



Investigating the Viability and Efficiency of the Teachers' Training Curriculum in Romania

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Abstract

For the substantiation of this study, an analysis of the specialized literature was made. Analyzing the curriculum from a diachronic and synchronic perspective, the vast specialized literature can conclude that each conceptual and praxiological approach of the curriculum derives from the different sets of values, sometimes in competition. We consider that many approaches to the concept do no more than to demonstrate the importance of the curriculum. It is therefore a fundamental concept of teacher training whose promotion is crucial in organizing the educational process as a whole. So, the design of teacher training curriculum is a comprehensive and extremely important segment of educational research and action. It aims to provide the real manifestation premises of the interactions and the interdependencies between educational objectives, contents, principles and strategies of teaching and learning, principles and strategies of assessment in formal educative contexts.

The paper „Investigating the viability and efficiency of the teachers' training curriculum in Romania”, aims at achieving an exploratory study to identify the opinion towards teacher training curriculum of the students and of the graduate students of teacher training programs. The sample of subjects involved in this study is comprised of students in pre-service teacher education (N=114) and of graduate students of teacher training programs (N = 110).

To identify the opinion towards the teaching profession and curriculum for teacher training, so to analyze viability and efficiency of the teachers' training curriculum, it was used as research method an investigation based on questionnaire. A Likert scale with five points was used, containing 32 items and self-report measures of the variables were used to record data from participant students. Statistical data analysis were made using t test, and calculating averages. Education provider, in general, and curriculum designers, in particular, can use the results to better understand, design and apply the curriculum of teacher training.

1. Theoretical background

1.1 Contemporary perspectives on curriculum and curriculum design

Analyzing the curriculum from a diachronic and synchronic perspective, the vast specialized literature can conclude that each conceptual and praxiological approach of the curriculum derives from the different sets of values, sometimes in competition. Therefore, in the specialized literature have continued and continues to exist different conceptualizations of the curriculum that tend to one or another paradigms and visions grounded throughout history. We consider that many approaches to the concept do no more than to demonstrate the importance of the curriculum. It is therefore a fundamental concept of education whose promotion is crucial in organizing the educational process as a whole. Moreover, it is a central category of contemporary education that significantly alter explanatory and exploratory approaches of education and educational praxis, giving and reinforcing its own identity.

Like the curriculum concept, the curriculum design is a comprehensive and extremely important segment of educational research and action. It aims to provide the real manifestation premises of the interactions and the interdependencies between educational objectives, contents, principles and strategies of teaching and learning, principles and strategies of assessment in formal educative contexts (Andronache, 2015).

The International Encyclopedia of Education (2003, pp. 1164-1168) identifies three main directions in curriculum design: *the content and the organization of subjects as the source for designing the curriculum; the students and their characteristics as a source for curriculum design and the society as a source for curriculum design.*

The content and the organization of subjects has been and continues to be one of the most common sources that are used in Romania for developing the curriculum design. According to this vision, the organization of content in relation to the subject of study and domain of study is a logical and rational organization that encourages the students' effective learning and understanding of the



content and the development of a broad general background (Hunkins, 1980). However, we believe that by making use only of this curriculum design we would impose on students a rather mechanical learning where the teacher seeks only to cover and complete the planned content losing sight of the student. The attempts to make this curricular design more flexible were objectified in organizing multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary contents. Likewise, the contents are no longer artificially separated, but they are studied in an integrated manner in order to facilitate their systemic understanding by the students.

The focus on the student's characteristics represents another important source in curriculum design. It is a strong vision in contemporary pedagogy but it was in fact Dewey who expressed it for the first time in the early 1900s. From this perspective, the needs, the interests, the individual characteristics, the age, the students' prior learning experiences represent the basis for the curriculum design. Students have the opportunity to select and organize their learning path, and can make a personal or guided choice, regarding the disciplines and the educational activities that correspond to their skills and interests and this is essential for lifelong learning skills (Saylor & Alexander, 1974). Likewise, the learning sequence becomes personalized and therefore relevant and intrinsically motivating for the learner.

The society. From this perspective, the curriculum is designed by taking into consideration the development of the society in order to prepare students to cope and adapt to the society in which they live. The curriculum objectives are designed in terms of developing students' abilities to put in practice the knowledge they have acquired. The learning content is deeply rooted into the social life, it is relevant and in line with the current and the prospective developments of the society. The teaching activities also have an important social role as the students are involved in activities that require cooperation, communication and problem solving. Contemporary practices that exploit the society as a primary source in curriculum design focus increasingly more on facilitating the integration of students not only in the social and cultural environment of the country in which they live, but also in the European and worldwide socio-cultural environment, thus promoting globalization.

1.2 The current structure of the curriculum for teachers training in Romania

In Romania, teacher training for various disciplines is performed in universities, within the departments for teacher training accredited by the Ministry of National Education.

According to the laws of Romania (Ministerial Order 5745/2012), competences certification for the teaching profession can be achieved at two levels. Level I (initial) grants the right for university graduates to fill teaching positions in pre-school, primary and secondary, provided the accumulation of 30 transferable credits (ECTS) minimum from psychopedagogical training program. Level II (deepening) which grants the right for university graduates to fill teaching positions in high school, post high school and higher education.

Curriculum of psychopedagogical training programs is divided into 3 components: **core - curriculum, expanded curriculum and an optional curriculum.**

Core - curriculum consists of compulsory subjects and educational activities for levels I and II for certifying teaching profession. This package includes the following disciplines:

- Fundamental psychopedagogical training courses - 18 credits:
 - Educational psychology (5 ECTS, 56 hours);
 - Fundamentals of pedagogy. Theory and methodology of curriculum (5 ECTS, 56 hours);
 - Theory and methodology of instruction. Theory and methodology of assessment (5 ECTS, 56 hours);
 - Classroom management (3 ECTS, 28 hours).
- Teaching training courses and speciality practice - 12 credits:
 - Subject didactics (5 ECTS, 56 hours);
 - Computer assisted instruction (2 ECTS, 28 hours);
 - Teaching practice in compulsory secondary education (semester 1) (3 ECTS, 42 hours);
 - Teaching practice in compulsory secondary education (second semester) (2 ECTS, 36 hours).

Extended curriculum consists of compulsory subjects and teaching activities in order to obtain the level II certification for the teaching profession and includes the following disciplines packages:

- Extension courses of psychopedagogical training - 10 credits:
 - Psychology of adolescents, youth and adults (5 ECTS, 42 hours);
 - Design and management of educational programs (5 ECTS, 42 hours);
- Extension courses for practical training - 10 credits:

- Subject didactics in secondary and higher education (5 ECTS, 42 hours);
- Teaching practice in secondary and higher education (5 ECTS, 42 hours);

Optional curriculum consists of two packages of disciplines - 10 transferable credits, students being able to choose one subject from the curriculum, as follows:

- Package 1 (5 ECTS, 42 hours) includes:
 - Educational communication;
 - Counseling and school orientation;
 - Educational research methodology;
 - Inclusive education.
- Package 2 (5 ECTS, 42 hours) includes:
 - Sociology of education;
 - The management of school organization;
 - Educational policies;
 - Intercultural education;
 - Contemporary pedagogical doctrines.

2. Method

2.1 Participants

A number of N = 225 participants was involved in the conducted research (N = 114 students in pre-service teacher education from Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania, and N = 110 graduate students of teacher training programs, also from Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania. 58% of students study at faculties in the exact sciences field, and 42% study at faculties in social sciences field. In terms of graduate students, 52% of those who participated in the research, graduate faculties from exact sciences domain, and 48% have graduated from faculties of social sciences field.

2.2 Research design

To explore the viability and efficiency of the teachers' training curriculum, it was realized a exploratory and constatative study design which aimed to identify the opinion towards teacher training curriculum of the graduate and ungradutate students of teacher training programs. The research question of the study was the following: *What is the effectiveness of teacher training curriculum in the opinion of students graduates students?*

Data obtained were statistically descriptive analyzed by calculating mean, standard deviation and *t* test, using IBM SPSS™ software.

2.3 Measures

To identify the viability and efficiency of the teachers' training curriculum in Romania, in the opinion of graduate and ungradutate students, it was used a Likert scale with 5 points, where 1 represented total disagreement and 5 strong agreement to various statements about the teachers' training curriculum and teaching profession. Proposed scale contains a series of 32 items aiming to evaluate three main dimensions: **curricular coherence**, **curricular flexibility**, and **practical application**.

Note that the construct validity of the scale was assessed by two independent experts from the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Babes-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca, Romania.

2.4 Procedure

In the research were involved only those students and graduates students who participated in more than 50% of courses and seminars and were excluded those who had a low attendance.

A paper and pencil version of the scale, was distributed and completed by participants in the faculty environment, without interfering with the normal didactic activities. The participants were explained that their participation in the study is voluntary, and their consent was completed in the questionnaire. The researcher was the one who organized the demarche of distributing and collecting questionnaires.



3. Results

First, concerning the identification the **opinion of the ungradutate students** concerning the teacher training curriculum, it was resorted to calculate an average of the responses of participants for each of the three main dimensions that we have taken into consideration (curricular coherence, curricular flexibility, and practical application). The data obtained are shown in Table 1:

Table 1. The average value of the students' opinion for each curricular dimension evaluated

Curricular dimension	N	Mean	Lower	Higher
Curricular coherence	114	3.17	2	5
Curricular flexibility	114	2.45	2	5
Curricular application	114	2.13	1	4
Total		2.58		

Second, concerning the identification of **the opinion of the gradutate students**, it was resorted also to calculate an average of the participants' responses for each of the three curricular demesions evaluated. The data obtained are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. The average value of the gradutate students' opinion for each curricular dimension evaluated

Curricular dimension	N	Mean	Lower	Higher
Curricular coherence	110	2.82	1	4
Curricular flexibility	110	3.12	2	4
Curricular application	110	2.52	1	4
Total		2.82		

In order to establish if there is a significant **difference between the opinion of the two groups** involved in the research conducted, it was used the calculation of the *t* test for independent samples. Thus, regarding the difference between the opinion of students, and graduate students, it is not significant for any of the three curricular dimensions evaluated.

We present in table 3 the data of *t* test that shows the significance of the difference of students' and graduated students' opinion for each of the three curricular demesions taken into consideration (curricular coherence, curricular flexibility, and practical application):

Table 3. *t* test value

		t-test for Equality of Means			
		t	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
curricular coherence	Equal variances assumed	1,39	0,16	0,35	0,22
	Equal variances not assumed	1,39	0,16	0,35	,022
curricular flexibility	Equal variances assumed	1,61	0,49	0,67	0,26



	Equal variances not assumed	1,61	0,49	0,67	0,26
practical	Equal variances assumed	1,42	0,96	0,39	0,25
application	Equal variances not assumed	1,42	0,96	0,39	0,24

4. Discussions and conclusions

The major objective of this study was to analyze the specific of the opinion of the students, and graduate students towards teacher training curriculum. On Likert scale with 5 points, used for research, it appears that we have a total average $M = 2,58$ of the ungraduate students' opinion (see table 1), and a total average $M = 2,82$ of the graduate students' opinion (see table 2). It is noteworthy an unfavorable average, because these data show a limited trust and a discontent of research participants, regarding curriculum for teacher training for each curricular dimensions evaluated (curricular coherence, curricular flexibility, and practical application).

The low average regarding the curricular coherence ($M = 3,17$ - the ungraduate students' opinion, and $M = 2,18$ - the graduate students' opinion) shows a weak functioning and a mismatch of the various pedagogical disciplines in order to form professional competencies. In this case, students do not see interdependencies between disciplines nor their homogeneous character.

Concerning the curricular flexibility, there is also a low average ($M = 2,45$ - the ungraduate students' opinion, and $M = 3,12$ - the graduate students' opinion) which shows that curriculum does not facilitate flexible learning paths exploring the possibility of optional subjects. At the same time, the inflexibility of curriculum makes it impossible to recover some learning difficulties, or deepening some contents.

Concerning the practical application of the curriculum for teachers training, the low average ($M = 2,13$ - the ungraduate students' opinion, and $M = 2,18$ - the graduate students' opinion) suggests that what is studied by students is not used in practical activities, so, theoretical knowledge is not transferred into practice.

In conclusion, the analysis of the participants' responses in the study, as presented in Table 1, Table 2, Table 3 show that there is not a coherence and a significant flexibility of the curriculum for teacher training. Also, in the opinion of study participants, the curriculum has not a significant practical applicability. As shown in Table 3, the opinions of those two categories of respondents are not significantly different for any of the three curricular dimensions.

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