

TEACHERS' EDUCATION IN ROMANIA CASE STUDY: BUCHAREST UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMIC STUDIES IN ROMANIA

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Abstract

The teachers' education is nowadays a controversial issue in Romania. It is an important subject in the debates in academia and practitioners' groups and in mass-media too. Teachers' education is seen in relationship with the quality of education and is considered by representatives of different interests' groups and decision makers as one of the most effective factors that can positively influenced the quality of education. This is why alternatives and best practices in the teachers' education field are re-examined and re-valued. Among these the author includes the experience in the field of teachers' education gained at the Bucharest University of Economic Studies, with emphasis on education of teachers of economics and business. The Bucharest University of Economic Studies is one of the most important universities in Romania and the most important economic one. It was established in 1913 by Royal Decree and in its' over 100 years of existence has provided "higher and in-depth knowledge" in the field of economics sciences and prepared generations of economists. In addition to its mission of preparing professionals for economic activity and public administration functions, at Bucharest University of Economic Studies were prepared economics and business teachers who have to contribute to economic education of population. The paper presents the activity and the programs designed at the pedagogical seminar from the Bucharest University of Economic Studies, as it was called, the former Department for teacher education started to function soon after the beginning of the university and the nowadays programs meant to educate teachers of economics and business too. The analysis of data collected in respect with the learning outcomes at the level pre- and in-service teachers of economics and business is used to drive conclusions in respect with the quality of the programs and to identify positive experiences that can be shared in similar academic communities.

Keywords: Teachers' education, teachers' education programs, economic education and teachers' education, in-service teacher training.

1. INTRODUCTION

The teachers' education is nowadays a controversial issue in Romania. It is an important subject in the debates in academia and practitioners' groups and in mass-media too. Teachers' education is seen in relationship with the quality of education and is considered by representatives of different interests' groups and decision makers as one of the most effective factors that can positively influenced the quality of education.

Basically, discussions are focused on the controversial issue of the way to train teachers: simultaneously or consecutively bachelor and master programs provided by universities (Coalitia pentru educatie, 2016). The present discussions have roots in the negative perception of the public regarding the educational system and the learning outcomes ensure by the public schools. They are complaining of the lack of discipline,

achievements and motivation in many public schools and consider that one of the main causes of all these minuses is the quality of teaching and, sometimes, of the teachers themselves (Badescu et al, 2017). Important facts demonstrate the low achievements of the educational system (OECD, 2015). 15 years old Romanian students internationally tested on reading, math and science - while participating in The Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) – did not succeed to perform satisfactory. Their scores are much below the EU 28 average and about half of them are under the level 2 of performance (out of 5 or 6 levels), which is considered “functional literacy”.

The educational experts and representatives of different interests’ groups such as parents or employers are asking for a change in the system of teachers’ formation (Romania educata, 2018). This is why alternatives and best practices in the teachers’ education field are re-examined and re-valued.

2. TEACHERS’ EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Teacher education programs are focused on developing teaching competences consisting in competences such as lesson planning, teaching methods and strategies, assessment, curriculum and educational materials development, communication, class management, counselling, educational decision making, character development, or leadership skills derived from the roles of instructional manager, caring person, expert learner, cultural and civic person a teacher should play (Caena, 2011). Three area of competencies are defining teaching competencies: working with others, working with knowledge, technology and information, and working in and with society (European Commission, DG Education and Culture, 2005).

In the present, in Romania, universities are responsible for teacher education. They have departments specialized in teacher training. A teacher education program should have 60 ECTS which is equivalent with one year of study. Teacher education programs are psycho-pedagogical subjects oriented. In order to graduate a teacher education program, students have to take courses such as psychology, pedagogy, didactics, and subject teaching methods. By definition, these are more pedagogical ones. In addition, they have to take non-traditional courses such as sociology and philosophy of education, ITC, or communication. Teachers are initially trained by enrolling students in special designed teacher education programs in addition and simultaneously with the bachelor and master programs they are attending at university. While getting knowledge and skills in order to be specialized in particular domains of knowledge and acquiring competences as specialists in different industries, students can choose to attend psycho-pedagogical courses that will allow them to get a teaching certificate too.

The teacher education is done based on a national curriculum approved by the Ministry of Education. These are unique national plans each university has to apply. Accordingly to these plans a fully 60 ECTS teacher education program means graduating actually two 30 ECTS psycho-pedagogical programs: a so called Level 1 program simultaneously or consecutively to a bachelor program and a Level 2 program simultaneously or consecutively to a master program. The Level 1 program develops teaching competences required in compulsory education – basically, to teach in middle school. The Level 2 program develops teaching competences required in non-compulsory education – basically, to teach in high schools (Table 1: Initial teacher training programs).

Table 1: Initial teacher training programs

Program	Beneficiaries	Qualification
Level 1 initial teacher training	Students enrolled in bachelor programs Graduates of a bachelor program	Teacher in secondary compulsory education, basically middle school teacher
Level 2 initial teacher training	Students enrolled in master programs Graduates of a master program	Teacher in secondary non-compulsory education, basically high school teacher

Source: Data collected by the author

In Level 1 program students are required to take courses such as psychology of education, pedagogy, didactics of specialties, classroom management and ICT assisted teaching. Particular focus is given on having the school experience. Students have to go in schools to observe classes, study educational materials and school documents, plan lessons, assist teachers, and, finally, teach. A practical stage in a

school lengths 14 or 12 weeks, depending on the length of the semester when it is plan to be attend - in the 3rd year (Stage 1 – 14 weeks, 1st Semester; Stage 2 – 12 weeks; 2nd Semester). The students' activity in schools is supervised by tutors and faculties.

As we have mentioned already, at the end of Level 1 program students will have 30 ECTS. Level 1 provides basic psycho-pedagogical knowledge and skills. Level 2 courses represent in-deep studies and extensions of Level 1 courses such as: adults, youngsters and teenagers' psycho-pedagogy, didactics of domains and developments in didactics of specialties, educational programs planning and management. These are compulsory courses. In addition, there are optional courses too, among them students have to choose two: one from a 1st set of subjects (educational communication, integrated education, educational counselling, educational research methodology) and one from a 2nd set of subjects (school management, intercultural education, sociology of education, educational policies, contemporary pedagogical theories). At the end of Level 2 program students will have additional 30 ECTS. In total, graduating the Level 1 and the Level 2 programs, means gaining 60 ECTS.

In-service teachers are trained too. This is part of so called continuous teacher training and includes professional and career development or teaching degrees programs too. (Table 2: Continuous teacher training).

Table 2: Continuous teacher training

Program	Beneficiaries	Qualification/certification
Definitive as a teacher in education certification / on-the job confirmation (provided by the local school inspectorates)	Teachers at the beginning of their teaching career, usually, at the end of the first year of teaching.	Definitive as a teacher in education
2 nd teaching degree certification (provided by universities)	At least 4 years definitive as a teacher in education	2 nd degree teacher
1st teaching degree certification (provided by universities)	At least 4 years 2 nd degree teachers	1st degree teacher
Other teacher training programs (provided by local teacher training centers, universities, or different private teacher training providers)	Teachers, in general	Attending certificate Professional credits certificate Post-graduation certificate Qualification certificate issued under regulations of The National Qualification Authority

Source: Data collected by the author

Teaching degrees programs are provided by universities. They are development career centers for teachers. The 2nd teaching degree can be obtained by experienced teachers who can prove teaching competences at high level. That means that they have to pass two exams: a written one from didactics of specialties topics and an oral one from psycho-pedagogy topics. In order to pass these exams, the candidate teachers have to obtain a minimum 8 grade on a scale from 1 to 10. Universities organize each year 2nd degrees programs to allow all interested teachers to obtain it. It is not compulsory to have it but almost all teachers would like to have it mainly because it represents a higher position in the teaching career. In addition, 2nd degree teachers are rewarded by an increase in salary.

The 1st teaching degree program is a 2 years one. Teachers have to pass an admission exam and to write and public present a paper to demonstrate their interest in the subject matter and capacity to use new subject knowledge in their current activity in class. The focus on the 1st degree program is the competence of teachers to innovate the educational process, with special emphasize on teaching activity. These should be

demonstrated in class, while teachers are observed by experts from universities and local school authorities (inspectorates) designated as evaluators in charge to issue 1st teaching degrees.

In the absence of available data regarding the number of teachers with teaching degrees at national level, we present below the situation in a commercial high school in the capital city as an example of a possible situation in schools (Table 3: Teaching degrees at V. Madgearu Commercial High School in Bucharest). This is a particular situation which might be not generalized. At least, we do not have data to support such a generalization. It is demonstrated by research that urban schools have a better situation in terms of human resources as rural ones (Badescu et al, 2017, ISE, 2015) and it is expected that many of the best teachers in the country or at least in the region to be employed in the capital city. But even so, below provided data can offer an image of the teachers' interest for teaching degrees in Romania.

Table 3: Teaching degrees at V. Madgearu Commercial High School in Bucharest

Category of teachers	Number of teachers	Percentage
Doctors	7	9.09
1 st degree teachers	41	53.25
2 nd degree teachers	10	12.99
Definitive as teachers in education	17	22.08
Total	77	100

Source: Col. Ec. Virgil Madgearu, Bucuresti. Raport anual de evaluare a calitatii, 2017-2018, la http://www.madgearu.ro/documente/RAEI_2017-2018.pdf

As we can see, more than 75% of the teachers in the school have teaching degrees (PhD, and 1st and 2nd teaching degree). In pre-university education, a PhD is equivalent with a 1st teaching degree at the teacher request and following a specific procedure. The situation differs mainly due to the age of the teachers (young teachers may not have teaching degrees) and teaching experience (at least 9 years of teaching to be a 1st degree teacher are required). Schools less well situated in terms of location, profile, and attractiveness both for students and teachers may have less 1st and 2nd degree teachers.

The only compulsory teaching degree is the definitive one, all the others being at the teachers' choice. But, the teaching career is a prestige motivated one and, in addition to increase in teaching position, teaching degrees mean also an increase in the teachers' salary. In general, it is considered that despite of the stress involved by exams, due to these, almost all teachers choose to attend teaching degrees programs and to get teaching degrees. The prestige and income effect of the teaching degrees is higher than the stress effect.

3. TEACHERS' EDUCATION AT THE BUCHAREST UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMIC STUDIES

The Bucharest University of Economic Studies (ASE) is one of the most important universities in Romania and the most important economic one. In 2011 was classified as a university for advanced research and education, the top category of universities in Romania. In the same time is one of the largest universities in the country with more than 22,000 students enrolled in bachelor, master, doctoral, postgraduate, and postdoctoral programs (Istudor, 2017). It was established in 1913 by Royal Decree and in its' over 100 years of existence has provided "higher and in-depth knowledge" in the field of economics sciences and prepared generations of economists. In addition to its mission of preparing professionals for economic activity and public administration functions (Davidoglu, 1913), at the Bucharest University of Economic Studies were prepared economics and business teachers who have to contribute to economic education of population.

3.1. About 100 Years of Experience In Economics and Business Teachers' Education

The Pedagogical Seminar, the predecessor of the present Teacher Training Department (TTD), begun to function soon after the university was setting up. (Năstase, Roșca, 2013). Students enrolled in psycho-pedagogical programs have benefitted, in addition to a strong economic preparation, of a high quality

pedagogical one and many of them became dedicated teachers or professors.

At The High Academy of Commercial and Industrial Studies (AISCI), as it was called at that time the present ASE, in the first year of its existence, were enrolled 600 students, 107 among them being foreigners (Năstase, Roșca, 2013). They were studying economics, in general, being prepared for a career in the economic or public administration domain. At that time, economic education was seen as education for economic activity with a larger practical and realistic dimension. Besides the economic background, students gained a scientific background too in the fields of mathematics, physics, and chemistry. In addition, they were required to study geography, modern languages, and shorthand and typing.

The pedagogical courses were organized mainly for the students who were thinking to have a teaching career at pre-university level, in a commercial high school. But, all the AISCI students, graduates, and doctors could attend them. Pedagogical courses were compulsory for all students who wanted to become AISCI professors. The university prepared teachers and professors of economics and business both for pre-university and university level. Starting with academic year 1927-1928, the pedagogical courses become compulsory for all students enrolled in the 3rd year. In addition, new courses were introduced for the commercial high school teachers. These were organized each year, in August and September.

“The Pedagogical Section” as it was called the pedagogical department, has offered programs for AISCI students, graduates, and doctors interested in teaching economics and business subjects. The department offered different programs, with length between 1 and 2 years. The 2 year program included courses, class and practical activities (pedagogy, practical stages in schools, physics applied in commerce and industry, language, shorthand and typing). The 1 year program consisted in class activities: commercial mailing (in French, English, German and Italian languages), shorthand and typing, commercial sciences, mathematics, physics and chemistry applied to merchandises, judicial sciences. As part of their practical stages in schools, students had to teach classes at The Pedagogical Seminar – 2 years, during the 3rd and 4th years of studying.

The Pedagogical Seminar has continued to train teachers up to nowadays, with disruptions caused by The Second World War and the changes in the Romanian society after the War. Changes in the teacher training programs were related with more formal aspects than basic and content ones, so that important things such as quality orientation, strong economic, pedagogical and practical preparation, and respect for the teaching career, students, and quality work were kept and transmitted to students.

3.2. The Teacher Training Department

The Teacher Training Department (TTD) follows the pedagogical department and The Pedagogical Seminar. It had the support of the university administrators even in moments of difficulties for academic life such as The Second World War and after the War (1946-1948). It had the support of well-known prestigious professors, active as head of departments, or directors of Pedagogical/Educational Sciences Institute.

In ASE was always recognized the value of economic and pedagogic education for the quality of teachers and of education provided by them. As economists and economic way of thinking promoters, the members of ASE academic community have understood the value education as positive externality of and its rate of return and, in the same time, have argued in favor of the need for highly qualified teachers who can develop to their present and future students the competences they need or will need.

3.3. The Teachers' Education Programs

As we have mentioned before, universities are in charge to train teachers. In order to be a teacher in Romania, a person need to have a university degree and, in addition, a teaching certificate. Both diploma are issued by universities, the last one after graduating TTD programs.

3.3.1 The Initial Teacher Training

In ASE, TTD courses are attended by a large number of students enrolled in bachelor, master and doctoral programs, both in campus or at distance. Each year, TTD has about 1600-1700 students, 100-175 of them being master or doctoral students. TTD students are simultaneously or consecutively students in different schools of economics and business from ASE. First year students, both in bachelor and master programs in ASE, who have chosen a TTD program follow simultaneously economics and business bachelor or master programs and the psycho-pedagogical ones. All the others are attending the psycho-pedagogical programs consecutively to them major programs, as post-graduated programs.

In Level 1 teacher training students enrolled in different schools of economics and business in ASE are

receiving general psycho-pedagogical knowledge and all necessary information related to teaching economics subjects in compulsory education. Specific knowledge on economic education in schools are provided by courses and class activities in didactics of economics and economic/business subjects and practical stages in schools. Students spend 3 semesters to get this specific knowledge while they are discussing curriculum issues and the teaching process in economics/economic or business education classes.

They become familiar with educational materials such as textbooks, teachers' and students' books developed for teachers' and students' in usage in classes and outside of classes, including electronic resources. Among other class activities recommended for Level 1 students is a textbook evaluation in order to select from available textbooks the best one for a particular group of students, defined through interest on studying economics, incentives to learn, expected performance level, family support, and other relevant aspects. It is a research-based activity involving students in collecting data about the published textbooks. They compare different criteria used to evaluate textbooks, select up to 10 criteria considered most relevant, elaborate a grid as instrument of textbooks evaluation and applied the grid to select the best economics textbook. The activity implies high level thinking skills such analysis and evaluation.

Economics and business lesson planning is another important component of pre-service teacher training at TTD. Students are trained to establish valuable instructional objectives and to propose students complex achievements, starting with knowledge up to evaluation and application (Bloom, 1956; Anderson, 2006). They become familiar with different methods and strategies of teaching in order to be able to design effective learning activities and plan properly different lessons. As part of their training students are actively involved in different attractive learning activities, such as simulations, play-roles, or games designed to learn important economic concepts such as market, price, profit, cost, productivity, demand and supply, or competition. Among these, the simulations of transactions on the market or production and consumption activities are used to demonstrate the value of active-learning teaching to increase students' motivation and achievements. At the end of the class, students should be confident in active teaching and, also, able to design themselves attractive activity-based economics lessons.

Students are trained to be able to evaluate learning achievements too. Evaluation is as important as teaching due to its power to motivate students to learn. Based on their own learning experiences, TTD students are recognizing that they can easier accept imperfect teaching than incorrect assessment. In order to become good evaluators, students attend lectures on theory of assessment and participate in class activities in which they analyze and design assessment instruments for economics lessons and complete and grade tests.

At the end of the class, students participate in micro-teaching sessions. They applied all what they have learned in planning and teaching a 15-minutes class activity. The teaching experience continue in schools. In Level 1 teacher training have to spend time to experience teacher activity in school during 2 stages of teaching practice. The 1st stage lasts 14 weeks and the 2nd lasts 12 weeks. Both stages implies class observation, teaching assistance, lessons planning and teaching. At the end of the practical stage 2, students should be able to teach themselves and to perform satisfactory the roles a teacher has to play. At the graduation time, they will be certified as qualified teachers for compulsory education.

The Level 2 students are enrolled in a master program in ASE or have graduated one (not necessary in ASE, but in economics or business or in other domains of knowledge related with schools of economics and business, such as public administration, law, or business communication). Students enrolled in a Level 2 program are prepared to teach in high schools/non-compulsory education. There are no clear establish requirements regarding the psycho-pedagogical background for university teaching staff. Universities are autonomous institutions and, based on this, each university have its own requirements, in addition with the legal ones which are considered a minimum. Universities are encouraging the teaching staff to attend and graduate a psycho-pedagogical training program in order to improve their teaching competences and, in the same time, to meet the requirements of national agency of quality assurance in higher education.

Level 2 means in-depth studies, both in psycho-pedagogical domain and economic non-compulsory education. Students spend 2 semesters on non-compulsory economic education studies attending lectures on didactics of economic domain and developments in didactics of specialties and participating in class activities and one more practical stage in schools. Lectures, discussions and class activities are oriented to contemporary issues on economic education, ways to improve adults' economic education, and, especially innovative teaching methods and strategies.

3.3.2 The Continuous Teacher Training

TTD is a center for in-service teacher training and professional development of pre-university teachers of economics and business subjects. Especially for them, TTD has 2nd and 1st teaching degrees programs. Almost half of the teachers of economics and business subjects in the country attend these programs. Regularly, TTD teaching degree programs are attended by teachers from 5 out of 8 regions in Romania (North-East, South-Muntenia, Bucharest-Ilfov, South-Vest and Center). For 2nd teaching degree candidates, TTD organizes courses each year, in July.

The number of in-service teachers of economics and business professionally trained at TTD seems to be low (Table 4. Teachers of economics and business enrolled in 2nd and 1st teaching degree programs at TTD) , and especially if it is compared with the number of other subject teachers trained in similar centers. But, absolute figures might not be relevant by themselves; they have to be related to the total number of teachers of economics and business subjects in pre-university education and with their percentage in total number of teachers. From all economics and business subjects thought in high schools, only economics and entrepreneurial education are part of the main core curriculum; in other words only these subjects are thought in every high school, no matter of its profile (scientific, humanistic, artistic or vocational). But, they are though only 1 hour/week, 35 weeks a year. Business subjects such as accounting, commerce, tourism, marketing, management, finance, or public administration are thought only in commercial vocational high schools, which are not so many. For instance in the capital city, which is the largest city in the country only 6 out of more than 100 high schools are commercial vocational ones. As consequence, the number of teachers of business subjects is low, relative to the total number of teachers.

Table 4. Teachers of economics and business enrolled in 2nd and 1st teaching degree programs at TTD

The teaching degree	Year	Number of teachers		Absolute variation	Relative variation
		Enrolled	Graduates		
II Teaching degree	2012	26	19	7	27%
	2013	20	18	2	10%
	2014	28	23	5	18%
	2015	32	29	3	9%
	2016	24	18	6	25%
I Teaching degree	2012-2014	26	24	2	7,7%
	2013-2015	32	32	0	0%
	2014-2016	35	24	11	31%

Source: Cace, C; Lăcătuș, M. L.; Stăiculescu, C.; 2017

Enrolling in the teaching degrees programs at TTD and attending the courses means not necessary successfully graduating them. The table above (Table 4) shows differences, sometimes important, up to 30%, between the number of teachers enrolled in the program and the number of graduates (teachers who succeed to obtain the 2nd or 1st teaching degree at the end of the program). There are specific requirements for each teacher training programs and competence standards for candidates' teachers. A teaching degree represents a higher level of competence in teaching which can be describe as a switch from a good teacher to a very good, or exceptional, one. Than lowest grade to pass the 2nd degree exam is 8 (on a scale from 1 to 10), while to pass the 1st degree exam is 9. In other words, they should be highly qualified teachers, both in economics or business and in pedagogy, capable to motivate their students to learn and to adapt the instructional process to the students' needs, even in not the very best situations.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The experience gained in more than 100 years of training of teachers of economics and business is a valuable thing in ASE and it should be continue both in initial and continuous teacher training provided by the university. TTD good name is a valuable thing too. Despite of all controversial opinion regarding the quality and efficiency of the present teacher training programs we couldn't say for sure that the system of teachers' education is the problem and not the way in which it is implemented in different cases. In the case of ASE, the teachers' education programs are conducted responsible, according with well-defined quality standards and aiming to educate dedicated teachers of economics and business capable to deliver high quality economic education in schools. And this should continue no matter what changes in the system of teachers' education may occur. Right now, it seems that the necessary change is in to establish appropriate quality standards and to follow them, and to learn from good practices.

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