. Their planning was adjusted to fit the actual needs of school leaders. There are also plans for the introduction of mentoring into the programme. Each teacher will have the opportunity to visit his/her mentor in his/her school unit three times a year in critical periods like the transition to a new trimester. The mentor will receive the corresponding training in order to be



able to support the newly promoted Head Teacher. (Hadjikakou E., personal communication, September 27, 2012).

Apart from the above programmes, the Pedagogical Institute offers: Seminars for Parents, Training Programme for Greek Origin Teachers from Abroad, Crash Course for Greek as a Second Language and training programmes for teachers of Secondary Education of specific specialities. In addition, the Pedagogical Institute organizes programmes in subjects that are deemed necessary in adherence to the priorities of the Ministry of Education and Culture for each school year, for example training programmes for teachers of Special Education, training programmes for teachers of All-Day Primary School (Hadjikakou E., Personal communication, September 27, 2012).

The Pedagogical Institute makes extensive use of Information and Communications Technology for the support of the training programmes provided. It has created an electronic platform to serve the needs of distance learning during the application of teachers' training programmes. The platform has been applied in a few programmes so far and this year it is going to be expanded for several other programmes.

*There has been a wide use of the platform in the training of School Leaders; the participants were visiting the platform and were exchanging views, making comments about the programme and asking questions. The entire programme was observed by the coordinator. Besides, literature refers to the exchange of views and conversations among the participants, those learning communities that are formed as quite beneficial for the learning of participants and we make efforts to promote those communities.* (Michaelidou A., personal communication, September 13, 2012)

Teachers who are interested in participating in the programmes of the Pedagogical Institute can apply online on a website formed especially for this purpose. The website was designed to facilitate teachers in registering to the programmes offered by the Pedagogical Institute and also to provide the possibility for teachers to manage their training. (Pedagogical Institute, Department of Educational Technology, 2012). Apart from the online registration, the Pedagogical Institute makes efforts for the application of videoconferencing in circumstances of teachers' training when the audience is located at remote areas. 'Every time we applied the videoconferencing, the school units were highly interested in participating and the results were very good.' (Hadjikakou E., personal communication, September 27, 2012).

In general, the Pedagogical Institute makes an effort to meet the needs of teachers and combine them with the priorities of the Ministry of Education and Culture and the requirements of contemporary Pedagogy. That is why teachers take part in the formation and evaluation of training programmes. What teachers ask for, is more practical training and more concentration on the specific subjects that concern them (Michaelidou A., personal communication, September 13, 2012). During the last three years, the Pedagogical Institute has attempted to approach teachers' personal needs by conducting programmes at the level of the school and by offering a variety of seminars in many subjects. Effort is also made to reduce the training at the central level and form small groups of teachers that will have the opportunity to receive not only theoretical training but practical as well. The Pedagogical Institute also attempts to provide solutions to the problems of each school and aims to make the people in each school work together and cooperate.

#### **4. The status of teachers' in-service training in Cyprus**

It can be argued that the changes introduced by the Pedagogical Institute, which is the main provider of teachers' in-service training in Cyprus, during the last few years are in the right direction, satisfying the priorities set by the European Commission for quality in-service training systems. However, it is necessary to further explore the factors and conditions that will ensure the participation of more teachers in professional development activities and highlight the needs of teachers that require attention.

The current scheme of teachers' in-service training in Cyprus is described as highly centralized, controlled by the Ministry of Education and without the contribution of schools or teachers to its formation. The only compulsory training programmes offered by the Pedagogical Institute refer to newly promoted Head teachers in primary and secondary education and to newly appointed teachers of all levels (Pedagogical Institute of Cyprus, 2010). There are no agreed standards for professional development training programmes and teachers need to meet no specific requirements for professional development in order to keep their jobs. Karagiorgi & Symeou (2006) noted that a number of studies point to the inefficiency of the current training scheme and also referred to data collected by the Labour Force Survey in 2002, which ranked Cyprus second last on a list of 28 countries regarding the percentage of teachers having received training during a period of time.

A study carried out in 2008 by Karagiorgi et al. aiming at exploring the degree to which adult learning traits are embedded in optional seminars offered by the Pedagogical Institute, showed

that they are embedded to a great extent. Referring to the annual report published by the Ministry of Education and Culture for the year 2011- 2012, it is mentioned that the optional seminars for the specific year covered the needs of teachers in all districts of Cyprus and that there were 1,308 participations from all levels of education. (MoEC, 2012). The data derived from studies and reports indicate that the optional seminars achieve high rates of participation and they are of good quality according to teachers' views. Similar studies should be applied to all the different kinds of training that teachers participate in. The continual investigation of teachers' needs regarding their professional development and the adaptation of the training programmes to these needs are critical for the effectiveness of the training. Especially nowadays in Cyprus, during the process of holistic educational reform and because of the effort for the re-organization of Pedagogical Institutes' programmes and services, the re-orientation of the existing training of teachers is deemed necessary in order to comply with the new reality. As noted by Koutselini M. (2008) the educational change is 'multidimensional' and one crucial dimension is curriculum change and reform which cannot be achieved without concomitant changes in teachers' and researchers' thought and practices.

## **Conclusions**

The in-service training offered to teachers of pre-primary and primary education in Cyprus has undergone progress during the recent years and there are efforts to meet the broader regulations of the European Union. There is an attempt to approach teachers' personal needs, reduce the training at the central level and transfer the activities at schools. However, it is necessary to explore the factors that will upgrade the quality of the training programmes and will also contribute to higher levels of participation. Priority should be given to the continuous investigation of the teachers' needs regarding their professional development, which is critical for the effective planning of the training.

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