

THE VIEWS OF PRE-PRIMARY AND PRIMARY TEACHERS REGARDING CONTINUOUS TEACHER TRAINING IN ROMANIA

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Abstract

The research aimed at identifying the opinions of pre-primary and primary teachers, from the Romanian educational systems, regarding the quality of the in-service training programmes. The research methods used, the focus group and the interview, were also applied in order to identify possibilities for curricular innovations, from the perspective of pre-primary and primary school teachers. The results show that the pre-primary and primary teachers from Romania would prefer in-service training programmes focused more on practical training, as this would really support them in improving and updating their teaching practices.

Key words: in-service training, perceptions, pre-primary and primary teachers

1. Introduction

The investigation of pre-primary and primary teachers' training perceptions represents a necessary condition in order to improve the quality of teacher education programmes in agreement with the current exigencies of international educational policies. The demand for improving the quality of teaching and learning has led to the increased role of professional development on the agenda of educators, researchers and policy makers (OECD, 2005).

Teachers' continuous training is done differently in various countries from Europe. In Romania it is regulated through the methodology regarding the continuous professional development of teachers from pre-university education (2011). The continuous training of teachers from pre-

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primary education is compulsory and regulated by the law The Statute of the Teaching Staff in the Pre-University Education. According to this law, teachers should accumulate 90 transferable credits in the interval of 5 years, from participation in accredited courses of continuous training.

The Ministry of National Education is conducting, in Romania, within the Programme of Early Education Reform, a national programme of continuous training for the entire staff from the early pre-primary education system at the end of which each teacher, principal and psycho-pedagogic counsellor working in kindergartens receive certificates of continuous training and a certain number of professional credits.

Teachers from the early pre-primary educational system are nevertheless free to select from the training offer of providers certified by the National Centre for Staff Training in Pre-university Education those courses that respond best to their training needs.

The professional development of elementary or primary teachers is a process involving several stages. It is about improving oneself through the teaching/ professional degrees that may be obtained after the licensure in the following order: the 2nd and 1st didactic degree followed by continuous training once in 5 years (Figure 1). At the same time, the Statute of the Teaching Staff stipulates that the teaching staff from pre-university education should take part in continuous training programmes at least once in 5 years or whenever this is recommended by the council of school administration or by the county's school inspectorate. The condition is regarded as satisfied for teachers who obtained licensure or any of the didactic degrees in the given interval.

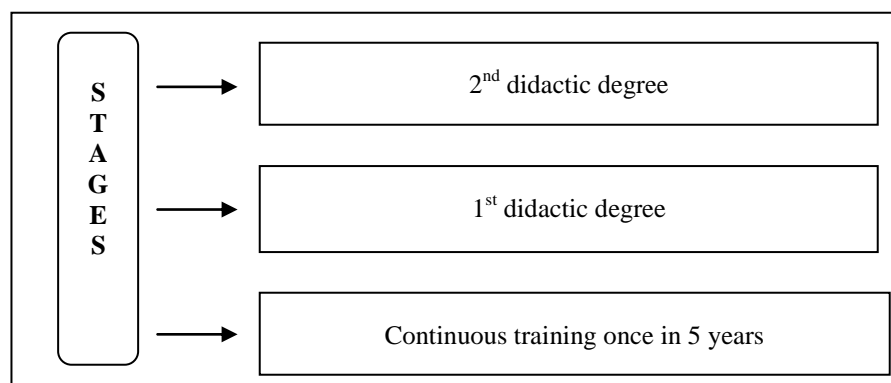


Figure 1. *The representation of programmes in terms of in-service training of pre-primary and primary teachers from Romania*

According to the Order of the Ministry of National Education 4796/ 2001, the regular training of teachers is structured into modules quantified as transferable credits. The minimal standard for the regular training of teachers is 90 professional transferable credits.

Certain subjects, such as Foreign Languages, Religion, Physical Education and Music from primary education may be taught by specialized teachers or by primary school teachers only if they prove that they are qualified for this through a diploma or a certificate issued by the education institution one has graduated from for the respective language, validated by the Ministry of Education, Research, Youth and Sport.

In Table 1 we present the main elements of the continuous professional development of teachers from Romania.

Table 1. *The main elements of the continuous professional development of teachers from Romania*

Components	Romania
1. Educational institutions	- National Education Minister; - County School Inspectorate; - The Institute of Educational Sciences; - universities
2. Specific documents	- <i>The methodology regarding the continuous professional development of teachers from pre-university education</i> (2011)
3. Educational reform	- Programme of Early Education Reform (2010)
4. In-service teachers' programmes	- programmes and activities for the improvement of the scientific, psycho-pedagogical and didactic training; - training programmes in the fields of management, orientation and evaluation of education; - training courses and the exams for obtaining the second and first didactic degrees; - professional conversion programmes; - studies corresponding to a specialization from another BA field.
5. Activities	- scientific and didactics activities; - communication sessions; - periodical research stages; - training courses; - development grants
6. Evaluation	- the accumulation of transferable professional credits. - the validation of the competences obtained in the didactic activity from the annual evaluation charts, in the inspection reports and lesson assistance; - grading the portfolio

Based on the specific context of achieving the in-service training of pre-primary and primary teachers, the study consists of exploring the views of pre-primary and primary teachers towards training in-service programmes in Romania.

2. Research methodology

2.1. Objectives and hypothesis

The object of the study was to identify the expectations of teachers in pre-primary and primary education regarding the continuous training programmes.

The general hypothesis relies on the assumption that teachers will mainly formulate expectations regarding the increase of the percentage of practice in the training courses and the organization of courses that may be applicable in pre-primary and primary education.

2.2. Methodology

The subjects involved in the study are 18 pre-primary and primary school teachers from the counties of Bacău and Neamț. The distribution of subjects according to the independent variables (educational level, professional experience, county) is shown in Table 2. From all the 18 participants, 17 are women and only one teacher is male.

Table 2. *The distribution of subjects according to the independent variables*

Independent variables		Number of subjects
Educational level	Pre-primary	4
	Primary	13
Professional experience	3-15 years	8
	16-26 years	9

The **research method** was the focus group, which was used to collect data on teachers' expectations regarding the in-service training programmes. The focus group interview is particularly useful because it allows researchers to obtain qualitative data on teachers' expectations.

Regarding the **research procedure**, the focus group was designed during February-April 2012, at the start of the CITPED project, and was conducted in May 2012. In terms of organization, there were two focus groups comprising 9 teachers, since the efficient number for a focus group is 6-10 participants. The selected teachers covered the bachelor programme of the Pedagogy of Pre-primary and Primary Education from the "Vasile Alecsandri" University of Bacău. Due to the fact that in Romania the process of training teachers for pre-primary and primary education is undergoing restructuring, our aim was to select 20 teachers with a Bachelor's degree in order to obtain qualitative information on their expectations regarding the continuous training

programmes, with a focus on exploiting the interaction between participants (Morgan, 1997). The processing and analysis of the results was performed during June-November 2012.

Processing the results obtained during the focus group interview was done through content analysis (Bardin, 1977) in order to identify the specific themes and categories related to the expectations of pre-primary and primary school teachers regarding the continuous training programmes. Descriptive statistical techniques were applied for the identification of the frequencies obtained at the level of thematic categories.

The **research results** are presented below. The main thematic categories identified are related to the following aspects (Table 3): characteristics of continuous training programmes, categories of competences, collaboration among teachers, certification of the continuous training programmes, aspects related to educational policy.

Table 3. *The frequencies obtained on the specific categories of the expectations of pre-primary and primary teachers regarding the continuous training programmes*

Themes	Specific categories	Frequency
Characteristics of the continuous training programmes	very high level of theoretical training	1
	creating continuous training courses with applicability in pre-primary and primary education	3
	organizing diverse training courses	2
	continuing Bachelor Studies by attending Master's Studies in the field	3
	improving evaluation by implementing a real feedback system, related to the results and appraisal objectivity	3
	ensuring continuity in conducting continuous training programmes	1
	organizing training for sitting in the exams for obtaining the didactic degrees and appointment; elaborating support and guides for the appointment, licensure, didactic degrees examinations, taking into account the new requirements imposed by the Ministry of Education	2
	organizing training courses for beginner teachers	1
	introducing criteria for selecting the participants to the continuous training programmes	1
	high quality of psychological and pedagogical training	1
	conducting continuous training programmes mainly at the university and less at the Teaching Staff House	4
	<i>Total</i>	

Categories of competences	the ability to put into practice the learned theory, applicability of the theoretical knowledge	3
	the ability to adjust the curriculum to the needs of the beneficiaries of education	1
	developing communication skills	1
	developing the competences which a pre-primary and primary teacher needs, improving the teaching style	2
	receptivity and the desire to improve one's performances	1
	developing group management competences	1
	building the ability to adjust to changes	1
<i>Total</i>		<i>10</i>
Collaboration among teachers	organizing seminars, experience exchanges, with a view to disseminating information on the innovations in the field	2
<i>Total</i>		<i>2</i>
Certification of the continuous training programmes	recognition of the studies and acquired skills	3
	organizing training programmes with transferable credits	1
<i>Total</i>		<i>4</i>
Aspects of educational policy	flexibility and openness of the institutions' leaders regarding the relevance of pre-primary and primary education	1
<i>Total</i>		<i>1</i>

Conclusions and recommendations

The qualitative research results highlight the main expectations of pre-primary and primary education teachers regarding the continuous training programme from Romania. Following the application of the interview to the focus group, the themes regarded as relevant by the teachers were highlighted.

The first category includes the aspects related to the *characteristics of continuous training programmes*, at the level of which the teachers mentioned the conducting of continuous training programmes most frequently by the universities and less by the Teaching Staff Houses from the County School Inspectorates. These results reveal a need for improving the continuous training programmes, as a consequence of involving trainers from the academic environment in the organization and delivery of courses. Other aspects highlighted by the teachers are those related to creating continuous training programmes with applicability in pre-primary and primary education; continuing Bachelor Studies by Master's Studies in the field and improving evaluation by implementing a real feedback system, related to the results, as well as ensuring appraisal objectivity.

The second category of aspects is related to *professional competences*, which are essential for the continuous training programmes for pre-primary and primary school teachers. In the first place, the most important competences pointed out refer to the ability of transposing the learned theory

into practice. In second place the teachers placed the improvement of the teaching style, which implies developing all the competences needed by a pre-primary and primary teacher. The results obtained demonstrate the need for enhancing practical and formative activities at the level of continuous training programmes.

The third category of aspects is related to the *certification of the continuous training programmes*, in relation to which the teachers ask for the recognition of the studies and the skills acquired during the programmes. The results of the study reveal the official character of the continuous training courses and teachers' need to have their participation in programmes and acquisition of skills acknowledged.

Another category of aspects is related to the *collaboration among teachers*, more precisely the organization of seminars, experience exchanges with the purpose of disseminating information on the innovations in the field. The implications of these results are obvious in terms of improving the collaboration and communication among teachers from the perspective of the access to continuous training programmes.

The last category of aspects is related to the *educational policies in the field of the continuous training* of pre-primary and primary school teachers. Although mentioned to a smaller extent, these aspects have a crucial role in the development of continuous training. Among their expectations, the teachers mentioned the flexibility and openness of the leaders of institutions towards the importance of pre-primary and primary school teachers. Therefore, a wider opening of the authorities responsible for education is required towards continuous training in Romania.

Based on knowledge of the expectations of pre-primary and primary teachers, the directions for improving the various aspects identified may be established, which may contribute to developing the system of continuous training.

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