

# PROFESSIONALIZATION OF THE TEACHING CAREER IN PRE-UNIVERSITY EDUCATION

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## Abstract

The governing strategy for education 2016-2020 relies on major investments in human resources, investments made both for professionalization of the teaching career and for reconsideration of the didactical levels system. The community's expectations in terms of teaching staff's skills are high. Teachers qualify for one or two speciality disciplines which means a high level of academic education. Knowledge is continuously updated through improvement programmes which ensure a minimum number of 90 transferable credits every 5 years. The traditional role of the information sender is obsolete. There emerge new roles of the modern teacher: resource person, instructor and adviser towards documentation and information, supporter of transdisciplinarity, expert in learning situations presented to pupils, researcher with innovation valences in the discipline didactics, assessor of the learning progress of each pupil, responsible and organiser of the interpersonal relationships which are established in schools or intermediary of such relations with community. The objective of the focus group research as investigation method was to outline the perception of the teaching staff in pre-university education in Dambovita on the "professionalization" model of the teaching career. The sample of the teaching staff in pre-university education, high school, on which the focus group research was conducted, was made up 9 teachers with different expertise, seniority and qualification levels in education so as to ensure representativity and lead to pertinent conclusions with regards to skills which teachers in pre-university education should have in order to practice the teaching profession.

**Keywords:** Competences, Personality features, Professionalization, Professional standard, Teaching career.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Professionalism is defined as exercise of an occupation based on a speciality professional education. The teacher is a professional as he or she practices this occupation after having taken a speciality education which gives him or her right to teach. The creation of the Teaching Staff Training Departments and the requirements to participate to the pedagogy module so as to access a teaching

career have conferred the initial training the statute of a genuine professionalization. This refers to a set of specific competences which provide the teacher with the abilities needed to efficiently perform instructive and educative activities. Professionalization is therefore approached as a redefinition of the competences used in deploying quality educational practices (Onutz, 2011). We abandon the polemic on obstructing “free and full development” through professionalization and we approach the activity of the teaching staff not only in the light of achieving a vocation and acquiring personal skills but also as an activity which relies on norms and specific and precise constraints. Knowledge acquired and competences developed imply a continuous training based on a rigorous and elaborated professional model. Empiricism, improvisation and artisanal procedures are thus eliminated.

## 2. RELEVANCE AND IMPORTANCE OF RESEARCH

Most countries include in guidelines elaborated for initial training of teaching staff a list of competences which they have to acquire. Norwegian regulations on teaching staff training rely on the European Qualification Framework and stipulate what candidates must know, understand and be able to undertake under the form of “learning results”. In Belgium (Flemish Community) there are two elements which detail the basic competences for debutant teachers and one element for experienced teachers. In Ireland, in addition to the guidelines for providers of initial training for teaching staff, there are also the professional conduct codes for teachers. In opposition, in Estonia, Latvia, Holland, Great Britain and Romania, the competence frameworks are elaborated as professional standards for teaching staff. In Romania there are different standards for each teaching position” <http://www.anefore.lu/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/EURYDICE-THE-TEACHING-PROFESSION.pdf>”.

In Europe the persons who aspire to become teachers attend a licensed academic programme, with or without master’s degree included, depending on the level: pre-elementary, lower secondary, upper secondary, post-secondary. The alternative routes to become a qualified teacher – such as short-term re-professionalization programmes for employed people who want to change their career - are not very popular in the European countries.

Throughout Europe admission to an initial training as a qualified teacher is regulated by general requirements regarding access to high or tertiary education and not by criteria or examinations specific to future career. Only a third of the European countries have in force specific selection methods such as skills tests or interviews on the motivation of the candidates to become teachers. In other countries the admission requirements are regulated by authorities in the education system. In other countries,

education establishments are free to introduce additional admission criteria in addition to minimal requirements set at central level. For instance, in Denmark, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia and Finland, admission for general teachers include a written examination and a skills test" [http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/key\\_data\\_series/151en.pdf](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/key_data_series/151en.pdf)". Over the past years cooperation between universities has consolidated in terms of students' admission to initial training as qualified teacher so as to ensure more consistently the minimal requirements provided for admission to specific study programmes, as indicated in the table 1 below.

**TABLE 1. SELECTION METHODS/CRITERIA FOR ACCESS TO INITIAL TEACHER EDUCATION. PRE-PRIMARY, PRIMARY AND GENERAL (LOWER AND UPPER SECONDARY) EDUCATION, 2011/12**

Certificate of final examination of upper secondary education			X	XX	X
Performance at upper secondary level	X		X	X	X
A general entrance examination to tertiary education			X	X	
Performance at bachelor level	X	X	X	X	
A (written or oral) examination specifically for admission to teacher education					X
An interview specifically for admission to teacher education					X
Literacy and numeracy tests					
	DK	PT	RO	SK	FI

Source: made by authors with data from EACEA

[http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/key\\_data\\_series/151EN\\_HI.pdf](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/documents/key_data_series/151EN_HI.pdf)

X - Decided at institutional level

XX - Decided at the level of the education authority

Initial pedagogical training in Romania had many forms of which we can mention: training teachers who work in pre-school and primary school, training specialist subject teachers, training of specialists in educational sciences.

Initial teacher training today, according to regulations in force in Romania, is carried out in specialized departments of universities and aims to build in future educational professionals the competencies to work with the information and skills acquired in both specialties and educational sciences (<http://www.sciencedirect.com/>). Obtaining a teaching position depends on completing a specialized degree (licence and master level) and pedagogical training which can be undergone in parallel or subsequently, prospective teachers being required to go through the stage of pedagogical training organized by the Departments of Teacher Training (DTT). Certification for the teaching profession can be achieved at two levels, namely: a) Level I: university graduates can apply for teaching positions at preuniversity level provided they have previously accumulated a minimum of 30 transferable credits in a pedagogical studies program; b) Level II university graduates can apply for teaching positions at pre-

and university level provided they have previously accumulated a minimum of 60 transferable credits in a pedagogical studies program, and they have obtained a master's degree in their specialty field.

### 3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

In order to identify options of teaching staff in pre-university education in relation to professionalization of the teaching career, especially for initial training, focus group research (Krueger & Casey, 2005) was used as an investigation method.

#### The main objectives of the survey highlight:

- Identification of the perception of persons interviewed on the "professionalization" of the teaching career.
- Statement on the role and the importance of the Professional Standard for the teaching career.
- Identification of the competences specific to teaching profession.

The qualitative research about the professionalization of the teaching career started from the following hypotheses:

- The professionalizing of teaching career involves activities based on rules and constraints.
- The professional Standard for the teaching career is a unitary model based on general skills.

The sample of the teaching staff in pre-university education, high school, on which the focus group research was conducted, was made up of 9 teachers with different experience in education, as shown in the table 2 below.

TABLE 2. TEACHING STAFF SAMPLE

No.	Specialisation	Seniority in education	Qualification level	Position
1.	Economic, administrative, trade and services/Trade and services	36	PhD	Manager, CNDIPT inspector
2.	Foreign Languages	3	Permanent	Teacher
3.	Romanian Language and Literature	12	II	Teacher
4.	History	17	II	Teacher
5.	Economic, administrative, trade and services/Trade and services	17	I	QA Manager, curriculum author
6.	Economic, administrative, mail services	0	debutant	Teacher
7.	Philosophy	12	I	Deputy Manager in charge of projects and programmes
8.	Religion	27	Permanent	Teacher
9.	Physical Education	6	II	Teacher

Source: made by authors using data from the focus-group sample

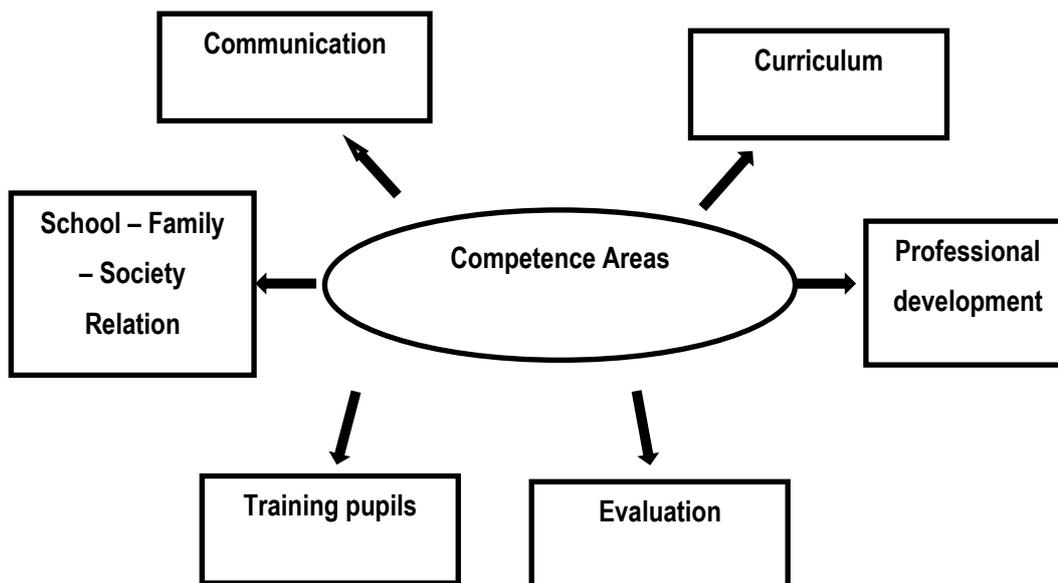
In selection of the teaching staff account was taken of the curriculum, seniority in education and improvement level attained. Optimal combination of teaching experiences was therefore ensured.

#### 4. RESULTS

**Question 1.** Define the teaching profession and state the competence areas of the teacher

The teachers interviewed consider the teaching profession as a “multitude of knowledge and competences presented and organized in a professional system”, more precisely a Professional Standard methodically acquired and organized by scientific principles (Gliga, 2002).

According to the Occupational Standard (<http://www.anc.edu.ro/uploads/SO/Profesor%20gimnaziu%20-%20liceu.pdf>), they call it the occupation of lower secondary – upper secondary teacher, the teacher is the teaching person who addresses pupils falling under the 10 – 18 age group, which corresponds to the cycles development, observation and orientation, thoroughgoing study, specialization. The competence areas presented by respondents are shown in the diagram 1 below.



**FIGURE 1 - THE COMPETENCE AREAS PRESENTED BY RESPONDENTS**  
Source: made by authors using data from the focus-group sample

According to the Occupational Standard, each competence area finds as correspondent a competence unit based on performance criteria, a range of variables and concise evaluation guidelines.

**Question 2.** State what you consider to be essential for the teaching career

For a long time the teaching activity has relied on the freedom of action, improvisation and creativity. Keeping the creative and the innovative element, it is of paramount importance to go from the traditional teacher to the expert teacher, adapted to a continuously changing society. Another interviewed person considers vital for the teaching profession: "all aptitudes and values which compose career professionalism, more exactly the professional consciousness". The teacher plays several parts at the same time, has the specialty expertise for at least two different domains. According to Romanian Occupation Classification COR 2016 "[http://www.rubinian.com/cor\\_4\\_grupa\\_baza.php?id=233](http://www.rubinian.com/cor_4_grupa_baza.php?id=233)", the teacher in the secondary education teaches one or several disciplines at secondary level, excluding the disciplines meant to prepare the pupils towards employment in various professional fields.

**Question 3.** What do you understand by teaching profession model?

Considering the specificity of the educational activity, all people interviewed consider difficult achieving a teaching profession model. The teaching activity relies on repetitive situations which develop rapidly and efficiently, starting from actual experiences, of the one hand, and on new didactical situations, not encountered on a regular basis, of the one hand, situations for which the teacher needs to think, investigate, research etc in order to find solutions.

In respect of the Professional Standards, the unanimous opinion is that they have to be detailed, normatively exact, rigid, sometimes constrainable in performing activities in class. The heuristic and creative spirit is sometimes obstructed. One of the respondents suggests that this fact imposes development of the capacity of the teacher to adapt to new situations, to mobilise all knowledge and competences in order to adapt to particular contexts and to solve multiple issues. The expression "outside the box" is quite fitting here, it prescribes the limits of the teaching career (Illich, 1971).

**Question 4.** State 10 competences which are important to practice the teaching profession

In respect of the competences specific to the teaching profession, the respondents have identified, upon moderator's request, 10 of the most important competence areas, as indicated in the table 3 below.

TABLE 3. COMPETENCE AREAS

Competences/Attribute Granted	Very important	Rather important	Neutral (Neither-Nor)	Not important
Projects teaching activity	9			
Carry out quality teaching activity	9			
Evaluates the results of learning	9			
Has an irreproachable professional conduct	9			
Creates a working environment which favours learning, a proper emotional teacher-pupil relationship	6	3		
Masters the speciality terminology (knows the area/discipline taught very well)	7	2		
Is updated on the latest news in the speciality domain	4	4	1	
Develops through experiences and continuous professional training	4	3	2	
Has cultural and social competences which are appropriate to current society	3	3	3	
Performs organizational and administrative duties	3	3	2	1

Source: made by authors with data from the focus-group sample

All respondents agree with the fact that the teaching profession means thoroughly selected persons and requires a long period of professional training in the personality area. The teaching staff's continuous training standards establish a list of competences specific to each category, synoptically presented in the diagram 2 below.

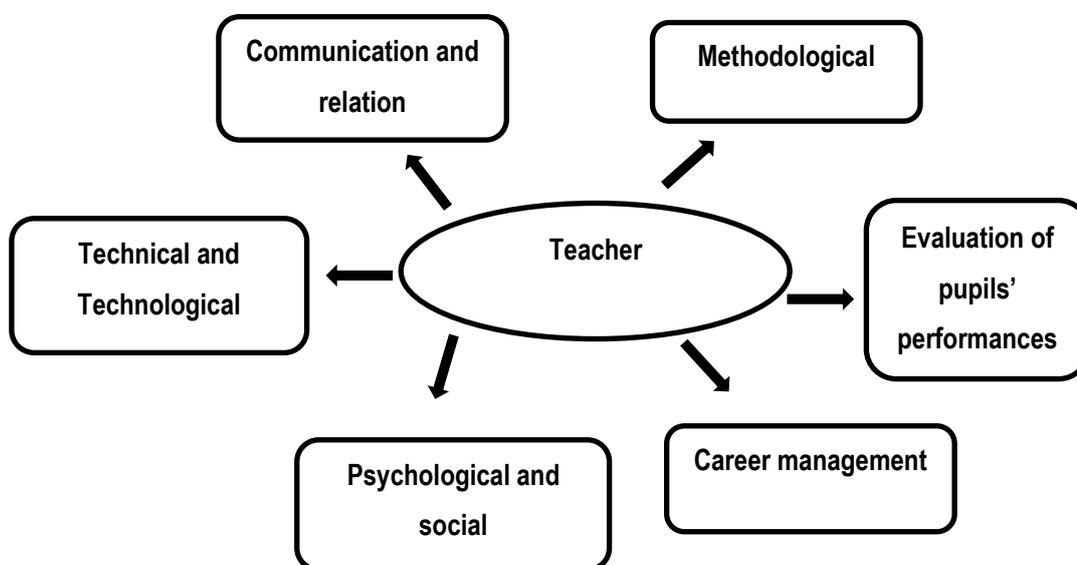


FIGURE 2 - LIST OF COMPETENCES

Source: made by authors using data from the focus-group sample

**Question 5.** Make improvement suggestions which you consider to professionalize teaching career

With regards to professionalization of the teaching career, the respondents' answers were grouped as shown in the table 3 below.

**TABLE 3. SUGGESTIONS ON IMPROVEMENTS**

Suggestions on improvements	Number of respondents
Periodical revision of norms, methodologies and legislation in line with the dynamic of the society	4
Coherence and harmonization of the educational legislation	9
Greater development opportunities and continuous improvement	7
Allowing access to modern teaching resources	6
Motivating human resources, regaining the professional prestige and dignity of the teaching career	9
Evaluation of the teaching staff by relevant, objective and unanimously accepted criteria	5

Source: made by authors using data from the focus-group sample

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

Respecting the specificity of the educative activity, professionalization of the teaching career is vital. The professionalism of the teacher does not come down to a series of individual competences specific to a strict specialization. In addition to mastering a volume of knowledge which needs to be continuously updated, it is necessary to develop some abilities and personality features to enable capitalization of the pupil's potential. The initial and continuous training needs to ensure the teacher's compliance with all and any situations in the teaching endeavour. A good performance of the teacher relies on self-confidence and confidence in his or her professional competences, on solving difficult situations, tensed or conflictual ones, on the capacity to manage typical or atypical situations. The improvement programmes trigger newness both in specialty and in valid or possible solutions to new situations developed by the contemporary society and which influence the behaviour of the pupils. The activity of the teaching staff goes beyond the vocation stage and relies on competences and knowledge accumulated throughout the Initial Training – Continuous Professional Training path. A teaching profession model must include both standardized and non-standardized competences. The legitimization of the teaching profession among social activities and professions rely on the elaboration of a unitary teaching profession model and teaching profession standards. Competences and activity categories in the Teaching Position Standard require some improvements, especially outside the sphere of introducing a new set of performance criteria adapted to new and progress.

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