CONTINUOUS TRAINING OF TEACHERS IN ROMANIAN AND EUROPEAN CONTEXT*

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Abstract
Continuing education, training is an important component of every social subsystem, including the education one.

The study aims to address the issue of continuing education of teachers, both in the context of the Romanian education and teaching system, and the European one, conducting an analysis of the legislative framework, but also of the experiences of recent years in this field. We have referred to documents, legislative acts, which regulate the system of continuous training (eg: National Education Law, for the Romanian education system) or to various reports (OECD, Eurydice), which present different statistical situations regarding the continuous training of teachers in European countries, on training priorities.

Our investigative approach focused on a category of continuing education activities, namely training programs, which support the career development of teachers. The target group consisted of teachers who teach in preschool education, participants in such a continuing education program, before taking an exam (grade II teacher), to ensure their career development.

We analyzed the importance/ relevance of using a summative assessment tool (portfolio), respectively of its components in establishing the level of professional skills, developed within the Program. The research methods we used were the survey based on the questionnaire and the analysis of the products of the activity (the portfolios). The results obtained confirmed the validity of the evaluation tool used.

Key words: Continuous training; Professionalization; Teaching staff; Evaluation portfolio.

1. Introduction

Continuing education is not a new concept, but one with a long history, adapted according to the concrete, specific elements of the socio-educational, cultural, political context.

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Compared to the current period, the concept of ***continuous training*** can be defined as "process of professional, institutionalized training of future teachers, attending specific theoretical practical applied training activities, within a university education institution" (Bocoș, 2016, pp. 263).

In another definition, which belongs to Noveanu and Potolea (2007, *apud* Bocoș, 2016, p. 263), the continuous training of teachers is assimilated with a "basic subsystem of training of trainers in the field of instruction and education, which is addressed to teachers in pre-university education and which aim at their professional development".

Continuing education is an excellent tool for developing the skills needed to achieve higher student achievement (Musset, 2010). According to The Glossary of Education Reform, the concept refers to a wide variety of specialized training, formal education or advanced vocational learning, designed to help administrators, teachers and other educators improve their professional knowledge, competence, skills and effectiveness (https: //www.edglossary.org/professional-development/).

From another perspective, training and continuing professional development includes all types of learning, undertaken by teachers, beyond the initial training (Craft, 2000, *apud* Boudersa, 2016).

The term training captures the process of personality integration according to an action model developed in order to adapt the person (Schipor, 2003, p. 49).

According to the legislation in force, the system of continuous training of teachers in Romania includes (according to Bocoș, 2016, p. 264):

a) The examinations for obtaining the teaching degrees (II and I), including the programs that can ensure the preparation for these exams;
b) Continuing education/ training programs/ internships, in order to accumulate 90 credits, at each consecutive interval of 5 years, for the teaching, management, guidance and control staff, in pre-university education;
c) Training/ development programs for the competencies of management, guidance and control staff in pre-university education;
d) Programs for the professional-scientific development of the teaching staff, through master's, doctoral, postgraduate studies, authorized or accredited according to the law;
e) Professional conversion programs, for the teaching staff with higher education, through university or postgraduate level courses;
f) Other programs for scientific, didactic or psycho-pedagogical improvement or for the acquisition of complementary competencies.

2. Continuing education of teachers, in a European context

At European level, the transition from ***continuing professional development*** (CPD) to ***continuing professional learning*** (CPL) is being discussed (Boeskens, Nusche, Yurita, 2020, p. 13). This is reflected in changes in teachers' knowledge and practices, which contribute to improving the students' outcomes (Darling-Hammond, Hyler, Gardner, 2017, p. 2).

The continuing education of teachers, as well as their initial training, has always been a priority of policies and practices, both at European level and at the level of each country.

According to an OECD Report (Boeskens, Nusche, Yurita, 2020, pp. 8-13), there are a number of trends and developments that have increased the importance of teachers' professional development:

- Changing the learning objectives and the students' needs
- New evidence on continuing professional learning practices (CPL), effective or less effective
- New technologies and the link with lifelong learning/ training
- Greater diversity of initial teacher training pathways
- Increased emphasis on resource efficiency in education systems

The main purpose of all these types of actions is to improve and better the quality of teacher training. Table no. 1 sets out a set of European policies on lifelong learning, as well as the areas covered.

Table 1. Directions for common teacher training policies

General objectives	Continuing education policies	Targeted areas
Improving the quality of teacher training	Attracting the right people for the job of being a teacher	Traditional models of teacher training
		Alternative models of teacher training
	Giving teachers the necessary tools	Knowledge on content, pedagogical skills
		Practical experience
	Monitoring the maintenance of the optimal level of competence throughout the career	Initial teacher training
		Continuing education

Source: adapted from Musset, 2010, p. 7

Teacher training activities are characterized by diversity, variety: dissemination conferences, workshops (preparation for new content of subjects), school activities (study groups, courses), personal development of teachers (individual activities outside schools) (Musset, 2010).

European documents mention several important categories of activities for lifelong learning (OECD, 2009): informal dialogues to improve teaching; courses and workshops; reading specialized books; conferences and seminars on educational topics; professional development networks; individual and collaborative research; mentoring and observing colleagues; visits for observational purposes to other schools; qualification programs.

To what extent are these ways used by teachers? Various statistics at European level highlight this aspect.

An analysis of the categories of continuing education activities at European level highlights the following situation (Figure 1):
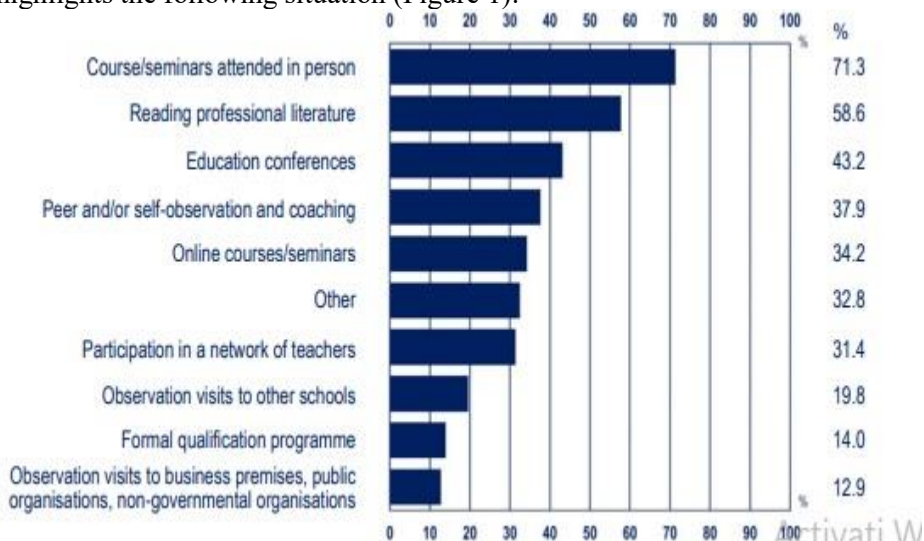

Figure 1. Situation regarding the ways of continuous training, accessed by the teachers from the secondary education, in 2018
Source: Eurydice Report, 2021, p. 87

In a 2019 OECD Report (OECD, 2019, p. 15), several categories of vocational learning activities are mentioned (Table 2):

Table 2. Categories of continuing education activities

Ways of accomplishment	Exclusive formal	Formal	Less formal
In particular, individual way	Online courses and seminars Self-study, monitoring the results		Exchanges on online platforms Self-study without monitoring the results
In school	Workshops and on-the-job training Structured initiation programs Observation as part of formative assessment Structured coaching and mentoring activities		Professional learning communities Collaborations and mutual exchanges Self-observation and mutual observation Ad-hoc coaching and mentoring activities
Outside school	External courses and seminars Qualification programs Conferences		Exchanges between schools Communication networks between teachers

Source: OECD, 2019, p. 15

As there can be seen in Table 2, courses and seminars predominate, organized in different variants, mentoring and coaching activities, qualification programs. A

significant role is played by mutual exchanges of experiences, good practices, organized both individually and between schools, as well as professional communities. Self-study and self-observation complete the list of continuing education activities.

With regard to the professional development topics covered by secondary school teachers at EU level, the Eurydice Report also presents a statistical situation (see Figure 2): pedagogical skills in teaching specialized topics; knowledge and understanding of the specifics of the field; student assessment practice; knowledge of the curriculum; ICT skills in teaching; student behavior and class management; approaches to individualizing learning; education of children with special needs; teaching transversal skills (eg creativity, critical thinking, problem solving); student evaluation analysis; teacher-parent collaboration; teaching in a multicultural and multilingual context; school management; communication with different people from different cultures or countries.
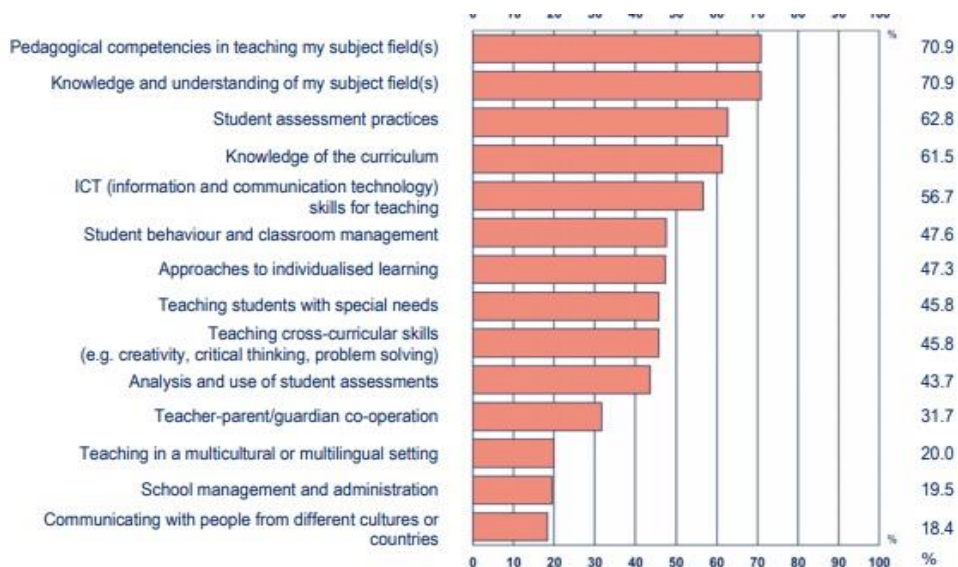

Figure 2. The situation of distributing different professional development subjects taken by teachers in gymnasium, at EU level, 2018
Source: Eurydice Report, 2021, p. 89

According to a study conducted under the auspices of the OECD (Viac, Fraser, 2020, *apud* Boeskens, Nusche, Yurita, 2020, p. 40), continuing vocational learning, in the current context, with the perspective of 2030, must be based on the idea of the wellbeing of the actors of the didactic act.

3. Research Methodology

One of the ways/ directions of continuous training, which are found in the Romanian legislation is represented by the training courses/ programs that precede/

prepare certain stages in the career evolution. Within them, students have the opportunity to practice and develop skills that are specific to their professional field or the level of education where they work (teaching, methodological, monodisciplinary, transversal competencies etc.).

The investigation we conducted targeted 33 teachers in preschool education, participating in a training program, in order to support the second degree in education[1].

Within the above mentioned program, an evaluation portfolio was used, as a summative assessment tool, to determine the level of the competencies developed, whose structure comprised four representative papers.

The aim of our investigation was to know the diagnostic and predictive value of this assessment tool.

The objectives pursued were the following:
- Knowing the opinion of teachers on the usefulness of the portfolio, in general, and the works in its structure, especially in continuing education
- Identifying the difficulties encountered in developing the portfolio
- Knowledge of the elements newly acquired after the completion of the works in the portfolio
- Anticipating the possibilities of capitalizing on the competencies exercised in the elaboration of the works.

The specific hypothesis followed involved the validation of the idea that *the Use of the portfolio as a tool for summative evaluation of the Program is able to highlight the level of competencies exercised/ developed in the program.*

The sample of subjects consisted, as mentioned above, of 33 teachers who teach in preschool education, from different institutions, both urban and rural, from several counties. We are showing, in figure 3, in percentages, the structure of the sample.
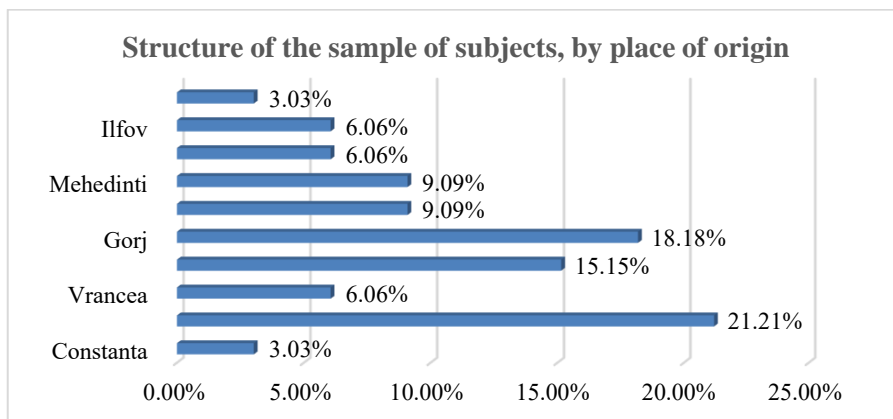

Figure 3. Structure of the sample of subjects, by place of origin

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[1] In the Romanian education system, the evolution in the didactic career involves the completion of two essential steps, regulated by the law: didactic degree II and didactic degree I.

The research methods that we used were the survey based on a questionnaire and the analysis of the products of the activity, respectively of the portfolios developed by the students.

The first research tool, the opinion questionnaire, included 8 items, focused on knowing the students' opinion on: the usefulness of the program; the usefulness of the prepared portfolio, respectively of each individual work; difficulties encountered in drafting the works; the advantages of their accomplishment; the possibility of future capitalization of the newly acquired elements.

The questionnaire was applied through Google Forms, the results being then centralized and interpreted.

The second tool that we used was the evaluation marking scheme of the portfolios developed by the participants in the continuing education program. It included criteria for evaluating each paper, as well as criteria related to the overall structure of the portfolio and its quality (see Table 3).

Table 3. The marking scheme of the portofolio

Crt. No.	Assessment criteria	Indicators	Score (1-10)
1.	**General structure criteria**	Keeping to the recommended structure	
		Respecting the structure and requirements specific to each type of work	
		Personal, original contribution to the overall aspect of the portfolio	
		Ordering the works according to the recommended criteria	
		Quality of comments and personal reflections	
		Original contribution to the overall aspect of the portfolio	
2.	**Criteria specific to each work**	Scientific correctness	
2.1.	*Essay criteria*	Respecting the structure and specific requirements of this type of work	
		Ensuring the concordance of theme-title-content	
		Using an essay style	
		Originality of ideas, arguments, examples	
		Correctness and expressiveness of language	
		General score	
2.2.	*Criteria for the cognitive map*	Keeping to the recommended structure	
		Essentializing ideas in the form of key words/ phrases	
		Graphic organization of map elements	
		Originality of the approach	

		The scientific correctness of the concepts and the relations between them
		General score
2.3.	*Criteria for the didactic activity project*	Compliance with the specific requirements of this type of work
		Correct accomplishment of the correspondence between the curricular elements
		Consistency between the parts/ dimensions of the project, between the stages/ sequences of the lesson
		Correct dosing of resources (procedural, temporal, ergonomic, etc.), work tasks
		Adequacy and essentialization of scientific content
		Flexibility, creativity
		Correctness of the terminology used
		Correct making of the lesson plan
		Relevance of annexes
		General score
2.4.	*Criteria for the didactic game*	Compliance with the structure and specific requirements
		Correct and explicit description of the task/ structure/ stages of the game
		Explicit presentation of the game rules
		Proper use of materials
		Originality
		Correct use of specific terminology
		General score
		General score

4. Results and discussions

We present the results obtained after the application of the opinion questionnaire. The students unanimously appreciated the usefulness of the continuing education program for their professional development, as well as the relevance of using the portfolio, as a summative assessment tool, in order to know the level of competencies developed as a result of completing the program.

Among the works included in the portfolio, the students believe that the didactic game had the greatest utility, at the opposite pole being the cognitive map (see figure 4):
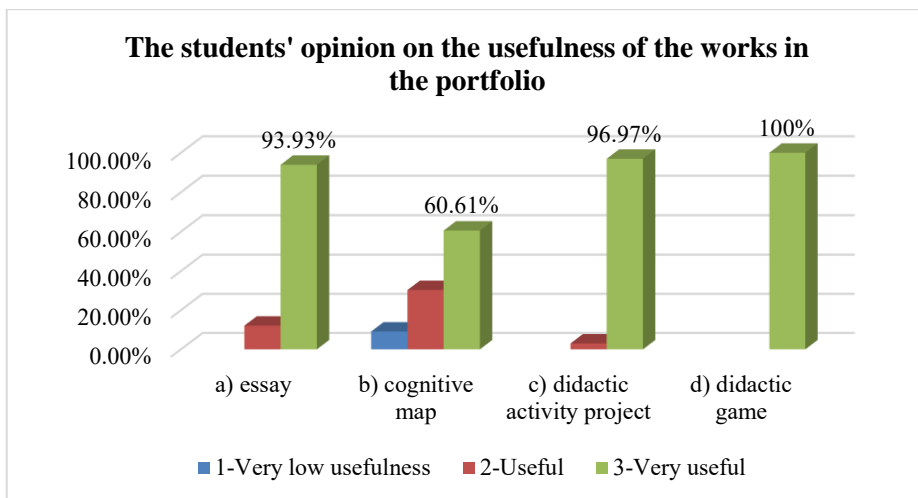
Figure 4. The students' opinion on the usefulness of the works in the portfolio

The lower percentage given to the cognitive map work is justified by the difficulty of students to understand the role of this tool in developing transversal, general competencies, such as the autonomous learning competency, and not necessarily monodisciplinary and specific ones.

More than half of the students (54.54%) mentioned that they did not encounter difficulties in carrying out the works, the others appreciating that the number of difficulties that appeared was reduced.

Regarding the difficulties encountered according to the type of work, the situation is exactly the opposite of the usefulness of the works in the portfolio (fig. 4).

Thus, the students stated that most of the problems were created by making the cognitive map, and the least - the didactic game (see figure 5). Paradoxically, the work that required the most was the least useful, and vice versa.
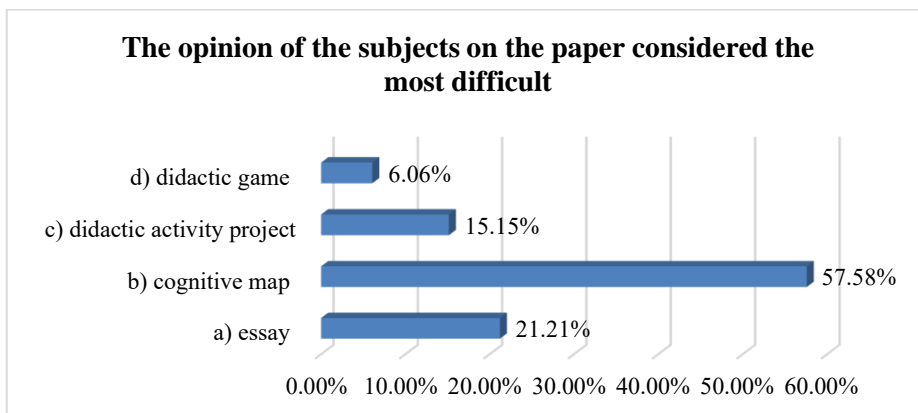

Figure 5. The opinion of the subjects on the paper considered the most difficult

The didactic activity project is considered the work during which the students learned the most new elements (51.52%), followed by the cognitive map (30.30%), the essay (12.12%) and the didactic game (6, 06%).

The last item of the questionnaire asked the students for their opinion on the future situations during which they will be able to use the competencies developed by completing the works in the assessment portfolio.

Figure no. 6 presents the way of distributing the answers on the proposed variants:
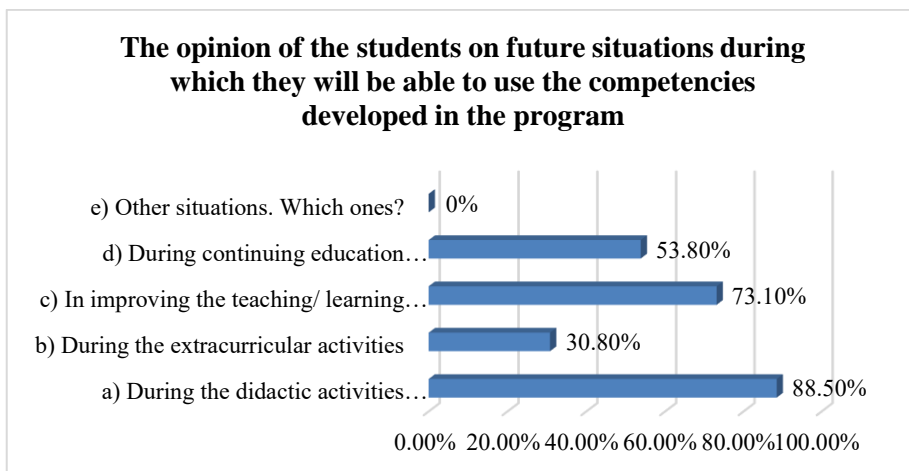

Figure 6. The opinion of the students on future situations during which they will be able to use the competencies developed in the program

The results obtained by teachers in the evaluation through the portfolio confirmed the results of the questionnaires (see table 4).

Table 4. General score for each work in the portfolio

Crt. No.	Criteria specific to each work	Generale score
1	Essay criteria	8,89
2	Criteria for the cognitive map	8,72
3	Criteria for the didactic activity project	9,01
4	Criteria for the didactic game	9,12

The highest score was obtained in the work called „didactic game".

5. Conclusions

The continuous professional training of teachers is going through an important new stage, determined by the massive social, economic, cultural changes, by the evolution of societies, at European and global level, by the development of new communication technologies. in addition to the traditional forms of career

development, new ways appear in the context of the mentioned changes. The major requirements for this professional category are flexibility, creativity, openness to the new, to change and the ability to integrate the new into already existing structures. The ultimate goal is represented by the benefits to the students, their results, their wellbeing, necessary to sustain performance.

In the Romanian education system, continuing vocational training involves both the completion of stages/ stages, which involve significant theoretical and practical accumulations and the enrichment and improvement of experience and teaching style, and the obligation to participate in a series of training activities, throughout career.

In conclusion, we can mention that the types of activities accessed by teachers, as well as the priority topics are consistent with those promoted at European level and by the education systems in other countries.

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