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Romanian language pre-service teachers' training for didactic career

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Abstract

The aim of this study is that of trying to identify and group the main reasons for which pre-service Romanian language teachers (be they fresh graduates or experienced) obtain rather poor results at the national exam for filling a teaching position. For this purpose we undertake the theoretical findings concerning the main issues of preparing pre-service language teachers. Thus, we analyze the results obtained by 89 candidates who took the national exam for the filling a teaching position as teachers of Romanian language and literature starting from the premise that these results reflect the level of initial training from the perspective of the development of pedagogical competences. The results of the research indicate the necessity of taking some measures for the improvement of initial training for the teachers of Romanian language and literature from a pedagogical perspective with a view to obtaining better results at the national exams for the filling of a teaching position fact which will have a positive effect upon professional integration.

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1. The challenges of teacher training

Many recent studies aim to identify the causes that determine a series of problems that restrict the development of modern, efficient programmes of language teaching at the level of initial training thus influencing directly the results of the future teachers at their exam for filling a teaching position. The problem is viewed from more perspectives, in isolation and correlation with each other in order for the beginner teachers to develop a realistic approach to teaching, to handle various complexities of the teaching act and the relationship with students and shift approaches if it is necessary. Thus, various research studies focus upon the obstacles encountered in developing efficient language teachers' initial training with a view to introducing teachers-to-be to realistic aspects of the process of teaching, to theories, methods and procedures applicable in the classroom and which they could use as a support for the practical

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application of their exam for entering the profession of teaching. All these aspects should have as an ultimate purpose the allowing of freedom of choice on the part of the teacher and the permanent adaptation to the demands of a changing society and student.

The need to discuss these aspects stems from various aspects which candidates entering these exam come against (which represent, in fact, drawbacks of the training programmes) such as: the difficulty to control a teaching situation in the classroom (Vonk, 1993), the disconsidering of the aspect of teacher's identity (Casanave, 1997), the difficulty of maintaining the balance between teacher's control over instruction and students' needs and interests (Pennington & Richards, 1997), teachers' autonomy (Clement & Vandenberghe, 2000), the failure to develop an expert–novice type of relationship between teachers and student-teachers (and not master–apprentice) and apply and insist on school-based/ school-centred programmes of initial teachers' training, mentoring and partnerships between schools and higher education institutions as a necessity for an integrated realistic teacher education programme (Korthagen et al., 2001, Robinson, 2004), institutional pressures (Britzman, 2003), the existence of a large gap between teacher education courses and day-to-day practice of teaching (Varghese, 2005) or teachers' expectations and workplace realities (Hebert, 2001), the failure of regarding both the school context and the personal background (Flores & Day, 2006), or the manner in which personal identity incorporates in professional identity (Bainbridge, 2011), the observation of the insufficient impact of teacher education courses (Benson, 2010), the difficulty in attaining teaching effectiveness and students' quality (Gupta et al., 2011), the accountability for teacher preparation programmes (Henry et al., 2010), the hardships of implementing curriculum (Richards, 2013), the high demand of meeting (inter)national standards (Bunch, 2013). Unfortunately many of these aspects are presented mostly theoretically and the insufficient practical applications within the programmes do not grant candidates for the future profession of teaching a realistic understanding of the pedagogical phenomenon, this leading to their failure or poor results at this exam.

2. The necessity of improving the training of pre-service language teachers

The main idea on which teachers' preparation and the new pedagogy of realistic teacher education (Korthagen et al., 2001) are supposed to focus, as it can be concluded from these studies is that this process has to be permanently circumscribed to the local and the global context of contemporary culture, teacher's emotions and identity and labour market all of them projected onto the larger frame of change, negotiation, dialogism (Britzman, 2003), transformation and progress as the main paradigm of the contemporary individual and society evolution. It is in this line of discussion of a dialogism in teaching that made researchers advocate for a "reciprocal and synergistic" relationship between science learning and language and literacy development applying the following principles: integrating science, language, and literacy development; engaging students in scientific discourse; developing scientific understanding; collaborative inquiry in science learning; and contextualized science instruction. The stage of preparing students for the teaching profession was identified as the pre-professional phase (Vonk, 1993) and it is most important as it should diminish the occasionally dramatic transition from student to teacher which arises from the fact that the process of preparing teachers is a complex, sometimes conflicting process and which prepares them for the third phase of growing into a profession. The impending necessity of uniting teacher education with the practice of teaching, in other words of making teacher preparation programme accountable for the teachers' effectiveness, is what has become the preoccupation of researchers, fortunately and too little the preoccupation of curriculum planners, unfortunately.

In the attempt of meeting these demands attempts have been made to establish models of teaching. Thus, the minimum competency model (based on data delivery) or the model of open professional (insisting on both professional knowledge and skills base) (OECD, 1988) were identified, with a preference from the viewpoint of innovation and efficiency on the latter so as to lead to what was called teaching as an open-ended exploration (Vonk, 1993). Another important aspect which recent studies (Varghese et al., 2005) have underlined is the importance of the concept of language teacher identity by recognizing the teacher as the fulcrum of the classroom, lesson and teaching act and of the concept of professional identity formation in relation to context demographics, personality traits, motivation, external support. That is why, as in social penetration theory, the education theory and teachers' preparation has to be regarded as a hierarchy of layers affecting the teaching behavior from the levels/actors

involved to the levels determined and determining teachers' identity, all of which good training has to cross progressively in order to penetrate to the core.

That is why an attempt in Table 1 to present a ten-layered grid which renders the drawbacks of the process of training teachers for their future profession, with the purpose of remedying these aspects. In another research study we present some actual solutions that could be adopted for the remedying of these aspects. Only such an undertaking will offer viable solutions to some problems of teachers' preparation and will manage to anticipate the positive effect of such measures that should be adopted in order to meet the demands of the main dichotomies of teaching: "knowing and being, thought and action, theory and practice, knowledge and experience, the technical and the existential, the objective and the subjective" (Britzman, 2003). It is only in this way that teachers will feel that they are genuinely prepared for a correct selection of activities and materials, for the establishing of correct classroom standards, for purposeful instructional planning and sequencing and recognized on-the-job decision making (Pearson & Moomaw, 2005). The identification of all these aspects is important in the attempt of offering a model which equally takes into consideration the needs, desires, expectations and beliefs of both teacher-trainer and student-teacher.

Table 1. A ten-layered grid emphasizing the pedagogical training needs of Romanian pre-service language teachers

Components	Drawbacks
1. Educational reform	- the pressure of the exam; - frequent changes of the evaluation criteria;
2. Theoretical models	- the lack of an innovative models in domain; - the weak correlation between theoretical models and the future teachers' training needs as required by the educational practice;
3. Curriculum of pre-service teacher education	- the mandated curriculum (which is partially outdated or lacks a genuine connection to the reality of teaching); - the lack of curricular innovations at the level of the training programmes;
4. Pedagogical standards	- the lack of educational policies based on the development of the pedagogical competencies for pre-service teachers training; - the lack of a framework for the development of pedagogical competences;
5. Correlation between pedagogical competencies and other categories	- lack of interdisciplinary integration; - the lack of connection between forming the pedagogical competences and the didactic, psycho-social and management competences;
6. Training methods	- predomination of traditional methods of training;
7. Training resources	- lack of modern resources of formation in the field;
8. Assessment methods	- focus on knowledge evaluation; - lack of formative evaluation regarding pedagogical competences;
9. The teaching style of trainers	- predomination of a training style which is not focused on the student;
10. Organizational aspects	- the allotting of a reduced number of hours for the actual training.

In the context of Romanian system of pre-service language teachers training, it is precisely this lack of developing the pedagogical competencies in correlation with all of these layers that leads to partial failure of the candidates in their future exams.

3. Constatative research regarding the analysis of the results obtained by candidates at the national exam for the filling of a teaching position

3.1. Objectives and hypotheses

The objective of our research consists in the analysis of the results obtained by the candidates at the exam for the discipline Romanian language and literature in the area of Bacău county. We also intend to analyze the results of the graduates of 2013 with the experienced teachers having taken the same exam.

The study starts from the general hypothesis that the mean of the results obtained by the candidates at the national exam for filling a teaching position is low.

Secondary hypothesis 1: There are significant differences between the results obtained by the graduates from 2013 and the other candidates, with more than one year experience in the teaching profession.

Secondary hypothesis 2: There are significant differences between the results obtained by candidates depending on their specialization.

Secondary hypothesis 3: There are significant differences between the results obtained by candidates depending on the type of faculty they graduated from.

3.2. Methodology

Within this study we have analyzed the results of 89 candidates who took the national exam for the filling of a teaching position at the County School Inspectorate from Bacău. The dependent variable is represented by the results obtained at this exam and the independent variables refer to: *the didactic experience* (young graduates or experienced); *the specialization* (Romanian language–foreign languages, foreign languages–Romanian language, Romanian language–Theology); *the type of faculty* they graduated (public–full time, public–part time or distance learning, private). The data regarding the graduates with the specialization Romanian language and literature have been taken from the site <http://titularizare.edu.ro/2013/generated/files/j/index.html#BC> and have been processed and analyzed during the period August–September 2013.

3.3. Data analysis and results

The general hypothesis is confirmed, because more than 50% from the candidates taking this exam obtain poor results at the national exam for filling a teaching position, fact which indicates a low level of development of the pedagogical competences in correlation with the requirements for the integration in the didactic career within the initial teacher training programmes. The recorded data have been submitted to analysis by help of the descriptive statistical techniques from the SPSS programme, the statistical mean and the standard deviation being calculated (Table 2).

Table 2. Statistical data regarding the result of the candidates at the national exam for the filling of a teaching position as teachers of Romanian language and literature

Statistical data	Values
Mean	6,61
Standard deviation	1,64

In order to verify the secondary hypotheses we verified the type of distribution and we discovered a normal one. Secondary hypothesis 1 is not confirmed because there are not significant differences between the results obtained by the graduates from 2013 and the other candidates, with more than one year experience in the teaching profession. The data was analyzed by help of the Independent-Samples T Test in the SPSS programme [$t(87) = -0,715, p > 0,05$] (Table 3).

Table 3. Statistical data of the Independent-Samples T Test regarding the candidates' results at the national exam for the filling of a teaching position as a teacher of Romanian language and literature depending on the didactic experience

	Levene's Test for Equality of variances		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
	F	Sig					
Equal variances assumed	0,66	0,798	-,715	87	,477	-,43688	,61123
Equal variances not assumed			-,734	8,542	,483	-,43688	,59550

The secondary hypotheses 2 is not verified because there is not a significant difference between candidates' depending on their specialization. The data was analyzed by help of the One-Way ANOVA test in the SPSS programme (Table 4).

Table 4. Statistical data of the One-Way ANOVA test regarding the candidates' results at the national exam for the filling of a teaching position as a teacher of Romanian language and literature depending on the specialization

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	11,743	2	5,872	2,231	,114
Within Groups	226,298	86	2,631		
Total	238,041	88			

The secondary hypothesis 3 is confirmed because there are significant differences between the candidates' results depending on the type of university they graduated from. The data was analyzed by help of the One-Way ANOVA in the SPSS programme [$F(3, 85) = 4,987, p < 0,05$] (Table 5). The results indicate the fact that students from public universities – full time (6,96), as well as the ones from public universities – part time or distance learning (6,26) obtain better results at the exam in comparison with graduates from private universities – full time (5,15) and the with the ones who graduated from a private university – part time or distance learning (5,30).

Table 5. Statistical data of the One-Way ANOVA test regarding the candidates' results at the national exam for the filling of a teaching position as a teacher of Romanian language and literature depending on the type of university they graduated from

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	35,627	3	11,876	4,987	,003
Within Groups	202,414	85	2,381		
Total	238,041	88			

4. Conclusions

From the perspective of the new approaches in the field of language teachers' initial training, the stress falls more and more on the application of innovative models based on the development of pedagogical competences with a

view to accomplishing efficient professional integration. Thus, the training of future teachers in an integrative and dynamic process is essential especially as the requirements for the national exam for the filling of a teaching position require the concomitant activation of scientific, pedagogical and didactic competences. The results of the research emphasize and support the conclusions of the theoretical approaches because the findings certify the fact that the mean of the candidates' results at the above mentioned exam is low. One of the future directions of research will consist in the application of a model within a project based on the integration of curricular innovations proposed at the level of teachers' initial training programmes with positive results upon the integrative formation of pedagogical competences and upon the efficient integration in the didactic profession.

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