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Strengths and weaknesses of the Romanian pre-service training system in prospective secondary-school teachers' view

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the current Romanian pre-service training system for secondary teachers. Drawing on recent proposals regarding teacher education, put forth by the EU, and on Romanian legal and curricular provisions in force, a small scale questionnaire-survey was conducted in order to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the framework in use, in prospective secondary-school teachers' view. The subjects' answers highlight the good and bad points of the Romanian teacher education system, leading us to the conclusion that the prospective secondary-school teachers' view is realistic and giving us the opportunity to make some recommendations.

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1. Introduction

The main goal of the Strategic Framework for Education and Training (ET 2020) is to ensure high-quality teaching, and the European Council's conclusions of March 2013 pinpointed to the possible means of accomplishing this goal. Thus, 'by ensuring effective initial teacher education, by providing coherent and adequately resourced systems for recruitment selection, initial teacher education, early career support and competence-based continuing professional development of teaching staff' (EC, 2013:3), one can make sure that this EU priority will eventually take shape. Nevertheless, the issue is complex and, more often than not, country-sensitive. Taking this into

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consideration, this paper aims at giving a short account of the current situation regarding the initial education for secondary school teachers in Romania, mainly from the point of view of the Bachelor's Degree students wishing to become teachers. In part one, we briefly outline the recent proposals regarding teacher education in Europe, and, using it as a reference point, in part two, we review the Romanian legislative and curricular provisions in force. Thus, we provide the theoretical basis necessary for our empirical research, described in part three in point of methodology, data analysis and interpretation. The final part deals with the conclusions of our investigation and introduces possible solutions for the problems that have been identified.

2. EU Perspectives on Teacher Education

The activity of the European institutions in the field of teacher education has had a long history. Starting with the *Treaty of Rome* (1957), which tackled the issue of professional training, continuing with the *Treaty of Maastricht* (1992), which dedicated an entire article to education, several other official documents have constantly outlined that a highly educated population is the key to economic success and sustainability. The initiatives included in the *Memorandum for Lifelong Learning* adopted by the Lisbon Council in 2000 prepared the launch and the implementation of the work programme ET 2010 and its continuation, ET 2020. The result is a common European strategic framework for education and training that should be followed by policymakers, education and training providers, employers and learners.

Therefore, teacher education has gradually become one of the EU watchwords. The development of *Common European Principles on Teacher Competences and Qualifications* (2005) ('a well qualified profession; a profession within the context of lifelong learning; a mobile profession; a profession based on partnership') helped the European Commission suggest further policy steps in its Communication on *Improving the Quality of Teacher Education* (2007). Focusing on lifelong learning, the 2007 Commission proposals would serve: to ensure that provision for teachers' education and professional development is coordinated, coherent, and adequately resourced; to ensure that all teachers possess the knowledge, attitudes and pedagogic skills that they require to be effective; to support the professionalisation of teaching; promote a culture of reflective practice and research within the teaching profession; and to promote the status and recognition of the profession (EC, 2007). It had become obvious that by providing high-quality initial teacher training, one comes closer to achieving the main EU goals.

3. Pre-Service Teacher Education for Secondary-School Teachers in Romania

In Romania, education reform started after the events in 1989 and has been sped up since 1998. Ever since the beginning, one of its priorities has been the reformation of the pre-service and in-service teacher education system. Initial teacher education has been regulated by several Acts of Parliament, and, as our research focuses on future secondary-school teachers, we limit our short description to this well-confined category.

Pre-service teacher education for secondary-school teachers has been progressively reformed, in three main stages. Firstly, Education Act of 1995 (modified and supplemented by Act 268/2003 and by Act 354/2004) and Act 128/1997 on the status of teachers (modified and supplemented by Act 349/2004) regulated the teaching positions and the selection and occupation procedures. Accordingly, higher education graduates who wished to become teachers could join the profession only if they had attended the psychopedagogical training and methodology courses organized by the Teacher Education Departments (TED) within the universities (Education Act of 1995, 68, (1), (2)). For example, a Math university graduate could become a Math teacher, only if he had attended and graduated from, during or within 3 years since his university graduation, the compulsory and elective courses provided by the TED (Pedagogy, Curriculum Theory and Methods, Teaching Theory and Methods, Educational Psychology, Computer-Assisted Instruction etc); thus, the initial training curriculum for secondary-school teachers meant coping with an extraload of lecture, seminar and practice hours (the equivalent of one semester). Moreover, only after being employed as a secondary-school teacher for two years and passing the permanent certification exam, did the period of initial teacher training finally end.

The second reform stage is marked by the Bologna Process. Romania, having signed the Declaration in 1999, regulated the new higher education structure by means of Act 288/2004, which came into force starting with the 2005-2006 academic year. As a result, initial teacher education was seriously amended from both a quantitative and

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