QUALITY IN EDUCATION THROUGH PROFESSIONAL INSERTION MENTORSHIP – A REFERENTIAL STRATEGY IN PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

Ioan NEACŞU [a], Sorina CHIRCU[B7*]
[a] The University of Bucharest, Romania
[b] Politehnica University of Bucharest, Romania
chircusorina@gmail.com

Abstract: The quality of any academic training program results from the way in which it was designed and implemented, as well as the measure to which it satisfies the training needs of the target audience. Thus a clear positive change is generated in the professional outlook, behaviour and activity of the participating social actors.The program "From start to success – national program for the professional insertion mentorship of teachers" that took place between February - December 2013 at the Politehnica University of Bucharest in cooperation with other higher education institutions, had the main goal of improving the quality of the teaching activity as well as the professional insertion of junior teachers in the primary and secondary education systems. The core intention was connected to the development of formational national system that is coherent, cohesive and sustainably qualitative of assisting in the traineeship. In order to achieve this objective, the quality assurance of the training program implementation for professional insertion mentors was necessary. In this regard coherent sets of quality procedures were created, while their implementation started from the premise that the attributes of the program can be identified both in the process of implementing and running this, as well as later, in the actual activity of the professional insertion mentor, taught through this program. We are highlighting in the present paper the degree to which the quality assurance of the professional insertion mentorship program from the project through a design-implementation-evaluation strategy that was at the foundation of the training program.

Keywords: *quality, professional insertion mentorship, mentors, training, junior teachers*

---

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +40733306117
E-mail address: chircusorina@gmail.com

1. Introduction

Based on article 248, paragraph (2) from the National Law of Education no. 1/2011, starting with 2011 in Romania the body of mentor teachers was formed that runs the traineeship for those who want to profess as teachers. Entry in the body of mentor teachers is based on a contest where minimum requirements are requested regarding experiences, abilities from the process of continuous training, as well as going through a practical test.

The teachers that have the quality of being a mentor teacher as well as belong to the body of mentor teachers benefit from the reduction of their work week with 2 hours or by receiving revenue for the mentorship activities outside their basic norm. By creating the body of mentor teachers the purpose is to fill the need for new mentor teachers, as support for the junior teachers at a national level. (Law of Education No. 1/2011).

The strategic project financed by the European Social Fund, named "From start to success – national program for the professional insertion mentorship of teachers", that took place between February-December 2013, had as an objective the improvement of the professional insertion as well as the quality growth of the teaching activity of junior teachers, from the primary and secondary education through the development of a formal national system that is coherent, cohesive ad sustainable in assisting the traineeship. The project aimed to also capitalize the experience potential of teachers with experience and international recognition in the system. A growth of the quality and attractiveness of the teaching career is anticipated through qualified mentorship support activities, as well as through the creation of a body of certified mentors on a national level in the field of practicing actual assistance in the work place, in the traineeship for the junior teachers of various specialisations. (Brundrett, Silcock, 2002). The wider context is that of the modernization of educational management and especially that of educational leadership in the skills training (Bush, 2015).

Reiterating the construction of the program objectives we are highlighting the idea of quality assurance in the implementation of the training program for professional insertion mentors. In this regard, a series of quality procedures were created (Neacşu, Bocoş, 2013), in their creation and implementation the premise was that the attributes of the program can be validated both during the process of the program, as well as later in the actual activity of the professional insertion mentor as well as through the pragmatic curriculum of this program.

2. Methodology

2.1 Objective

The present paper has the central objective to emphasize the way to which the quality assurance of the professional insertion mentorship program is assured. From an operational perspective, the working hypothesis "We expect that the strategy of design-implementation-evaluation that was at the foundation of the mentorship program to assure a high level of quality", with valid proof for evaluation taking into account the impact of the later possible transfer in the practice of the primary and secondary school system in Romania.

2.2 The curricular model offered and delivered

The internal coherence of the program for mentor training was thought out, designed and delivered with an internal logic offered by experts, the interdependence between the levels of trainers being assured, trainers who were teachers from the higher education system, with experience in training primary and secondary school teachers in the form of 3 training curricular modules.

Module 1. Professional insertion mentorship, introduces the mentorship theme, offering to the participants' information regarding quality standards in the professionalising of the teaching career (theme 1) and professional insertion mentorship – statute, skills, functions (theme 2).

Module 2. The design and delivery of the personalised programs for the professional insertion of junior teachers, of a large complexity, the theme being focused on details regarding the analysis of training needs junior teachers have, the management of the professional insertion process, modern strategies in the mentorship activity, the evaluation and self-evaluation of the mentorship activity, information activities in the mentorship activity.

Module 3. Professional counselling and communication in the mentorship activity, aimed to develop counselling and communication abilities in the mentor, by going through 2 training stages: professional counselling in the mentorship activity and communication relations in the mentorship activity.2.3 Participants
The sample is made of 342 teachers from the primary and secondary school, participants at the project as trainees in order to get the extra qualification of

being a mentor. Their distribution on education levels can be followed in Figure 1, below.
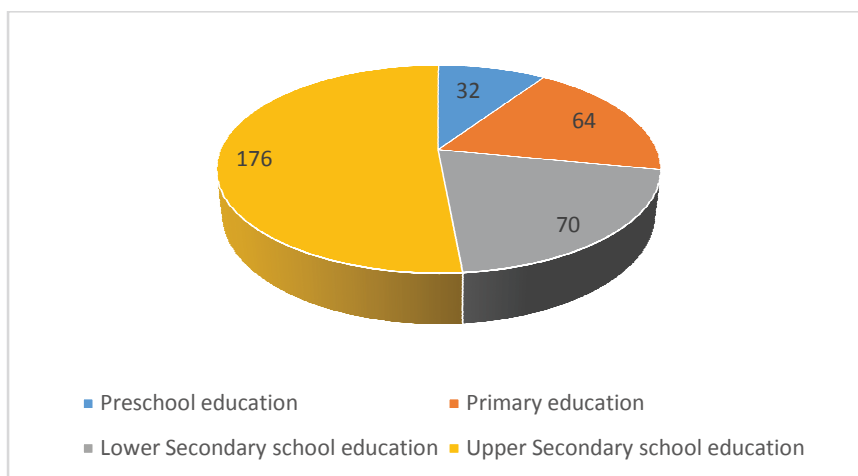

Fig.1. Sample distribution

2.4. Research methods

We have used as research methods the survey-based research that "is almost always an opinion-based research" (Iluț, 1997). With the help of the survey, as an investigation instrument, certain questions were asked and problem situations as well in order to determine various reactions from the surveyed people. As a research instrument, the survey plays a double role: it offers the indicative for respondents and constructive support for evaluating these reactions. Also, the survey based research has a standardised character because the questions are clearly formulated, as well as their number and order (Chelcea, 2004).

Also this important instrument was associated, naturally, and the values of some of the authors' observations resulted from experience, as well as from the personalised notes resulted from the many professional progress evaluation – classroom teaching in scholastic institutions from the urban and rural areas, regarding the value of the tested skills.

The survey was structured in 2 main parts:

The first part of the survey contained 54 items in the form of closed-ended questions, aiming to investigate the opinion of mentors regarding a series of aspects of the training program they participated at: internal and external coherence, reflexivity, interactivity as well as the rigorous, realistic, and revealing character of the program, etc.

The second part of the survey contained 30 items in the form of open-ended questions, aiming to observe the opinions of mentors regarding the quality of the school programs that the junior teachers use in their role as teachers o various specialisations. In the present research, we will selectively harness data from the first part of the survey, more precisely, those items that emphasize the quality of the training program in the form of its design, implementation and evaluation.

2.5. Procedure

The activity regarding the quality assurance procedures of the implementation of the training program of professional insertion mentors is based on a theoretical framework, on a set of operational procedures, on a strategy for applying the quality assurance procedures as well as clear, explicit instructions for trainers. The surveys were applied both in person, as well as through the online platform. The results were centralised and interpreted, intermediary and final reports being delivered.

In the present study we will selectively present the data obtained from the applied survey through the online platform, with the emphasis of the quality of the program on 3 analysis dimensions:

- Quality of design
o The conception that was at the basis of designing the program;
o The way in which the curriculum of the training program was designed.
- Quality of implementation
o Organisational perspective
o Perspective of the relationship participant- trainer of mentors;
- Quality of criteria valuation
o Evaluation strategies
o Internal logic of characteristics of total quality management in Education

3. Data analysis

From processing the above-mentioned items, we can draw the following conclusions and statistical data, which we order by criteria, as follows.

3.1. Quality of design

First of all, we are highlighting the relevance of the concept that was at the basis of designing the program.

Among the respondents, a highly significant majority (341 respondents) considers that the training program respects the European and national legal stipulations, again similarly of a highly significant majority (340

respondents) considers the program in accordance with the medium and long term strategies for the development of learning and education in Romania (see table 1 and 2).

Table 1. The training program respects the national and European legal stipulations

Answers	Frequency	Percent
Yes	341	99,7
No	1	,3
Total	342	100,0

Table 2. The program is in accordance with the development strategies of learning and education in Romania

Answers	Frequency	Percent
Yes	340	99,4
No	2	,6
Total	342	100,0

Moreover, the data obtained shows the fact that, mentors involved in training agree to a large and very large degree with the teaching paradigm of the program, which, on one hand, promotes a reflexive-interactive pedagogy following the activity of the participants from an intellectual, emotional-motivational point of view, and on the other hand allows the development of a high level of understanding of the specific processes of the environment and the educational field as well as the processes specific to the mentoring activity (table 3).

Table 3. The degree of accordance with the teaching paradigm promoted in the program

Answer	Frequency	Percent
Very large degree	194	56,7
Large degree	132	38,6
Moderate degree	15	4,4
Small degree	1	,3
Total	342	100,0

Overall, the respondents appreciate to a very large degree the fact that the strategic and operational manner of designing the program has assured the

interdependence between objectives-content-in person activities and online-processes-results (table 4).

Table 4. The interdependence objectives-content-in person activities, online-processes-results

Answer	Frequency	Percent
Yes	340	99,4
No	2	,6
Total	342	100,0

3.2. The design of the program curriculum

After analysing the way in which the training program curriculum was designed, we can conclude that the program was designed, as previously mentioned on 3 training modules. The construction was a logical one, and in the opinion of respondents, with assuring curricular coherence and especially while keeping an interdependence between these (see table 5 and table 6).

Table 5. Logical construction of the 3 program modules

Module	Answer	Frequency	Percent
Module 1	Yes	342	100,0
	Total	342	100,0
Module 2	Yes	340	99,4
	No	2	,6
	Total	342	100,0
Module 3	Yes	342	98,0
	Total	342	100,0

Table 6. Assuring the systemic curricular coherence of the interdependence

between the 3 modules Answer	Frequency	Percent
Yes	339	99,1
No	3	,9
Total	342	100,0

3.3. The quality of the implementation

3.3.1. The organizational perspective

From an organisational perspective, human, material and financial resources have existed in sufficient amount to produce the changes estimated related to the program, in the opinion of the teachers that participated (26).

Table 7. The existence of resources for generating the foreseen change through the program

Answer	Frequency	Percent
Yes	260	76,0
No	82	24,0
Total	342	100,0

Also, in their opinion (289) there have also existed opportunities for attracting a big enough number of teachers in the program, so that the need for expertize in the field of mentorship within the education system could be covered.

Table 8. Opportunities to participate in the mentorship program

Answer	Frequency	Percent
Yes	289	84,5
No	53	15,5
Total	342	100,0

3.3.2. The perspective of the mentor trainer-participant relationships
Approaching the perspective of the mentor trainer-participant relationships, concludes that the mentor training programs have encouraged to a large degree (91) and to a very large degree (231), the interaction of participants with them, as well as other trainees participating at the program) to a large degree -107, very large degree – 211), facilitating the exchange of teaching experience.

Table 9. Encouraging the interaction between participants and the mentor trainer

Answer	Frequency	Percent
Very large degree	231	67,5
Large degree	91	26,6
Moderate degree	17	5,0
Small degree	2	,6
Very small degree	1	,3
Total	342	100,0

Tabel 10. The measure to which the interaction of participants with their colleagues was encouraged

Answer	Frequency	Percent
Very large degree	211	61,7
Large degree	107	31,3
Moderate degree	22	6,4
Small degree	1	0 ,3
Very small degree	1	0,3
Total	342	100,0

3.4. The quality of evaluation

During the training program, a formative evaluation was delivered through the online platform (the participants had to do several homework assignments specific to each module) and an in-person final evaluation, based on a portfolio. 337 of the participants and 342 appreciate that the trainer has given realistic and significant evaluations that took into account the training needs of the junior teacher and the need for skills required in the mentoring activity (see table 11).

Table 11. The quality of the evaluation process of the mentorship program

Answer	Frequency	Percent
Yes	337	98,5
No	5	1,5
Total	342	100,0

4. Results

Data processing confirms our working hypothesis, the design-implementation-evaluation strategy that was at the basis of the mentorship program, assures a high level of quality.

4.1. Quality analysis of the mentorship program design

Analysing the quality of the mentorship program design, judging by the concept that stood at the basis of designing the program and the way in which the curriculum of the training program was created, we can conclude that:
The purpose was for the mentorship program design to be based on a realistic and strategic concept that is logical and coherent which meant the program needs to respect on one hand the national and European legal stipulations, taking into account the medium and long term strategies for developing learning and education in Romania, and on the other hand, the training program needs to be based on a reflexive-interactive pedagogy that allows the trainees to develop a high level of understanding the processes specific to the environment, the educational field and the mentorship activity (Ezechil, 2013).

The respondents consider the training program respects the national and European legal stipulations, considering them in accordance with the medium and long term strategies for developing learning and education in Romania. Furthermore, the respondents appreciate to a very large degree that the way the program was designed has assured interdependence between objectives - content- live activities and online – processes – results.

Regarding the internal coherence o the training program for mentors, the program was designed in 3 training modules, logically built on the opinion of respondents, their interdependence being assured.

4.2. Quality analysis of the mentorship program implementation

Analysing the quality in implementing the mentorship program both from an organisational perspective, as well as from the perspective of the relationship between the participant and the mentor trainer, conclude that the training sessions of mentors were carefully planned and organised. The organisational details have been posted on the platform of the project, therefore enabling dialog between the management team – experts – mentors – junior teachers.

The creation of theoretical material and organisational references was assured: the trainer's guide, programs for 8 training centres, presentations, work tasks, materials for practical sessions, surveys, a.o. In order to ensure the sustainability of the project workshops were organised with 60 teachers of which 12 were monitors and 48 were teachers from the Education system. Promotion activities of the project took place in the 8 regional centres for professional insertion mentor training by presenting the project, activities and their results on the project platform. The evaluation and certification of the trained mentors (360 certified mentors) involved the creation of specific documentation. These were done both as formative activities such as doing assignments, feedback through the online platform) as well as through summative, based on the portfolios created by the participants. Follow up activities were delivered to 8 regional centres by applying in-person surveys, as well as through the online platform. Also, online support was provided to the insertion mentors in their activities of assisting the juniors.

In mentor training, needed and sufficient human, material and financial resources have existed to produce the foreseen positive changes and at the same time, opportunities for including a number sufficiently higher of teachers in the program, so that he need for expertise in the mentorship provided in the Education system could be covered.

4.3. Quality analysis from the participant-mentor perspective

Analysing the perspective participant-mentor trainer, respondents say that the mentor trainer has encourage to a large and very large degree the interaction of participants with them, as well as with the other participants at the program, with the aim to facilitate the transfer of positive teaching experience.

4.4. Quality analysis of the training program

Analysing the quality realised in the training program, results in the fact that a formative evaluation was done through the online platform (participants had to do several assignments specific to each module) and a final evaluation, in person, based on the portfolio, respondents appreciating the fact that the trainers have realised realistic and significant evaluations, taking into account the needs of the trainee as well as the necessary skill required by the mentoring activity.

5. Discussions

Designed and approved before the entry of the National Law of Education no. 1/2011, this project aims to create a degree of regulation for the new education jobs (professional insertion mentor, mentor trainer), the creation of

a body certified mentors, on a national level and actual assistance in the traineeship of juniors on the various speciality. (POSDRU, 57, 1.3., 36.525).

The legal framework for creating the qualitative, useful and needed support is relatively new in Romania. It is important to mention the fact that in the Romanian Education system a lot of theoretical and practical experience regarding mentorship exist. In this sense we can mention: UNISCHOOL project, PRESETT/Pre-service Teacher Education, NQT project for Newly Qualified Teachers, MOSS/Observation and support scheme mentor, START Project) (Şerbănescu, Chircu, 2014).

There have previously been done studies and research, projects based on normative legislation, as well as the development strategy of the for the initial and continuous training of teachers and managers of the primary and secondary school systems, 2001-2004.Studies and research have been evaluated, normative legislation was designed and created (Şerbănescu, 2011). Quality assurance procedures of the training program for professional insertion mentors have included: creating a theoretical and procedural-operational framework regarding the strategy of applying the quality assurance procedures to the implementation of the program of professional insertion mentorships and a clear instruction that is coherent for the mentors.

The results were centralised and interpreted, intermediary and final reports being done as well. From the synthetic results obtained we can conclude the project had a high level of quality assurance in the design, implementation and training program evaluation.

Moreover, we can formulate a few ideas as an improvement environment against the concept and mental practices of the mentorship system in Romanian schools:

a. the mentorship skill is learnt most efficiently through practical combined activities of direct mentoring models, in class activities as theoretical-modern methodological evaluations (Wagner, 2014);

b. mentoring training is in a continuous reconstruction in a modular and nuanced way, based on a dialog of type constructive-creative and on subject matter related contexts, at a curricular area and interdisciplinary level;

c.design of a mentoring monitoring subsystem, followed by training stages/continuous training, with decentralised interdisciplinary mentoring sessions;

d. creating the annual reports for subject areas, schooling level, teaching experience as well as the teaching material of type info documentaries.

References

Brundrett, M., Silcock, P. (2002): Achievement competence, success and excellence in teaching. London and New York: Routledge.

Bush, T. (2015). Leadership şi management educaţional..Teorii şi practici actuale. Iaşi: Polirom.

Chelcea, S. (2004). Metodologia cercetării sociologice. Metode cantitative şi calitative, ediţia a II-a. Bucureşti: Editura Comunicare.ro.

Education Law no. 1/2011. Monitorul Oficial, Partea I nr. 18, 10 ianuarie 2011, http://legeaz.net/legea-educatiei-nationale-1-2011/.

Ezechil, L. et al.(2013).Ghidul mentorului de inserţie profesională. Bucureşti: Printech.

Iluţ, P. (1997).Abordarea calitativă a socioumanului. Iaşi:Polirom.

Neacşu, I., Bocoş, M. et al. (2013). Proceduri de asigurare a calităţii implementării programului de formare a mentorilor de inserţie profesională. Bucureşti: Printech.

Şerbănescu,L., Chircu, S. (2014). The efficiency of e-Learning activities in training mentor teachers. Proceedings of International Conference e-Learning - IADIS, Lisabona, Portugalia.

Şerbănescu, L. (2011). Formarea profesională a cadrelor didactice – repere pentru managementul carierei. Bucureşti : Printech.

Wagner, T. (2014). Formarea inovatorilor: cum creşti tinerii care vor schimba lumea de mâine. Bucureşti: EdituraTrei.

htttp://www.mentorat.cpi.ro

http://pe-mentorat.cpi.ro

http://asmero.ro

http://www.euroed.ro