Teachers’ professional development and career advancement. Limitations of the current model of professional competences assessment

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Abstract

The study proposes the assessment of the teachers’ level of professional development and career advancement and examines the limitations of the current competences assessment model, which implies the completion of the second didactic degree standards. The research has been conducted on a lot of 216 teachers specialized in different pre-university education fields and has aimed at the following objectives: to assess the cumulative development level for teachers’ professional competences; to identify differences in the participants’ professional development, dependent on gender and specialty; to point at limitations of the current model of assessment of teachers’ professional competences. The research methods used have been document analysis (grade rolls), interview and statistical techniques. The research results contribute to the optimization of continuous teacher training programmes and to the improvement of their competences assessment strategies.

Keywords: professional development, career advancement, professional competences, assessment strategies

1. Introduction

In Romania, the topic of continuous training of teaching staff and of adult learning is of great importance and yet, unfortunately, it has not always been a topical issue for researchers in the educational field. Thus, in a thematic analysis of specialized literature on adult education, Claudie Solar (1995) observed that only 6.4% of the 623 articles reviewed in 7 top academic journals address the issue of adult learning (cf. Bourgeois & Nizet, 1997, 1).

Over the past decades, the worldwide efforts to reform educational systems, including teacher training programs, have led to orienting scientific researches in this domain towards some specific directions, among which we could mention:
• a new conception about professional training, correlated with notions of change, integration and development (Berbaum, 2008, 12);
• teaching career professionalization, promoting the system based on competency and professional recognition in education (Paquay et al., 1996; Dolz and Ollagnier, 2002; Lafortune, 2010; Méard and Bruno, 2009; Jorro, 2009);
• European tendency to harmonize educational systems and enable horizontal and vertical mobility of future teachers (cf. Şerbanescu, 2011);
• career planning as a process of identifying career needs, aspirations and opportunities, and the implementation of human resources development programs to support it (Iucu, 2007; Jovanova-Mitkovska, 2010, Dumitriu, Timofti and Dumitriu, 2011; Malderez and Bodoczky, 2009; Molina and Gervais, 2008);
• the identification of difficulties met by beginning teachers in their practice (Urzua, 1999; Killeavy and Maloney, 2010; Brookhart, 2001); strategies proposed in order to facilitate beginning teachers’ integration, including methodical guides, curriculum models, the use of mentor teachers and of orientation teams and tutoring (Roehrig, Bohn, Turner, and Pressley, 2008; Malderez and Bodoczky, 2009; Dumitriu et al., 2011; Johnson, 2001; Furlong and Maynard, 1995);
• practical application of constructivist theory, cognitive psychology and of reflective practitioner theory (Altet, 1994; Boisvert, 1997; Méard and Bruno, 2009; Schön, 1994).
• improvement of strategies for teaching competences assessment (Bourque, 1994; Behrens, 1998; Peretti, 1998; Bachman, 2002; Belair et al., 2010).

2. Professional development and career advancement in Romania

Continuous training of teachers in Romania represents a continuous and cumulative process of acquisition and development of teaching staff competences, a process founded on principles of permanent education and adult learning. Continuing education is mainly achieved by specialized training and professional conversion (Şerbanescu, 2011, 117). The design, implementation and evaluation of continuous training of teaching staff rely on the competency-based approach as a means to define and acknowledge training outcomes.

Career advancement of pre-university teaching staff is achieved upon successful completion of an examination of degree standard, including qualified teacher degree, second degree and first degree. Continuous professional development is supported by the principles and specificity of adult education of permanent education and is achieved by compulsory training stages, integrated in the system of evaluation/transfer through transferable professional credit units. The main fields in which the competences required for the teaching career are defined and continuous training programs are evaluated include: the field of specialty; the field of pedagogy and psychology of education; the field of educational management and school legislation; ICT, inter- and transdisciplinary fields aiming at alternative and complementary instructive strategies, research and innovation, communication and partnerships with the social environment etc. (cf. Methodology for continuous training of teaching staff in pre-university education, 2009).

Continuous formation is undergone in a system of institutions, organisations and structures, of which some fulfil functions of regulation, coordination, financing, evaluation, accreditation and monitoring of continuous training programs, while others, acting as program providers organise and develop such continuous training activities. Forms of organisation for the skills upgrading of pre-university teaching staff comprise among others: methodical-scientific and psycho-pedagogical activities, performed at the level of the educational institution or on groups of institutions; symposia, exchanges of experience; preparation courses and exams to obtain qualified teacher status and didactic degrees; national and international training and research grants; postgraduate skills upgrade courses; master’s degree courses; and doctoral studies. Professional conversion courses are in charge of higher education institutions and are organised according to specific methodological standards. Progress evaluation and validation as a result of teachers’ participation in different programs and forms of continuous training is performed by the system of acknowledgement, transfer and accumulation of transferable professional credits.

The main goal set in this paper is to assess the teachers’ level of professional development and career advancement and to emphasize limitations of the current model of competences assessment through their passing second didactic degree examination. Being awarded second didactic degree certification represents a further step
taken by the teacher toward professionalization, confirmed by exam results obtained upon the completion of tasks specially tailored to highlight the added value acquired since becoming qualified teachers.

3. Research design

3.1. Objectives:

3.1.1. To assess cumulative development level for teachers’ professional competences relating to professional standards and assessment criteria;

3.1.2. To identify differences in participants’ professional development, dependent on gender and specialty;

3.1.3. To underline limitations of the current model of professional competences assessment of teachers.

3.2. Hypotheses

General hypothesis: The results obtained by candidates in second didactic degree examination register different levels.

Specific hypothesis 1. There are significant differences between participants to second didactic degree exam according to gender.

Specific hypothesis 2. There are significant differences between participants to second didactic degree exam according to specialty.

Specific hypothesis 3. There are significant differences between the participants in terms of results in special inspection and average passing grade in second didactic degree exam.

3.3. Participants

The research was conducted on a lot of 216 teachers of different specialties who enrolled for the exam to obtain second didactic degree in the academic year 2011-2012. Only 19 of these did not pass the exam, as they failed to obtain the passing grade of 7.00 in written or oral examinations. 197 candidates passed the exam, of whom 29 male and 168 female; 80 teach in urban areas and 117 in rural areas; 69 had effective teaching experience of 7 years, while 128 had more than 7 years; according to specialty variable, 38 are preschool teachers, 44 are primary school teacher, 30 Romanian teachers, 25 English teachers, 21 French teachers, 22 Mathematics teachers and 17 are PE (Physical education) teachers.

3.4. Methods

The research methods were: analysis of school documents (exam registers) and interview; for data analysis, we have used descriptive statistics (average, standard deviation) and inferential statistics (Independent-Samples T Test, Paired-Samples T test), analyzed by V.16 of SPSS software.

Procedure. Tests for granting second didactic degree certification comprise: a special inspection preceded by at least two regular inspections as compulsory requirements for sitting in for the exam; written and oral examination in specialty discipline and elements of educational psychology. The passing of second didactic degree examination implies obtaining a minimum grade of 7 and is calculated as the arithmetic mean of the average grade obtained from specialty discipline and didactics of specialty (separate grades awarded by two examiners) and the grade in psycho-pedagogy examination.

4. Results and discussions

The first hypothesis is supported as results obtained by candidates for second didactic degree register variable levels depending on the gender variable (table 1). There are significant differences between male and female participants to this exam \([t (195) = -3.42, p = 0.001]\).

The second hypothesis is partly supported, because statistical analysis emphasizes significant differences between results obtained by participants to second didactic degree exam according to the specialty variable (table 1). Significant differences are registered between results obtained by:

- preschool teachers and PE teachers \([t (53) = 2.62, p = 0.011]\);
- primary school teachers and PE teachers \([t (64) = -2.29, p = 0.025]\);
- primary school teachers and PE teachers \([t (59) = 2.67, p = 0.010]\);
• English teachers and PE teachers \([t (40) = 3.10, p = 0.003]\);
• French teachers and PE teachers \([t (36) = 3.46, p = 0.001]\);
• Maths teachers and PE teachers \([t (37) = 3.99, p = 0.000]\).

Table 1. Test t results comparing the means according to gender and specialty

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average passing grade</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>male</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>6.86</td>
<td>1.95</td>
<td>-3.42</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>female</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>7.62</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average passing grade</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preschool teachers</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>7.55</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>2.62</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>0.011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PE teachers</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7.11</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average passing grade</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary school teachers</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>7.50</td>
<td>.54</td>
<td>-2.29</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>0.025</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maths teacher</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>7.86</td>
<td>.71</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Average passing grade</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>PE teachers</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7.11</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>0.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average passing grade</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>English teachers</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>7.60</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PE teachers</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7.11</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average passing grade</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French teachers</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>7.71</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>3.46</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PE teachers</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7.11</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>Average passing grade</td>
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<td>Maths teachers</td>
<td>22</td>
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<tr>
<td>PE teachers</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7.11</td>
<td>.33</td>
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</table>

The third hypothesis is supported because statistical data (table 2) indicate significant differences between candidates’ grades in special inspection and the average passing grade of second didactic degree exam \([t (196) = -30.00, p = 0.000]\).

Table 2. Results of paired-sampled test (special inspection grade and average passing grade) with 95% CI

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>M inspection</th>
<th>SD inspection</th>
<th>M_passing</th>
<th>SD_passing</th>
<th>t (196)</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>LL</th>
<th>UL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Special inspection grade</td>
<td>9.97</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>7.51</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>-30.00</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-2.62</td>
<td>-2.30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data analysis indicates that only 3 teachers obtained grades of 8/9 in the special inspection, while the rest of 194 got tens; this has led to an overall mean of M = 9.97, compared with the pass mean in the examination for the entire lot, which registers a much lower value (M = 7.51). A possible explanation has in view indicators and different assessment criteria, used throughout the special inspection (skills in planning, organisation and performance of class activities, classroom management, communication and interaction, student assessment), which are different from the ones for assessment of candidates’ skills through tests in specialty discipline, didactics of specialty and psycho-pedagogy. The tests focus more on knowledge assessment, explanation of theories, paradigms, concepts in the fields of didactics of specialty and psycho-pedagogy. To a lesser extent, there are also assessed critical thinking, metacognitive, psychosocial, communicative, interactional and applicative skills and the capacity of transfer of knowledge and abilities.

5. Conclusions

The research findings support the general hypotheses and the specific hypotheses, emphasizing different development levels for professional skills and competences of teachers who took and passed the second degree examination. There are significant differences regarding their performance in the exam depending on the gender variable: female teachers obtained better results than male teachers. Significantly different results were also obtained by teachers depending on their specialty: the highest averages were registered by preschool teachers compared with
PE teachers; Maths teachers compared with primary school teachers; English, French and Maths teachers in contrast with PE teachers. There are major differences between the grades obtained by teachers in their special inspection and the average passing grade in second didactic degree examination.

In order to overcome the limitations of the current system of teaching competences assessment by completion of second degree examination standards, we consider that it is advisable that written tests, which evaluate more the candidate’s capacity to memorize and reproduce information, be replaced with a portfolio-based interview centred on competences, in front of the examination board. “Its benefits” imply both respecting the standards regarding the validity and accuracy of assessment tools and fulfilling the desiderata of The European Qualification Framework concerning lifelong learning and focusing on learning results. This presupposes that the continuous training system integrates assessments of knowledge acquired by teaching staff in formal, non-formal and informal contexts.

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**References**


