ROMANIAN MODELS ON DEFINING THE TEACHERS' COMPETENCES

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Abstract: *Literature proposes several models of defining the teachers' professional standards. Each model has its strengths and weaknesses. Thus, the purpose of this paper is to identify them and to discuss which model is more accurate. To solve this research question, a critical analysis of existing literature has been done. The paper reviews some published teachers' standards on a widely recommended approach called competence-based teachers' training. It involves placing teachers' training and teachers' personal and professional development within a real-schools-life context. The key concepts utilized by all of them are standard and competence, but they are used with a lot of meanings as are demonstrated by relating 8 indentified Romanian models to some continuity - discontinuity elements of the process of developing standards for the teaching career. Because of the many theoretical and methodological problems with the existing models, recommendations are made describing the need for more and better designed research.*

Keywords:*teacher; competence; occupational standard; professional standard;*

1. Introduction

In today's digital era, teachers have a completely different journey than they used to. Significant changes have undergone professional activity of the school teachers as requirements of society for the teachers have increased substantially in recent years. As a result, a lot of recent educational debates have provided a wider rationale for teacher's competencies standards. It is recognised that throughout the world, the levels at which key decisions are taken about the competences required to be employed as a teacher vary [6]: those countries where the decision is taken at national level tend to have more explicit and detailed descriptions of the competences that teachers are required to possess; in those countries where teacher education institutions have the autonomy to decide, the definitions of teachers' competences tend to be more diverse.

What about the Romanian experience? In Romania, the notions of *competence* and *standard* were and still are interpreted differently and analysed in different plans. As example, there were elaborated different types of standards: *institutional standards* (education quality assurance, institutional structures, managerial system), *curriculum standards* (standards of finality, content, time, school performance), *standards of training objectives and content*, *methodological standards*, *evaluation standards,instructional standards* (methods, strategies, forms of organizing training), *school managers' standards, teachers' standards* and so on.
This study refers only to the teachers' standards.

2. Research

The **research object** are the teachers' standards which were elaborated and applied in Romania in the last 20 years (1999 -2018) in order to find answers to the following **research questions:**

- Are there any models of standards which represent the Romanian experience on defining the teachers' competences?

- Can be identified some continuity/discontinuity and theoretically/methodologically elements of the process of developing professional standards for the teaching career?

In order to respond at these questions, we have done the following activities:

- analyse the published Romanian teachers' standards trying to identify some models;

- analyse the Romanian laws on education trying to find some relationships between their stipulations and the conception and structure of the models identified;

- examine model by model conception and structure and cross-referenced to the accepted types.

There were used analysis of literary sources, of normative legal documents and of official sites and the modelling, comparison, generalization, abstraction and classification of the data obtained; besides, the author have experienced, in over 30 years of university teaching - researching activities, all situations arising from legislative changes that have occurred in connection with teachers' training; as well, was deeply involved in the process of development of many of the teachers' standards at which this study refers [3, 11, 14, 15, 19, 20, 21, 22].

3. Findings: Romanian models on defining the teachers' standards

3.1 Identification of 8 models on defining the teachers' standards in Romania

In the last 20 years (1999-2018), in Romania there were elaborated and published many standards for teachers. Analysing their structure, their content and their impact, we have identified the following 8 models of defining teachers' standards: **Model COSA (**Council for Occupational Standards and Attestation)-1999; **Model MER** (Ministry of Education and Research)-2002; **Model NCST** (National Council for pre-university Staff Training)-2004; **Model NCAQVT** (National Council for Adult Qualifications and Vocational Training)-2007; **Model NCST-PHARE**-2007; **Model NAQ-1** (National Authority for Qualification)-2011; **Model NQFHE** (National Qualification Framework for Higher Education-2012(elaborated)-2017(published); **Model NAQ-2** (National Authority for Qualification) - 2018.
Before their description, it is necessary to understand the relation between the process of defining these standards with the Romanian legislation on education.

3.2 Romanian education legislation on teachers' standards

There are two legislation documents that highlight the need to define the teachers' standards:

- **Education Law no. 84/1995**, who stipulates "*the obligation of the Ministry of Education and Research to establish, by the specialized bodies, the national standards for the attestation of the quality of teaching staff"* [9, art.155], and

- **National Education Law no.1/2011**, that outlines that "*The professional development of teaching staff, management, guidance and control and professional retraining are based on professional standards for the teaching profession*" [10, art. 244].

Both refer to the standards for teachers but we observe that each of them has its own approach: as the first one [9] requires "*the national standards for **the attestation** of the quality of teaching staff",* that means the minimum requirements to obtain a teaching position,the second one refers "to **professional standards** for **the teaching profession**", a quite enlarged perspective as it relates to the teaching profession and to the professional development of the teaching staff and, as well, of the management, guidance and control staff.

This finding leads us to organise the 8 identified models in two types (Table 1):

Table 1: Teachers' standards categories

Year	1. Occupational teachers' standards	2. Professional teachers' standards	
		Professional teaching role	Professional teaching career
1999	COSA Model		
2002		MER Model	
2004		NCST Model	
2005	NCAQVT Model		
2007			NCST-PHARE Model
2011	NAQ-1 Model		
2012- 2017			NQFHE Model
2018	NAQ -2 Model		

3.3.1. Occupational teachers' standards: They are used "*for the attestation of the quality of teaching staff*" [9],for the recruitment of the teachers. They express the minimum level at which the competencies of the teacher have to be placed, providing clear, unified national benchmarks for the quality of the teaching staff and, implicitly, for the educational processes they make possible. They are named **occupational standards**, the teaching activity being understood as a simple occupation, something like: driver, plumber, watchmaker, etc.

3.3.2. Professional teachers' standards, between which we have identified:
   a) Standards centred only on the professional teaching role;
    b) Professional standards of the teaching career.

3.3 Structure of the teachers' standards

3.3.1. Occupational teachers' standards

Models COSA (1999), NCAQVT (2007) and NAQ-1 (2011) have a very similar structure as they were developed by the same specialized body of the Ministry of Education, but with a name which changed in time, by reorganization [7, art.340], COSA, Council for Occupational Standards and Attestation, being the first specialized body empowered by Government Decision No. 779/1999 to elaborate and approve occupational standards.
Their theoretical and methodological approach were inspired especially by the Australian model, which defined the standard as a *"fixed/influenced performance specification of the industry that establishes the skills, knowledge and attitudes necessary for an efficient job at the job. The standards are composed of competence units, which in turn are composed of elements of competence, along with performance criteria, a range of variables and a sample guide*" [1].
Thus, **the COSA Model** [3] contains the *Occupation description* and *Units of Competence*. Each unit of competence is described by: - the title of the competence unit (major activities leading to a measurable result); - elements of proficiency; - criteria for realization; - range of variables: - contexts and conditions; - assessment guide (evidence required to demonstrate competence); - qualification level.
The NCAQVT Model.

National Council for Adult Qualifications and Vocational Training requests, in 2007, the use of the format: *Occupation description, Areas of competence, Competence units,* each competence being described as in the Table 2:

Table 2: NCAQVT model of describing a competence

The title of the unit of competence
Elements of competence   Criteria for realization
The range of variables:
Evaluation:
Knowledge:

In 2009, National Authority for Qualifications, in its *Guidelines: M1, M2, M3, M1 + M2 + M3,*recommended [13] the competence description as in Table 3.

Table 3: The unit of competence description - according to NAQ Guide M2 [13]

Unit of competence title and type			Occupation reference code (completed by NAQ)
Unit of competence description			Level of the unit
Elements of competence	Criteria for realization of the practical skills	Criteria for realization of the needed knowledge	Criteria for realization of the needed attitudes
1.			
2.			
3.			
Range of variables			
Assessment			

In spite of the fact that this competence description reflects the EQF-2008 approach [7, 16], two years later, in 2011, NAQ uses the same structure as in 2007, see NCAQVT Model: *Occupation description, Areas of competence, Competence units,* but requests the organization of competences in *key*, *general* and *specific* competence and the following format for the description of a unit of competence (Table 4,**the NAQ-1 Model**):

Table 4: NAQ -1 Model of describing a competence

	Unit of competence	Level of autonomy and responsibility
Elements of competence	Criteria for realization of the activity described by element of competence	Criteria for realization of how was accomplished the activity described by element of competence
...	...	...
- Contexts		
- The range of variables:		
- Knowledge		

That description have *The Occupational standards: Instructor, Master Instructor* (14), *The occupational Standard: Gymnasium and high-school teacher (15)* and more than a hundred occupational standards published on the National Authority for Qualifications site, since June, 2018. [18].

As a partial conclusions, the structure of these 3 models is based only on the following approach: ”*The Occupational Standard (SO) is the document that specifies the competencies and the qualitative level associated with the results of an occupation-specific activity”* [18].

The Model NAQ-2 (2018)

To respect the recent 3712/2018 Order [18], NAQ **has changed the name of the standards**: from *Occupational Standards* to *Occupational Standards for Education and Vocational Training.* (site.anc.edu.ro soefp). This reflects a different theoretical an methodological conception on occupational standard which, in 2018 is defined as "*a national reference tool that also includes elements related to the learning activities and conditions set in a VET program, on the basis of which a person acquires the knowledge and skills necessary to successfully complete the tasks of an occupation required by the market work*" [18].

Accordingly to it, the last one, **Model NAQ-2 (2018**) **has a different structure**. It contains two sections: Section A - Labour Market Requirements and Section B - Requirements for education and training.(18, p.3).

The first one, named *Occupational standard*, presents technical information on: - the name of the occupation (in Romanian and English); - occupation membership of the Classification of Occupation in Romania (COR) and its identification code; - level of qualification according to the provisions of the National Qualifications Framework, respectively the European Qualifications Framework; - activities specific to the occupation; - competencies and skills necessary to carry out activities specific to the occupation (including the ESCO competencies, if any); occupational profile/education and training requirements and access to other occupations.

Section B, named Standard *for the quality assurance in education and vocational training associated to occupation,* details the learning process: theoretical and practical training time, content, forms of organization, human and material resources, assessment criteria; also, information on actors involved in the process of development, verification, endorsement, validation and approval of respective occupational standard.

3.3.2. Professional teachers' standards

Professional teachers' standards are based on a quite different approach: the teaching is considered no more as a simple occupation, but as a complex **profession**. Analysing this category of teachers' standards, we observed that the process of defining teachers' standards was firstly, by 2001, oriented only to the principal role of the teacher - to teach a certain subject, and, by 2007, to the professional development of the teachers. So, professional teachers' standards can be differentiated (see Table 1) as:

a) Standards centred only on the professional teaching role.

b) Professional standards of the teaching career; they are statements regarding the qualitatively expected level of the professional benefits of the teachers, differentiated by levels of education and degrees of expertise: full-time teacher, second degree teacher, first degree teacher, professor emeritus.

a) Standards regarding only professional teaching role: MER Model (2002) and NCST Model (2004)

At the heart of the process of defining the standards, which we refer at as *MER Model (2002) and NCST Model (2004),* was the conception that *"the standards of the teaching profession should specify the requirements of education **for the work done by a teacher in the chair"*** [11, p. 64].

The MER Model (2002*): "Professional Standards for the Teaching Profession"* [11]

As a structure, these standards contain 5 elements: - activities expected to be performed by the teacher; - description (characteristics) of these activities in terms of knowledge, skills and mentalities; - motivation of the need to carry out these actions; - evaluation criteria, and forms of assessment.

They were published in the volume "Professional Standards for the Teaching Profession" [11]. To be observed that, for the first time, these standards are named *"professional",* not *"occupational"* and they refer not to the teachers but to the *teaching profession.*

Also, this model operates with the concept of *"pedagogical competence*", defined as *"the level of performance in the exercise of the didactic profession in which various methodical, pre-existing algorithms for the accomplishment of some work tasks are selected, combined and implemented depending on the changes of the situational context in which they perform their instructive-educational activity with students*" [11, p. 34].

However, the notion *standard of the teaching profession* has been used with a narrow meaning**;** the MER model abstains from the other roles of the teacher: school manager, student counsellor, curriculum designer, etc.

Model NCST (2004)

At the end of 2004 came into force, through an Order [12], *National Standard for Teaching*, elaborated by NCST for didactic functions of teacher, leadership, mentoring and control functions [12].

As a structure, the formula: *general competences* (didactic, psycho-educational, psychosocial, managerial and socio-educational skills, professional development) and *specific competencies* (refer to the candidate's specialization) were adopted for the elaboration of the standards regarding the **didactic** functions of teacher. For each general competence, were stated: categories of activities; ways to achieve; assessment tools.

The professional standards system developed by NCST in 2004 has been and still is a clear benchmark for providers of in-service training. It is, however, insufficiently used in the design and evaluation of initial and continuing teacher training programs.

b) Professional standards for the teaching career

NCST-PHARE Model (2007)

The Competences of Teachers and High School Leaders in Rural Areas in Romania and Other States of the European Union, Comparative Analysis [17, p.34-61]*,* is a Romanian model based on the analysis of teacher competency standards in Romania and other countries, and discussions with teachers from several counties.

Taking into consideration teaching as *"a qualified profession*" [4, p.11], the development of these standards is based on the analysis of teachers' roles and responsibilities, as well as on assumptions about how these roles and responsibilities are to be met. *"This means that standards are conditioned by certain values".*[17, p.19].

The competences description is quite different. It starts from the establishment of 5 basic competences, which describe the major responsibilities and actions that teachers do **during their professional careers.** For each basic competence, 3 levels are established, levels of competence not representing levels of experience but rather a framework for general and identifiable aspects of professional skills and outcomes (Table 5).

Table 5: The format of NCST-PHARE Model (2007)

The basic competences	Level I	Level II	Level III
The basic competence 1 Facilitate learning and pupils centred teaching innovative processes	Involve students in meaningful and appropriate learning experiences	Pay attention to the different learning styles and needs of students by consistently employing a diverse range of teaching strategies	Use appropriate strategies and techniques that meet the needs of students, groups and / or student classes in an inclusive way
The basic competence 2 ... *The basic competence 5*			

The competence *standards, competence descriptors, competence elements, performance criteria* are formulated for each basic competence and for each level; they *"outline the range of professional activities in which teachers are involved as they apply the professional knowledge, skills and qualities in the context of teaching activity"* [17, p.36].

NQFHE Model - (2012-2017)

It is related to the document *Professional Standards for the evolution in the teaching career* [21].

The structure and content of the model capitalizes the descriptors of the *European Framework of Qualification*, 2008, (7), as well as elements of models that were developed in*A Reference Framework for Designing teaching career professional Standards* [19], in*Methodology on the development of the NQFHE, 2009* [22], whose main provisions were included in the National Education Law no. 1/2011, [10, art. 341].

Teoretically, his model uses a broad concept of *"professional development"*at which an EU document refers as*: "the body of systematic activities to prepare teachers for their job, including initial training, induction courses, in-service training, and continuous professional development within school settings"* [5, p. 21], and, as well, an integrated model of the *"competence"* concept [20].

As it is internationally recognized that the teaching staff performs many professional roles, the key source of competency derivation here is the professional roles of teachers.

The NQFHE model [21] is based on the conception that the teacher roles and related activities are not stable, but integrated into a dynamic process that leads to content changes of classroom and schools roles and the emergence of new roles. So, professional standards regarding the evolution in the teaching career contain references to plans: *a) Continuous training* - initial training; *b)Levels of schooling*: early education, primary education, lower secondary education, upper secondary education, continuous training and *c) The evolution in the teaching career*:debutant teacher, second grade teacher, grade I teacher. (Table 6). Belgium (Flemish Community), Croatia, Sweden and the United Kingdom (Scotland) are examples of countries that specify the competences that are appropriate at several different career stages, teaching areas or levels [6, p.24].

<u>Table 6: Description of the professional teachers' competences in *Teachers' Professional Standards for Career Development*(NQFHE Model)</u>

Unit of professional competence	**Level of professional qualification**: 6 - Licence/ 7- Master/ 8- Doctorate **Level of the teaching expertise**: definitive/ second degree/ first degree, continuing education

<div align="center">Description of the professional competence</div>

Elements of competence	Knowledge		Skills		Attitudes
	Use of specific language; explanation and interpretation	Application, transfer and problem solving	Critical and constructive reflection	Creativity and innovation	Autonomy and responsibility

Transversal competences: **social and personal development** (expressed in terms of the descriptors: Social interaction; Communication; Life and career management)

Each type of learning outcome, knowledge, skills, and attitudes has its own autonomy, indicates distinct training objectives, specialized professional training processes, and specific evaluation processes.

Between these three types of learning outcomes there is a relationship of interdependence and, at the same time, a hierarchy in the process of achieving these results, namely: certain types of knowledge base the skills, and a certain set of knowledge and abilities leads to the development competence.

At the same time, the NQFHE model has its own identity; it integrates categories and types of competences, qualification levels and specific descriptors, consistently respecting the conceptual delimitations adopted and complying with the definitions of the EU Parliament [7]. Level descriptors entered into the matrix indicate the expected activities, results, and performances for each level of qualification and career development. They allow the description of the qualifications and, at the same time, formulate the necessary benchmarks for assessing the level of achievement or learning outcomes.

The document [21] offers a progressive framework of standards, reflecting the progression expected of teachers as their professional attributes, knowledge, understanding, abilities and attitudes develop and they demonstrate increasing effectiveness in their roles, clarifying the professional characteristics that a teacher should be expected to maintain and to build on at their current career stage. After the induction year, therefore, teachers would be expected to continue to meet the core standards and to broaden and deepen their professional attributes, knowledge-understanding, abilities/ skills, autonomy and responsibility attitudes within that context. This principle applies at all subsequent career stages.

The model is based on the conception that the relevant standards should be looked at **as a whole** in order to help teachers identify areas of strength and areas for further professional development. The standards clarify what teaching career progression looks like and, as now, the request that to access each career stage a teacher will need to demonstrate that he/she has met the relevant standards.

4. Discussion

4.1. The research indicates that all teachers' standards taken into consideration:
- were carried out in projects coordinated by specialized body of Ministry of Education (COSA, NCAQVT, NCST, NAQ), by teams of teachers from pre - university and university education, and executives school inspectors, researchers, trade union or the Sectorial Education Committee representatives;
- were discussed in various workshops, have been verified, validated and published;
- use the concepts "standard" and "competence", most often in syntax or with different meanings;
- the definition of professional competencies has been achieved not only for teachers (educator, teacher, master instructor), but, as well, for school managers and didactic auxiliary staff.

4.2. The analyse leads us to observe that, as a matter of fact, Romanian teaching' standards can be classified in two types: occupational and professional. These perspectives appeared in time, as a result not only of the evolution of the education theory and legislation but, as well, as a result of a larger international, European and Romanian experience accumulated in defining teachers' competences, and in writing and working with teachers' professional standards.

As was noticed, each of these category has its evolution in time, and we have to relate that to the evolution of the concept of *competence-based education* itself.

The concept of competence-based education was originally based on a behavioral model of learning and learning. Both in the practice of curriculum design and teaching-learning, the influence (and thus the weaknesses) of the behavioral model is still strong. As well, in the development of occupational teachers' standards, especially of those we included in so named COSA, NCAQVT and NAQ-1 models. The model NAQ-2 seems to prouve the effort Romanian legislation are trying to overcome the risks and shortcomings of a behavioral approach to competence-based education definition of occupational standards.

Currently, competence-based education focuses on a holistic approach presented as the norm. Countries applying a holistic approach are: Germany, the Netherlands, Scandinavian countries where competence is regarded as *"integrated skills needed to deal with complex tasks"* [2, p. 225-237]. This integrated or holistic approach is reflected by the second type of teachers' standards identified in the study, especially by those we refer at as "Professional standards for the teaching career", NCST-Phare and NFQHE models.

5. Conclusions

Results of present study allows us to conclude that:
- There are two strands of teachers' standards in Romania: one through National Authority for Qualifications, and a second one through universities which are much more familiarized with NQFHE Methodology [22]. Tradition has had these two areas separated for a long time and it looks as if this binary system is going to stay. Interestingly enough, this situation is mirrored in the way they are used, having implications for two types of teacher policies: hiring, recruitment and selection, on the one hand, and education process and teachers professional development, on the other. How long the two systems of defining teachers' standards will remain separated, we are facing the challenge of designing and realizing initial and in-service teacher training programmes on different theoretically approach, in spite of the fact that both are offered by the same university, the same university trainers working in both areas.
- According to TALIS, 2010, "during the last three decades two basic teaching and learning paradigms have dominated professional discourse: constructivist-inspired

teaching versus more structured (also often qualified as traditional) teaching. The two paradigms are the basis of divergent beliefs about teaching and learning" [5, p.27]. This can be seen as having implications for the development of two types of teachers' standard: occupational and professional; how to select good teachers, on the one hand, and how to assure the quality of the teaching profession on the other. In designing the occupational standards, more attention was focused on the behavioural repertoire of teachers than on deeply rooted aspects of their personality.Constructivist ideas have gradually been incorporated in professional teachers' standards and teaching practices along with more traditional approaches.

- A professional standard is a benchmark not only for the analysis, recognition and evaluation of teachers' professionalism, but also for: young people who intend to opt for the teaching career, institutions offering initial and in-service training programs for teaching staff, institutions evaluating or accrediting training programs; school managers who develop policies for the recruitment and development of human resources in school; institutions / researchers conducting comparative benchmarking on the professional training of teachers from different countries; each teacher to develop their own training and professional development projects and self-evaluation of their own performance.

- The substance of a professional teacher standard, what *is* and how it is constituted – *remains under-examined* in the Romanian research field, and particularly in the context of education. As Evans suggests, *"To be real, standards /competences have to be something that people – professionals – actually 'do', not simply something that the government or any other agency wants them to do, or mistakenly imagines they are doing"* [8, p.8].

- The changes in the teaching profession necessitate up-to-date and constantly developing teachers' standards, or, as it was called, *reinventing the wheel at regular intervals*. Over the years, building standards and defining the competencies of teachers and management staff have made clear progress in Romania, both conceptually and methodologically. Developing and periodically updating professional standards of teachers career development has been and must be subordinated to the idea that professional standards are not just a technical issue but must be associated with a value education table. Teachers' value options are those that orientate one way or another on their professional life.

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