

EDUCATIONAL POLICIES ON INITIAL TEACHER TRAINING FOR PRESCHOOL AND PRIMARY EDUCATION

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Abstract: *Educational policies on teacher education are in a continuous changing and have different forms for schooling levels. Are the routes of teachers' initial training for preschool and primary education still oscillating: medium level and/or higher level? Neither the National Education Act (2011) and any documents of the two agencies concerned and teacher training (ARACIP and ARACIS) do not clarify the relationship between the two routes to professionalize teaching. The initial teacher training for these education segments is only one aspect of the complex issues that the teaching profession is dealing with: role and status, selection and recruitment, evaluation and control inputs and outputs of the system, supply and demand, differentiated funding and remuneration, expectations and teachers' motivation etc. This article attempts to summarize the pros and cons of the two routes in the professional existence and their effects on teaching training skills. The teacher, especially the preschool and primary education teacher, ensures the start for all other professions.*

Key words: educational policies, teacher training, initial training, teaching competence

The relationship between political - politics - public policy and educational policy is a complex relationship that allows the mechanisms that occur in classrooms to be understood. Educational policies are the subject of multiple quantitative and qualitative analyses. The vector validating politics is its viability on the field. Therefore, „the pulse” of an education policy, in the teacher's work, can be the best taken during classes. The authenticity of an education policy for initial teacher training is reflected in the report that this one has it with the entire political sphere. From this report between

policy and educational policy the degree of politicization of the education system can be derived.

1. Conceptual Clarifications

The political is social space in which the people act conscious to promote the diversity of interests (individual, general, group social, national, international, economic, spiritual, political etc.). In this constellation of interests are found the aims and necessities of the holders of power that perform political activities.

Politics, like other concepts from the social sciences, does not have an universally accepted definition. This thing allows a conceptual analysis about politics from several perspectives: institutional, procedural, of content etc.

As an institutional dimension, the politics represent all the organizations/institutions, in which actions are taken to achieve political goals. As a procedural dimension, the politics include decision-making, conflicts, objectives and interests, mechanisms of conflict situations regulating etc. The content of policy refers to issues resolving and the execution of tasks through political and administrative system that makes all required decisions. This latter dimension of politics is reflected in the phrase: *public policy* and represents the actions realised by the authorities (central or local) in response to problems that come from society.

The best known definitions for the phrase *public policy* are:

- „A set of interrelated decisions taken by a political actor or a group of political actors with regards to a series of goals and means to achieve them in a given situation”. (Jenkins, W.,1978)
- „Public policies mediate between parties, parliaments, ministerial responsibility, on one hand considering and deciding priorities, giving resources and outlining directions of development and administrator, and on the other hand implementing and evaluating policies”. (Thoenig, J.-Cl., 1985)
- „A course of action followed by an actor or more political actors, having a purpose in trying to solve a problem”. (Anderson J.,1996)
- „Everything that a government decides to do or not to do”. (Dye, Th., 1998)

- „Public policy is a network of interrelated decisions concerning the choice of objectives, means and resources used to achieve their specific situations”. (Miroiu, A., 2001)
- „Public policies are usually decisions already taken, and not intentions or promises”. (Young, E. & Quinn, L., 2002)
- „The public policy is the answer that the government gives to those needs of society, considered to be of a general interest and of a greater importance as they are satisfied with public money”. (Popescu, L.-G., 2014)

In short, public policies are government actions in response to the real needs or issues of the world, developed with purpose, and include decision taken by an actor or a group of social actors.

By Government Decision no. 870/2006 the public policies are defined as „all activities of the specialized central public administration in order to resolve the problems identified and to ensure the needed developments in a particular field”.

Among public policies we also identify those from education area. The phrase *educational policy* allows multiple approaches, on different directions. The vectors that permit of the relationship between politics and education to express, have different depths. Some problems of educational policy may be theoretical, sometimes rhetorical, intellectual analysis, others are oriented on pragmatic structures, administrative, operational.

The interface between politics and education can reveal information about the management of the school, on reforms and innovations in school-type organization; relationship between employers and unions; about curriculum and teaching skills; about the relationship between technology and education, political philosophy and philosophy of education; about initial and continuous training of teachers; about teachers' salaries; gender policies in education or the policy on preventing and combating violence in schools; about the relationship between politics and student assessment system; dynamics of political doctrines and education systems etc.

In this entire themed carousel, the contemporary issues of educational policies are determined by social choices on the form and content of education. They also relate to ensure non-discriminatory nature of teaching and learning throughout the development lifecycle.

In the series of terminology clarification, an important aspect is the phenomenon of education politicization. We can see two aspects of this phenomenon: (1) the use of education as a subject in the political agendas of

the parties and (2) impregnating some educational decisions (administrative, managerial) with political decisions.

In Romania there is a multiparty system with two major parties and several smaller parties. The struggle for political power makes it impossible to maintain a majority government. There are frequent changes of government and every change brings a new minister at the Ministry of Education. In over 26 years since the change of the regime they have succeeded over 20 ministers of education. Only in the year of 2012 the Ministry had six ministers! The strong politicization, in the debate between parties, reflected negatively, on educational policies. First Law of Education after 1989 has undergone more than 60 amendments during the period 1995-2010. The current Law on Education, since 2011, has already been massive amended, by three emergency ordinances!

Romania has a Pact for Education (2008) at a high level, which received the support of all political parties, unions, teachers and other education interest groups. There are also numerous national strategies that address a variety of issues of educational policy. Since 2015 appeared The Coalition for Education. This is a federation of NGOs interested in improving the education system, which „must start from teachers and from how they are formed initially and how their training continues throughout life”. Although there are policies regulating the educational area, in the system of education in our country are large and very large problems. As long as there will not exist harmonization between educational expertise and long-term political engagement, things will not sit on a favorable track neither for teachers, nor for our main beneficiaries: children and students.

Educational policies on teacher training

Romanian educational policies on teacher training are few, being deficitary on the early education and primary education segments and also outdated. So, the educational practices for implementing these (few) educational policies, are minimal. The national context (educational, social, economic and demographic) does not differ much from the international contexts in terms of discrepancies between policy makers and the practitioners in schools. There are worldwide decisions on numerous educational policy studies and reports, but the situation of millions of teachers around the world remains problematic.

It's a commonplace to say that schools are changing very hard and difficult. The causes are many and the explanations are on measure. David Labaree, professor of history at Stanford University, interested in the history of reforms in American education, sustained in the work *Someone Has to Fail*

(2010) that education systems are „elastic, perpetually expanding, perpetually unequal, constantly reformed and essentially never change too much”. If we relate to policy makers on teacher training, Labaree believes it should take into account the following differences: „Teachers focus on what is special in their classrooms, and reformers on what is universal in all classrooms. Teachers operate in a framework dominated by personal relationships; reformers operate within a framework dominated by abstract political and social objectives. Teachers based on teaching experience, reformers based on social scientific theory. Teachers embrace the ambiguity in the class process, while reformers seek clarity tables and graphs ... Teachers focus on professional adaptability, reformers focus on standardizing their practices and school results”.

Another professor from the same famous university, Larry Cuban, while analyzing way the educational policies transform during classes, states that the „factors of policy decisions and the teachers, live in different worlds”. The quoted author shows that policymakers make a confusion between the quality of the teachers and quality of teaching, between the personal traits of teachers - flexible, open, meticulous, thoughtful, active, curious or rather the opposite - and the classroom organization or the institutions of education; confusion between the teacher's personality and specific situations in which he teaches, namely: age students, their number, educogen family environment, workplace conditions, the resources available to them in everyday activities.

In Europe and also in our country, the situation of the occupational category of the teachers is not different from that of American teachers.

In a report of the Court of Auditors from 2015 it is states that „the Romanian students in PISA tests obtained continuously poor results, indicating the reduced performance of primary and secondary education.” According to statistics, 42% of the children aged 15, are in the position of being functionally illiterate (followed in education, can reproduce text, but do not understand its ideas). These results reflect, in fact, how students were educated by their teachers and we understand how those teachers were trained!

The initial teacher training is the cornerstone of any education system. The quality of the human resource entering the educational system has fundamental impact on what is happening in education, in every stage, and on each series of graduates. Some graduates return to the education system, as teachers. The more these graduates are better prepared and more willing to stay in the education system, the more it will increase the value of education. A performant higher education can only be "build" over the performances

from the pre-university system. The negative effects of a policy geared mainly towards higher education have already begun to show. Without a solid foundation in secondary education, higher education quality is likely to fail.

Initial training of teachers in Romania was influenced, since period before the accession to the European Union, various European documents on education and training. Bologna Declaration (1999) and subsequently the European Common Principles for Training Skills and Qualification of Teachers (2005) have brought significant changes in terms of organization of Romanian university education. Thus, by Law no. 288/2004 on the organization of university, higher education is organized on three levels: bachelor, master and doctorate. Under the same law, beginning with the 2005-2006 academic year, the application to the European System of Transferable Credits (ECTS) is mandatory, and the Diploma Supplement is issued, according to European standards.

The majority of EU Member States adapted their education systems to the recommendations of the Bologna Declaration. However, in an analysis carried at nearly 10 years since the Bologna process' „the reforms of initial training of teachers remain problematic in terms of visibility, readability and comparability structures of teacher training and qualifications." (Dimitropoulos, A., 2008).

Today, teacher training involves changes at all levels: cognitive, attitudinal and behavioral, requiring adaptability proactive, effective in completely new situations, unknown and difficult to approach. In this regard, as professor Romița Iucu suggests, there are required differentiated curriculum routes for teacher training. The today's society defines, beyond current educational arena, new roles for the teaching profession: teamwork, mentoring, advising students, professional training, action research, participation in the organization and administration of the school (Iucu, R., 2010, p .62).

Teacher training policies calls for teachers, in a widely accepted definition, the following capabilities: taking an active and constructive-critic attitude towards education; an innovative involvement in the educational activity; a continuous self-evaluation and self-teaching in their educational activity.

Teacher Training Policies for Preschool and Primary Education

It is extremely difficult to build a clear picture of the initial training of teachers in this time of transition. We will attempt a description that contains both elements of the practices of the past and others that will occur in the near future. Professional routes for initial training to the human resource for preschool and primary segments are different from country to country.

The mode to organize the courses and practical experiences for teacher preparation is continuously changing due to new roles a teacher meets during classroom. It is therefore necessary a reformation of teacher training. To have high qualified teachers is it needed a high quality of training. But this means to consider the cost-effectiveness of training teachers, so as to increase the education system.

In our tradition there were training teachers for preschool and primary school in normal schools/ pedagogical high school until the early 2000s. After the Bologna Declaration were created the transient structures of non-university level, called colleagues, lasting 3 years, offering graduation diploma. The colleges offer students, future teachers, the training for preschool and primary segments, as well as a qualification in a field of study: arts (music or drawing), physical education, religion or a foreign language (English in most cases). The colleges functioned within the former pedagogical high school, with the human resources for the training offered by them in order to be trained, but were coordinated of universities.

In terms of the imminent entry of Romania in EU (2007), starting with the 2005-2006 academic year, teacher training for preschool and primary education is achieved within universities. On this path of teacher training, Romania was able to close Chapter 18 - Education and training - from the *Acquis communautaire*. Pedagogical high schools have gone through many changes, negative sense, in the last ten years. Although pedagogical high schools are yet a teaching route of teacher training for primary and preschool, but they do not represent, as before, an elite school of Romanian education. Pedagogical high schools are in a crisis of quality teacher-formators for early childhood education and primary education teachers, by the disappearance of pedagogy teachers and the teacher-mentors (ANCLP, 2016).

There are currently two parallel routes teacher training for preschool and primary education - a high school level and a university level, which creates a series of problems:

a) institutional level:

- pedagogical high school has a duration of 4 years, comprising young people aged 14-18; it is included in university education and is rated by institutional ARACIP; requires test for admission (diction, motor coordination, skills and musical aptitude plastic); the graduation diploma;
- PIPP university specialization lasts for 3 years, 180 ECTS credits and diploma supplement; it includes only graduates with a baccalaureate

Comment [RbD1]:

diploma; not all universities require proof of proficiency for admission; authorized / accredited by ARACIS; bachelor's degree.

b) curriculum level:

- there are any major curricular differences, although high school and university are on different levels of education and, theoretically, cannot be equated;
- there is no didactical textbooks for pedagogical high schools;
- number of practice teaching hours is substantially different, on behalf the pedagogical high schools; are different forms of teaching practice in pedagogical high school (weekly/individual/massed), while practice at the university there is only one form of teaching (2-5 hours / week during the 6 semesters).

c) at the financial level there are important salary differences, for those with higher education.

Similar problems, even more complicated than in our country, are in most European countries that have agreed to Bologna Process. In the report of the working group The European Network on Teacher Education Policies (ENTEPE), signed by Apostolis Dimitropoulos (2008), there is a set of conclusions on the subject. In what follows we refer only at the peculiarities of teacher training for preschool and primary education.

„Pre-primary school teacher education:

- Over half of countries introduced reforms in initial pre-primary teacher education after the initiation of the Bologna Process (1999).
- In most cases those reforms were, in some way, connected to the national implementation of the Bologna Process.
- In over two-thirds of the countries a degree at higher education level is required for pre-primary schoolteachers. Mostly this is a BA level degree. A few countries are introducing a master's degree.
- In almost two-thirds of countries there are no alternative pathways to pre-primary teacher status. In a few countries primary schoolteachers are also qualified for pre-primary school.
- About three-quarters of countries apply the concurrent model (generally combining educational sciences with teacher education). A few countries offer both concurrent and consecutive models or combine them in different ways.
- The duration of initial pre-primary teacher education varies across countries, ranging from 3-4 years of study.

- In just over half of countries, pre-primary schoolteachers are educated at universities. In all other cases there is great variety, ranging from upper secondary level to non-university higher education institutions.
- A few countries have implemented ECTS in pre-primary teacher education.
- There is a clearly visible and longer-term trend for countries to move initial education for pre-primary schoolteachers into the university sector and to increase the number of years of study.
- There is also a somewhat weaker trend to introduce a master's level degree as a requirement for qualification as a pre-primary schoolteacher". (Iucu, R., 2010, pp 69-70)

„Primary schoolteacher education

- Almost all countries introduced reforms in initial primary teacher education after the initiation of the Bologna Process (1999).
- In most cases those reforms were, in some way, connected to the national implementation of the Bologna Process.
- In all countries a degree at higher education level is required for qualification as a primary schoolteacher. In most cases this is a BA level degree.
- In very few countries alternative pathways exist to qualification as a primary schoolteacher (and this is mainly for holders of higher education degrees, other than primary school teaching qualifications).
- Most countries apply the concurrent model (generally combining educational sciences with teacher education). A few countries offer both concurrent and consecutive models or combine them in different ways.
- The duration of initial primary schoolteacher education varies across countries, ranging from 3-5 years.
- In over three-quarters of countries, primary schoolteachers are educated only in universities. In a few countries primary schoolteachers are also educated in non-university higher education institutions.
- About half of countries have introduced ECTS in initial primary schoolteacher education.
- There is a clearly visible and longer-term trend for countries to move initial education for primary schoolteachers into the university sector and to increase the number of years of study.
- There is also a trend, although somewhat weaker, to introduce a masters level degree as a requirement for qualification as a primary schoolteacher." (Iucu, R., 2010, pp 70-71).

For that, the initial training of teachers to join the Bologna Process objectives, says Otmar Gassner (2010), the efforts should be intensified as the content and skills in teacher training programs to be compatible. Only then teacher training program in Romania will really be comparable throughout Europe, and only then our program will constitute a solid basis for the employability of Romanian teachers in UE.

Regarding the grid of achievement of initial training in the near future, as it transpires from the previous statement, it needs to be introduced a master level degree. The issue about the master degree arises for initial teacher training for secondary and high school levels. It's a controversial idea, because the concept of master cannot be associated with the initial level, beginner or novice. Master signifies a level of mastery of the knowledge and skills deepening of previously acquired, in initial training.

Instead of conclusions

Teachers are the axis of all education systems. In all political programs it states that education is a national priority, but not all governments understand to invest in teachers and in their education. Teacher training must be of high quality, because of the quality of teacher education depends on student achievement.

A good preparing of children and students from pre-school and primary education provides a good start for secondary and later for high school and university studies. All innovating approaches for these two segments of education are welcome as long as it provides a fundamental training teachers on:

- a) understanding that each teacher working in a national framework, has a national identity as a basis for transnational awareness in European society; without a balance between national and European dimension, educational policies are not viable;
- b) every teacher must assimilate the national curriculum, but must see beyond - with the roots in the national traditions and with an European perspective; diversity in unity means national identity and transnational awareness, an open mind towards the world, in general;
- c) a teacher for primary / preschool must have knowledge about other educational systems and educational policies at EU level; only then will be able to assess their own system of education and history of this

- system, and to relate to other educational systems, past and contemporary;
- d) initial training of teachers it makes today in multicultural contexts, which implies respect for their own culture and other cultures; self-esteem involves respect for others, openness, acceptance of differences, non-discrimination;
 - e) initial teacher training involves the mobility of students, future teachers; this means that they could speak or teach different subjects in the language community where mobility applies;
 - f) even during initial training a student must have knowledge about the finalities of curricular programs and educational content, about teaching-learning methodologies and assessment strategies from other European countries;
 - g) the educational practices should not be restricted to national boundaries but must be exploited effectively by integrating new technologies.

It is obvious that there are several points of view. Educational policies should take into account multiple perspectives; they are not a fixed product. Any educational policy must be seen as a process that involves negotiation, challenge, fighting between various interest groups that may be located outside official policy mechanisms. Borrowing ideas from outside the national framework, validated by research "on the ground" means the risk of unsuccessful implementation or inadequacy of policy for initial training of teachers. The realities of each system of initial teacher training are varied and there are large differences in how different individuals shape reality (Smit, B., 2003). Also, „the filters” from rhetoric to policy operationalization by teachers in the classroom are many and extremely varied, depending on the knowledge and attitudes that they have.

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