

INITIAL TEACHERS TRAINING PROGRAM TRAINERS' OPINIONS

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ABSTRACT. The quality of the education process and the preparation level of the students are elements that are in a relationship directly related to the efficiency of the initial training program of future teachers. Many of the directions of Romanian educational reform have targeted directly or indirectly, the teacher training system but few of them have been inspired by the concrete reality in universities. Having as a starting point the above considerations, this article aims to highlight the opinions of trainers effectively involved in the initial preparation of future teachers regarding the efficiency of this program and how it could be restructured in order to be optimized.

Keywords: *teacher, trainer, initial teachers training, teaching skills.*

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG. Die Qualität des Bildungsprozesses und das Bereitschaftsniveau der Studierenden sind Elemente, die in einer direkte Beziehung mit der Wirksamkeit der Erstausbildung der künftigen Lehrer sind. Viele der Richtungen der rumänischen Bildungsreform waren, direkt oder indirekt, das System der Lehrerausbildung gezielt, aber nur wenige von diesen haben sich von der konkreten Realität in den Universitäten inspiriert. Nimmt man als Ausgangspunkt das bereits erwähnte, soll dieser Artikel die tatsächlichen Meinungen den Trainern in der Vorbereitung künftiger Lehrer über die Wirksamkeit, mögliche Optimierungen oder Umstrukturierungen dieses Programms markieren.

Schlüsselwörter: *Lehrer, Trainer, Erstausbildung von Lehrern, pädagogische Fähigkeiten.*

1. Introduction

Specialty literature devotes ample spaces to the issue of initial training of future teachers. The interest shown for this issue is caused by the obvious correlation which exists between the quality of the educational process in a

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country and the level of development of that society (Saw, S.H., 2010). Moreover, most of the actions to reform the contemporary educational systems were primarily aimed at restructuring, in the sense of optimization, of the programs of initial training of future teachers. The effort to streamline these programs is objective, determined by the convergent action of a complex of factors that define not only the school as an institution but also society as a whole.

We refer in this respect primarily to the finding that, as statistics indicate, due to the economic crisis and thus the low wages in education, the motivation for choosing the teaching profession is increasingly lower among young students and this lack of motivation may lead to a superficial treatment of the profession (Pontes, A., Ariza, L., 2010). Another factor to be taken into account in the efforts to improve the teacher training system is the degradation of the educational climate, with acts of indiscipline and violence becoming more varied forms and being an increasingly widespread phenomenon among students (Harding, J.D., 2008). This reality determines the reconsideration of the teacher training program towards the development of their skills including classroom management and conflict resolution. Paying increased attention to the quality of the initial training programs for future teachers is also imposed by the decrease in the students' motivation for learning, element implying endowing them with new strategies and methods, able to ensure the active participation of students in lessons. In the absence of undertaking a real reform of the initial training program of future teachers, based on the needs imposed by the concrete educational reality, the quality of teaching and the level of training of graduates will record major declines.

2. Major research coordinates

National evaluations at the macro level, due to their unitary and their high level of standardization represent one of the most loyal indicators of the quality of the educational system (Chiş, V., 2001, Stan, C. 2000). The results obtained in recent years by both students at the baccalaureate exam as well as by teachers in competitions indicate a passing rate of approximately 60%. The existing causality relationship between the two situations is an obvious one: the existing deficiencies in the training programs for future teachers are reflected on the quality of their professional preparation, which determines the appearance of clear negative consequences regarding the level of academic performances of students.

Taking the findings above as a starting point, the main purpose of our research was to identify the perceptions and opinions of the trainers directly involved in the initial teacher training program regarding its advantages and disadvantages. The reason we considered this approach appropriate and useful was because getting an inside perspective of some viewpoints from

those directly involved regarding the organization and functioning of the initial training program for future teachers enables us to bring necessary additional knowledge to the field.

Thus, the sample of subjects consisted of 78 people, teachers in higher education, with the rank of trainers in the training program for future teachers. The institutions of origin are representative for the Romanian universities that offer these training programs: Cluj, București, Iași, Timișoara, Brașov, Constanța, Sibiu, Galați etc. The primary method of investigation used was the questionnaire based survey, coupled with interviews and the focus group method. The questionnaire included seven questions with possible answers. The results obtained were statistically processed and the percentages obtained for each item and each choice are summarized in a tabular form.

3. Presentation and interpretation of results

The first of the questionnaire items sought to highlight the trainers' opinions on the efficiency of the initial training program for future teachers.

Table 1.

Opinions regarding the efficiency of the initial teachers training program

Answer	N	%
Very efficient	10	12.5%
Pretty efficient	34	43.6%
Slightly efficient	33	42.3%
Not efficient at all	1	1.3%

As we can see in the table above, the data obtained show an obvious polarity of the responses. If 56.1% of respondents believe that the current preparation system for future teachers is very efficient or fairly efficient, at the other extreme lie 43.6% of trainers who view this program as slightly efficient or not efficient at all. The interviews conducted, combined with the focus group method revealed that, although there is no significant difference statistically, usually teachers with a greater seniority in education (79.5% were teachers with more than 10 years experience) tend to be more dissatisfied with the offer of training while subjects with less seniority (20.5% were teachers with less than 10 years experience) consider the program as quite efficient. We explain this state of things in that an increased seniority in education allows, due to experience, a more objective and more pertinent analysis to the training needs of those who are

to become teachers. People with less seniority in education, products of the training system for teachers in question, are clearly less willing to criticize or bring major objections to the program whose direct beneficiaries were themselves. Grouping on the two extremes of the responses thus indicates not only the existence of certain malfunctions in the operation of the program but also a significant divergence of perspectives, divergence expressed through the manifestation of two different major trends of opinion.

The next item of the questionnaire aimed to identify the components of the initial teacher training program that the trainers involved consider deficient.

Table 2.

Components considered deficient in the initial teachers training program

Answer	N	%
The psycho-social component	13	16.7%
The pedagogical component	14	17.9%
The methodical component	19	24.4%
The practical component	32	41%

The data presented in Table 2 show that most of the subjects, 41%, consider that the most deficient component of the initial teacher training program is the component of teaching practice. The methodological component of the program is considered deficient by 24.4% of the trainers while the psychosocial and pedagogical components are considered deficient by 16.7% and 17.9% of subjects. As expected, the trainers involved in the program consider that giving greater attention to the preparation of teaching practice is useful and necessary to guarantee appropriate skills for future teachers.

The results related to the percentage of time spent regarding the subjects of the teachers training program are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3.

The percentage that the initial teachers training program should have out of the total hours of preparation at undergraduate level

Answer	N	%
15%	8	10.3%
25%	24	30.7%
35%	11	14.1%
50%	27	34.6%
75%	8	10.3%

As we can see in the table above, 34.6% of the trainers surveyed believe that the subjects included in the training program of teachers should be allocated approximately 50% of the total hours of undergraduate training while 44.8% of them calculated that a percentage of 25-35% should be enough. Only 10.3% of respondents consider that this percentage should be reduced to 15% or increased to 75% of the total hours.

The results presented above are also validated by the trainers' responses to the item regarding the opportunity of separating the didactic profile from the scientific profile. The data is presented in Table 4.

Table 4.

The agreement regarding the separation of the didactical profile from the scientific profile

Answer	N	%
Yes	44	56.4%
No	34	43.6%

As we can see, the analysis of data in Table 4 indicates the fact that more than half of the trainers, 56.4%, consider that they agree with the establishment of an educational institution specializing in training future teachers, being, in their opinion, the solution for providing the appropriate methodological environment for promoting psychopedagogical disciplines and the optimal development of skills and competences necessary for the teaching profession.

Another item of the questionnaire aimed to capture the degree to which trainers consider that their students grant the appropriate interest to the disciplines included in the training program of future teachers. The results regarding the extent to which students are determined to become involved in the initial teachers training program are shown in Table 5.

Table 5.

The importance that students grant to the initial teachers training program

Answer	N	%
Very important	2	2.6%
Pretty important	22	28.2%
Slightly important	41	52.6%
Barely important	11	14.1%
Not important at all	2	2.6%

The trainers' responses to this item, presented in the table above, offers a disturbing perspective, knowing that there is a directly proportional relationship between the degree of motivation of engagement in the task and the level of performances. Thus, we can observe the fact that only a third of trainers (30.8%) believe that their students grant enough importance to the disciplines associated with the initial teacher training program while 69.2% admit that the students they teach to pay little or very little importance to this group of disciplines.

One of the possible explanations of this situation, as can be seen in Table 6, is that not all students participate in the initial teacher training program.

Table 6.

The need for the pre-existence of special skills for the teaching profession

Answer	N	%
Yes	62	79.5%
No	16	20.5%

The data above reveals that exercising the profession of a teacher requires, in the opinion of 79.5% of trainers, the pre-existence of special skills, while only 20.5% of the respondents consider that this is not necessary and any person can be prepared successfully in this regard. In other words, most of the trainers tend to believe that teaching is more an art than a science.

The last item of the questionnaire sought to identify the subjects' opinions regarding the opportunity of introducing an admission system to the initial teacher training program. The results are summarized in Table 7.

Table 7.

The agreement regarding the introduction of an admission system to the initial teachers training program

Answer	N	%
Yes	56	71.8%
No	22	28.25%

According to the data presented in Table 6, the responses summarized in the table above confirm a general trend of opinion regarding the existence of a potential innate skill necessary to become a teacher. Thus, 71.8% of the trainers consider the introduction of an admission system to the training program for future teachers appropriate, with the selection carried out based on the skill spectrum previously mentioned.

4. Conclusions

The analysis of the opinions expressed by the trainers involved in the the initial teacher training program reveals some important aspects for its optimization process. We are referring primarily to the fact that almost half of us believe that, in its present form, it is slightly efficient or not efficient at all, with the same percentage of respondents expressing the belief that a greater percentage should be allocated to the teaching practice component. The solution that almost two thirds of respondents see is the establishment of a specialized teacher training institution, context in which, as proposed by the majority of trainers, the percentage of the disciplines included in the training program should be at 50%. Moreover, three-quarters of the trainers consider that the optimal exercising of the teaching profession requires the pre-existence of a skill set that should be checked by a system of admission to the training program. An appropriate restructuring of the system of training of future teachers requires, in our opinion, at least one profound act of reflection regarding the opinions based on the concrete experience of those directly involved in this program.

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