

## A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE ON INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION IN ROMANIA AND THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

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### Abstract

*This study aims to develop a comparative analysis of educational policies in initial teacher education from Romania and Republic of Moldova. The theoretical background is elaborated starting on the general aspects of educational policies and the special issues from perspective of pre-service teacher education. Also, there is achieved a comparative analysis between initial teacher training programmes from Romania and Republic of Moldavia related to the curricular documents. The results of study provide the background of implementing of the educational policies in initial teacher education from Romania and Republic of Moldova, as well as the prerequisites for initiating further research to improve the quality of training future teachers.*

**Key words:** comparative study, curricular documents, educational policies, initial teacher education

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### Introduction

The quality of the teacher training process is a topic of great interest in many countries around the world. Teacher training is one of the central concerns of the educational debates focusing upon finding various solutions to the requirements of the contemporary society. The new demands require new methods for the learning process, with which didactics may provide teachers and students (Popovici, 2000). Designing teacher training programs in the field of didactics results, to a good extent, directly from educational policy discourses related to training trainers. Governments across all Europe suggest reform initiatives based on parameters of visibility and quantification of learning results and performances, despite the fact that the models of teachers

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that are quasi-unanimously desirable should constitute answers to the demands of a world in which work, family, school are constantly changing (Gilroy et al., 2002). One of the priorities of reforming the Romanian teacher training system consists in restructuring the training routes introduced by means of normative decisions, coherently formulated and applicable in a short time, in agreement with the new axiological progress of the Romanian society in general and of the educational system in particular (Iucu and Păcurari, 2001). Currently, the 2020 European Strategy in the domain of Education requires a new approach to reforming education. A document has been elaborated to establish the national level of the reference values for the strategies' objectives, which emphasizes the option of "providing the human resources required by the good functioning of the pre-academic educational system and stimulating human performance". Following the implementation of the educational reform both in Romania as well as in the Republic of Moldova, teacher training relies on the didactic conception of the discipline, whose specificity is represented by the advantages of the competence-focused curriculum (*Curriculum Național pentru învățământul obligatoriu. Cadru de referință*, 1998; *Formarea profesorilor pentru implementarea curriculum-ului modernizat de liceu*, 2010). A change in the optics of approaching one's career and, implicitly, of one's personal evolution, starting with initial training and ending with continuous training, is needed. The most important dimension of initial training is initial professionalization, preparing the individual for the didactic career (Iucu, 2007). The focus is now on achieving professionalization in the context of exceeding the idea of single specialization, as a complex process. Given the rapid evolution of society, initial training will leave room for opportunities to train both the skills (competences) characteristic of the didactic career, as well as for collateral experiences of dealing with the requirements of society.

### **Issues related to initial teacher education**

The didactic training of prospective teachers should be correctly designed and monitored during initial training. Nevertheless, we may observe several problematic aspects which result from the didactic analysis of designing and achieving teacher training.

a. A major problem in training teachers in the didactics of the discipline is represented by the *lack of standards in designing school curricula for specialized didactics in higher education*. Goodlad (1991), for example, claims that research conducted by his team shows that there is painful inconsistency of programs which are not connected with any mission, have no curricular guiding principles and no themes or organizational elements.

b. Another difficulty related to programs of initial training in didactics is the *lack of continuity between the disciplines from the psycho-pedagogic module*. There is no continuity between the theoretical disciplines covered at the beginning of the module (Psychology of Education, Basics of Pedagogy, Curriculum Theory and Methodology, Training Theory and Methodology, Evaluation Theory and Methodology) and the disciplines of educational practice from the final years (Specialized Didactics, Pedagogic Practice, optional disciplines). The concern to establish an appropriate relation between theory and practice is one of the most ardent topics in teacher training worldwide (Murillo, 2006). Present theories of didactic professionalization prioritize methodological knowledge, focusing on such goals as knowing how to do and learning new behaviours. All professionalization processes aim at forming a professional, a competent person who may apply what he has learnt in real situations which he meets in practice (Iucu, 2007).

c. Another difficulty is the *lack of correlation between the programs of didactic teacher training and the requirements of the competition for obtaining a job as a teacher*. Training prospective teachers in specialized didactics differs from the contents of the requirements for the competition of occupying a teacher's position, hence discrepancy occurs between initial training from higher education and professional integration on the job market.

d. Another weak point is the lack of a *gradual model for training teachers in didactics*, which should start with the teachers' initial training, continue with the stage of beginning one's teaching career and improve throughout continuous professional development. Teacher initial training programs are designed in such a way that they do not differ significantly from continuous training programs in terms of the didactic contents covered by teachers. The didactic training requirements and sets of standards for initial training within the university and for continuous training are highly similar as far as the didactic degrees are concerned.

Under these circumstances, teacher initial training in specialized didactics requires a complex process of reconstruction in agreement with the innovative models of didactic professionalization.

### **Perspectives on initial teacher training in Romania and the Republic of Moldova**

Although there is ample pedagogic literature on teacher initial training and relevant contributions of higher education schools and institutions to teacher professional training (Booth et. al, 1990), there are few studies focused on the management of change in teacher initial training, in the

domain of didactics (Vasutova, 1999; Maciel, 2000; Bergsten and Grevholm, 2004; Abraham et al., 2010).

*Scientifically* speaking, there are few preoccupations concerning the development of initial training programs in the field of didactics (Bednarz, 2001; Tomescu et al., 2007). Educational research in this domain is quite limited (Ekimova-Boublil, 2006; Guimarães, 2006; Emprin, 2009). *Practically* speaking, there is a series of programs aiming both at initial and continuous training, without distinguishing between and particularizing the objectives of the two categories of programs. For example, one of the six lines of action of the programme Education 2000+ is represented by human resources development (Păcurari et al., 2003). The strategic priority of the entire process undertaken aimed at elaborating a coherent institutional policy regarding initial and continuous training. In the Republic of Moldova too, there are projects aiming at evaluating and renewing the curricula for training teachers in order to increase the quality of pre-academic teachers' training in universities, by updating and harmonizing the curriculum according to the job market requirements, the stipulations of the Bologna process and the Tuning methodology. Another project conducted in the Republic of Moldova aims at elaborating curricula for the initial and continuous training of teachers from the domain of early education (*Raport de activitate*, 2010).

After analyzing the literature from the perspective of teacher initial training in the field of specialized didactics, we may highlight the following limitations of the present approaches:

- a. There are no specific theoretical models focused upon innovating teacher initial training programs in the domain of specialized didactics.
- b. *The process of approaching teacher training in didactics is mainly theoretical*, which does not ensure the building of competences at prospective teachers. The focus is on sending information and the pragmatic component is diminished.
- c. There is no correlation between teacher professional training and innovation initiatives in the domain of didactics. Teacher initial training may become better organized and achieved if pedagogic innovations are correlated with the didactics of the discipline.
- d. There is no agreement between the system of teacher initial training and the qualitative development demanded by educational standards (Potolea, 2001; Gliga, 2002) and by the exigencies of integration within similar international organisms (Iucu and Păcurari, 2001).

## **Comparative study of curricular documents in initial teacher training programmes from Romania and the Republic of Moldova**

The initial training of teachers from secondary education in Romania is now implemented in universities according to the Bologna process, by the Departments of Teacher Training, through a three years study program, at the end of which graduates receive a certificate which allows them to become teachers in secondary education. In the Republic of Moldova, the initial training of teachers is achieved in colleges and universities. Most teachers are trained in universities or in separate subdivisions, or in faculties specialized in a particular field of science.

The programme of psycho-pedagogical training for secondary education from Romania integrates two levels: the first level (initial) and the second (deeper) level to assure the necessary competences of pre-service training for the didactic career. The first level grants university graduates the right to hold teaching positions in pre-university education, on condition that they accumulate a minimum of 30 transferable credits: 18 credits corresponding to the *fundamental subjects* in the field of psycho-pedagogical training (Educational Psychology; The foundations of pedagogy and The theory and methodology of curriculum, The theory and methodology of instruction and evaluation; Classroom management); and 12 credits corresponding to *specialized subjects* in the domain of didactics and practice training (Subject didactics; Computer-assisted training; Pedagogical practice in secondary education). The second level grants university graduates the right to hold teaching positions in colleges and universities, provided that two conditions are met: an accumulation of a minimum of 60 transferable credits; and completion of a master's program in the bachelor's degree. The second level certification is obtained by adding the 30 credits on the first level with the 30 credits from the second level: 10 credits corresponding to the *fundamental subjects* in the field of psycho-pedagogical training (The psycho-pedagogy of adolescents, young people and adults; Design and management of educational programs); 10 credits corresponding to *specialized subjects* in the domain of didactic and practice training (Domain Didactics and developments in subject Didactics; Pedagogical practice in colleges); and 10 credits corresponding to *optional subjects*.

The initial teacher training curriculum from the Republic of Moldova of each university is developed in agreement with the plan for higher education institutions, including the cycle of fundamental subjects, general socio-humanistic culture, specialized subjects. The subjects are selected in accordance with the national regulations. The syllabi of the subjects include course objectives, thematic content, seminar topics, evaluation form, recommended minimal bibliography.

In Table 1 there are synthesized the characteristic aspects of initial training for secondary school teachers in Romania and the Republic of Moldova.

**Table 1.** *Characteristic aspects of initial training programmes of teachers in Romania and the Republic of Moldova*

Characteristic aspects	Comparative analysis	
	Romania	Republic of Moldova
Institutions	- universities in the Departments for Teacher Training	- colleges and universities
Innovative aspects	- the introduction of didactic master as main form of initial teacher training ( <i>The New Law of Education, 2010</i> )	- the development and approval of standards for pre-service teacher education in universities (Guțu et al., 2003)

On the one hand, it is obvious that there are differences in the initial training programs at the level of educational policies from Romania and the Republic of Moldova, and on the other hand there can be observed that both initial training programmes are undergoing restructuring after the impact of curricular educational reform.

## Conclusions

The initial training of teachers represents a real problem, because the current educational systems from Romania and the Republic of Moldova are in the process of reorganizing universities for compatibility with the higher education systems in European Union countries. Therefore, it is necessary and appropriate to theoretically substantiate the specific model centred on developing pre-service teacher education in the domain of didactics and to explore, with specific methodological instruments, the possibilities of innovating initial teacher training programmes from the higher education of Romania and the Republic of Moldova.

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