

## TEACHER TRAINING IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA: TRADITIONS AND TRENDS

**Otilia Dandara**

*Moldova State University,  
Alexei Mateevici Str., 60, Chişinău, Moldova, MD–2009*

The author analyses the system of teacher training in the Republic of Moldova. Teacher training is a strategic issue for the Republic of Moldova, given that education is declared a national priority, but also because there are certain difficulties in providing the education system with qualified professionals. Teacher training and the quality of training of this professional category is a priority. Teacher training is a wide-ranging process encompassing pedagogical colleges and universities. Compared to universities, colleges put a strong emphasis on learning by doing. The priority of teacher training is stated in policy documents as well. The author describes the Normative and Policy Framework. There are different Professional Training Programs in the Republic of Moldova. The study programmes provide professional training in the specialist and pedagogical fields however, the analysis of study plans and the results of surveys show that some aspects of psycho-pedagogical training are given greater weight and others are in some way neglected. The teaching profession is not among the top jobs in the Republic of Moldova, though a programme to attract the youth to teaching careers and to keep young specialists in the education system is being implemented. Concerning the motivation, teachers mention that the amount of the salary is of little importance; rather, they enjoy the field/subject they teach; they like working with children and young people; they want to change the lives of children and young people. Today, the people in the education system of the Republic of Moldova have various levels of qualification. Given the importance of teacher training in terms of quality of education, modernising training programmes, and upgrading programmes to foster the teaching profession must be a permanent concern of the competent institutions.

*Keywords:* vocational training; psycho-pedagogical mode; career education; professional qualification.

### **The Essence of the Problem, and the State of its Research.**

Teacher training in the Republic of Moldova is a current issue, stemming from the fact that a good education system is provided by a contingent of qualified teachers. Addressing this topical issue is a permanent concern and therefore, we have proposed some arguments. Some are determined by the social mission of the school, while others – by the role and importance of those who implement the objectives of such an institution. Teacher training and the quality of training of this

professional category is a priority from both perspectives and we will formulate plain arguments thereof.

*1. Teacher training is a strategic issue for every state*

- despite the diversification of educational factors (such factors as mass-media and social media have become very influential), the school is still an important socialisation environment (alongside the family);
- educational policies are implemented through educational institutions;
- the school provides equal opportunities for all (although families have different possibilities);
- through their teachers, schools ensure the transmission of the national value system and contribute to the formation of social cohesion and civic spirit.

*2. Currently, the teaching profession is not among the top jobs, which actually, leads to a shortage of teaching staff*

- social perceptions of the teaching profession are, to a great extent, negative (people either sympathise with teachers because of their hard work or blame them for the lack of quality in the education system);
- young people are unwilling to choose the teaching specialities because the labour market offers more advantageous working conditions in other areas;
- the best high school graduates don't choose to major in pedagogical specialities (predominantly, graduates with more modest academic outcomes apply to such faculties);
- only a part of those graduating from the teaching specialties would like to work in schools;
- men do not want to work in schools, so the school does not provide male role models.

***Methodology, Methods and Research Tools***

The following methods were used to elucidate the problem:

- the study of specialised sources, which address the issue of teacher training;
- the study of normative documents and educational policies;
- the analysis of study programmes (especially the curricula from various institutions, both colleges and universities);
- the survey of teachers, to identify their professional skills based on self-assessment.

***Presentation of the Study Outcomes***

*The Normative and Policy Framework*

The Republic of Moldova enacted the concept of the education system functioning and structure through the Law on Education No. 547–XIII of 21 July

1995, to which the necessary amendments have been made with a view to modernising certain aspects of the educational process and system.

Currently, the concept of education in the Republic of Moldova is embedded in the Education Code (2015), which states that education is a national priority. Article 4 of the Code provides that 1) education represents a national priority and is the principal factor influencing the sustainable development of a knowledge-based society, and 2) the state assures, based on its policy in the field of education:

- a) the fundamental right to education, indispensable for the exercise of the other human rights;
- b) the implementation of the core mechanism for the training and development of the human capital;
- c) the achievement of the educational ideal and objectives, the formation of national consciousness and identity, the promotion of general-human values and society's European integration aspirations [1].

The priority of teacher training is stated in policy documents as well. Thus, "Education 2030" draft strategy highlights the difficulty of providing the education system in the Republic of Moldova with qualified teachers, the lack of motivation among the youth and men to work in schools. To attach importance to this problem, the document contains a strategic direction focused on this issue 4.3. *Qualified teachers for quality education*, which outlines the general objective *Ensuring the educational system with qualified, competent, motivated, and competitive teaching/research and managerial staff at all levels and forms of education*, and formulates several priority directions for action [6].

A programme to attract the youth to teaching careers and to keep young specialists in the education system is already being implemented. Annually, the government makes generous offers, providing budget-funded places for studies in teaching specialties. The scholarships for students in pedagogical programmes are 20 % higher than scholarships for students in other specialties.

Another programme to motivate young specialists applies as well: an allowance of 120 thousand MDL (six thousand EUR); a lower teaching load paid as for one teaching load (14 hours per week instead of 18 for a full salary); preferential conditions to access the first real estate procured in the urban area and supply with houses in the rural area; financial compensations for electricity, educational and teaching materials; payment for transportation, or provision of transportation means in case when teachers commute to other places for work purposes.

In order to develop professionally, teachers are motivated to obtain teaching and managerial degrees, which have an impact on their salary.

#### *Professional Training Programmes*

Today, the people in the education system of the Republic of Moldova have various levels of qualification: 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8. On the one hand, this diversity of

qualifications is determined by the traditions of teacher training and on the other hand, by new trends and regulations at international level that were implemented in the Republic of Moldova in last decades.

Teachers are trained in both technical and vocational education and higher education. Since becoming a sovereign state, both types of teacher training mechanisms have undergone changes in the Republic of Moldova.

In the early 1990s, the former pedagogical schools were transformed into colleges and acquired the status of short-term higher education institutions. After 2001, they were downgraded to the status of specialised secondary schools. Lately, they were made part of the technical and vocational education, and have the status of post-secondary vocational institutions.

Attempts have also been made to exclude teacher training from pedagogical colleges, the intention being argued by the tendency to provide schools only with specialists with a professional qualification level of 6–7 according to ISCED. This attempt negatively influenced the assurance of the education system with teachers, as pedagogical colleges proved to be not only institutions carrying out quality training of kindergarten educators, primary school teachers, music, sports and technological education teachers, but also a favourable environment for professional education in terms of promoting positive attitudes towards the teaching profession. Compared to universities, colleges put a strong emphasis on learning by doing, an approach that fosters competence development. Another quality indicator of college-based pedagogical studies was the graduates' high employment rate and the continuation of studies within part-time programmes provided by universities. All these benefits have led to the revitalisation of teacher training programmes in colleges.

Nowadays, colleges offer professional training programmes – level 4 qualification, for educators' assistants; level 5 qualification, for educators, and primary school teachers. Universities offer professional training programmes – level 6 qualification (bachelor's degree), level 7 qualification (master's degree) and level 8 qualification (doctoral degree).

The Education Code of the Republic of Moldova (2015) promotes the quality of teacher training and raising the level of qualification. Thus, since 2018, only teachers who have a master's degree can teach in high schools.

An overview of the specifics of teacher training for various areas of the education system underlines the following aspects:

- In the training of primary school teachers, there is a strong emphasis on psycho-pedagogical training. The multitude of particular didactics strengthens the teaching competences, while the subjects related to psychological, behavioural and educational theory and methodology train students in terms of class management and extra-curricular activities.

- There is a difference between the programmes that train educational psychologists and teacher assistants and the programmes that train teachers who will deal with the subjects taught in gymnasiums and high schools. In the case of teacher training for various subjects, the emphasis is put on acquiring the subject-related knowledge (in history, chemistry, biology, etc.).
- Teachers accede to the education system with quite different professional training itineraries.

We shall describe now the structure of study programmes in terms of their outcomes and content.

*a) Professional Training Programme of 180 credits (the three-year Bachelor's degree).*

Through these mono-specialty programmes, teachers are trained to teach school subjects in gymnasiums. Though each university has its own traditions in the training of teachers, whereby certain aspects of professional training are outlined (specific organisation and monitoring of internships, organisation of practical classes, organisational culture of the institution, which influences the system of attitudes, etc.), generally speaking, the outcomes and content of the study programmes relate to two basic components: the study of the specialist field (chemistry, biology, mathematics, etc.) and the study of the psycho-pedagogical module. The first component forms the knowledge, understanding, analysis, presentation competences in the field of specialisation, while the second component forms the competences in how to design, implement, evaluate the educational process and create of a favourable learning environment.

The structure and content of the psycho-pedagogical module was established by the Order of the Ministry of Education in 2005 and is continuously promoted by the regulatory documents of the higher education, primarily by the Framework Plan which determines the concept of professional training at this educational level. According to the normative provisions, the module implies 60 credits, out of which – 30 credits for theoretical training and 30 credits for practical training. The content of the psycho-pedagogical module consists of three components: psychology, pedagogy and didactics. Depending on the competences to be formed, the recommendation is as follows: 1) psychology, core course; 2) psychology, optional course; 3) pedagogy, core course; 4) pedagogy, optional course; 5) didactics of the subject, core course; 6) didactics of the subject, optional course.

*b) Professional Training Programme of 240 credits (the four-year Bachelor's degree).*

These programmes offer training in related specialties. The content of the training programme comprises three components: two specialist areas and the psycho-pedagogical module. The professional training in psycho-pedagogy follows the same regulations: 60 credits with a module structure almost similar to the 180-

credit programme. The exception to this is the didactic dimension, since two particular didactics are taught: for the first and for the second specialty.

From a formal point of view, the structure of the study plans complies with the conceptual approach. Theoretically, students can establish their academic/training itinerary based on the optional subjects, but this conceptual element of training is often constrained by the limited number of students and the tendency of institutions to limit the costs. The process of developing professional competences is additionally influenced by some practical aspects, which are, at first sight, primary needs. Since the emphasis during pedagogical internship is put on classroom teaching, teaching skills are given priority over the communication skills and the organisation of extra-curricular activities. Therefore, our conclusion is that there is a concern about teaching school subjects and less attention is paid to establishing relationships and monitoring the class as a social group.

*c) Training Programme for Professional Training 142 Sciences of Education (the three or four-year Bachelor's degree).*

The professional training programmes Pedagogy, Pre-school Pedagogy, Primary Education Pedagogy, Psycho-pedagogy, Special Pedagogy actually do not apply the structure of the psycho-pedagogical module, because the very logic of professional training demands a different structure of the itinerary. Even in the case of double specialisations, such as Primary Education Pedagogy and Foreign Languages, the emphasis is put on subjects with a psycho-pedagogical profile. These cover circa 120 credits out of 240 (in the case of double majors). Roughly the same weight is given to the psycho-pedagogical dimension in case of 180 credits (single speciality).

Having analysed the content of the development of psycho-pedagogical competences, we cannot speak of a psycho-pedagogical module, because the course units with a psychological, pedagogical content as well as those related to the didactics of subjects are mainstreamed into the whole training process.

*d) The Psycho-Pedagogical Module for Students Majoring in Areas Related to School Subjects*

Another way of training teachers is when students from related fields (biology, history, mathematics, etc.) choose (optionally) the psycho-pedagogical module.

These graduates receive qualification in the field of their professional training, not in pedagogy, but the fact that they acquired skills to organise and implement the educational process, allows them to be employed in the school and even to benefit from the motivation programme for the young specialists.

Obviously, the variety of teacher training programmes and methods corresponds, for the most part, to our diverse world: on the one hand, there are traditions, on the other hand, there are new trends; moreover, there are also

conceptual aspects (at first sight, beneficial), which generate certain difficulties determined by the concrete conditions of society's functioning at the macro level.

The Republic of Moldova is a small country and the division of qualifications based on a nomenclator, e.g. bachelor's degrees in mathematical sciences and bachelor's degrees in educational sciences (mathematics), requires the distribution of candidates, which, given the high rate of migration of young people and the declining demographics, makes it difficult to have strong functional programmes with numerous academic groups. This has a direct impact on young people's choice of teaching specialities. Therefore, the narrow qualification does not meet their needs.

The quality of pedagogical studies is affected as well. It is well known that the learning environment is a significant educational factor. In the case of an insufficiently consolidated academic group with a small number of students, a competitive training atmosphere cannot be created, there are no conditions to use collaborative and cooperative learning strategies, there is no favourable context for peer learning and evaluation.

Nevertheless, there is a weakening of related areas of professional training (biology, history, chemistry). The division also negatively influences the training of specialists in these fields. Unfortunately, the aforementioned shortcomings concerning teacher training apply to related fields as well.

#### *Peculiarities of Master's Studies*

Master's degrees are demanded by teachers working in high schools, but recently, there has been a trend for those employed in schools to obtain the level 7 qualification (ISCED). This also applies to primary school teachers, gymnasium teachers and school managers (according to the law, the latter may not have a teaching background).

All master's programmes can be grouped into two big categories: teaching masters (focused on particular didactics), which develop teaching competences in certain school subjects, and masters which form competences that enable the employment and performance of duties in various areas of the education system. A trend is emerging whereby the master's degree strengthens general professional skills (managerial skills, trainer skills, family work skills).

Because of the small number of applicants (only teachers of one subject), determined by its specific nature, teaching masters are still in place only in some universities. In recent years, master's programmes that train skills needed for the educational process "outside the classroom" are being strengthened. On the one hand, these masters are accessible, because there is a greater likelihood of creating academic groups, on the other hand, these master's programmes broaden the system of skills and employment opportunities for teachers, because these train them not so much as teachers, but rather as specialists in the field of education (focusing on educational management, adult education, family counselling, etc.).

### *Other Training Means*

One way to address the shortage of teachers is having additional qualifications. In their position of a teacher of one school subject, the teacher may study another related school subject during one year. Being an employee of an educational institution is a precondition to accede to an additional qualification programme. Retraining is also a solution. Retraining implies a two-year training programme (120 credits), which requires the cumulation of 60 credits for attendance of the psycho-pedagogical module and another 60 credits for the specialist training. Lately, teachers have been largely involved in continuing education. This type of training does not take place once every five years, but continuously over a period of five years. Teachers gain a certain number of academic credits by participating in various activities: internships, conferences, publication of articles, etc.

In the framework of a project implemented by the Department of Education Sciences, Oxford University and the Moldova State University, we conducted a study on teacher training, which yielded certain important findings related to the professional training and professional activity.

Concerning the motivation, teachers mention that the amount of the salary is of little importance; rather, they enjoy the field/subject they teach; they like working with children and young people; they want to change the lives of children and young people. The professional training programmes focus on the subject knowledge; teaching strategies; annual and daily planning; and assessment strategies. Teachers consistently highlighted the following: teaching multicultural and multilingual learners and supporting students with special education needs were the areas in which they felt less well-prepared after completing their teacher training programmes [3].

The results of the survey confirm the findings made based on the analysis of curricula, regarding the emphasis that is put on teachers' training. The double confirmation of this situation reveals the need to update the curricula to strengthen some competences that are necessary to be able to work in the education system.

### *Conclusions and Results of the Study*

Every curriculum needs a constant update, especially the one in education. A complex approach is needed to increase the quality of teacher training:

- increasing the prestige of the teacher and the social status, whose image is strengthened not only by creating positive social perceptions, but also by ensuring good working and living conditions;
- updating the contents of vocational training and a more efficient connection of universities with educational institutions;
- changing, if necessary, teaching-learning-assessment strategies, with an emphasis on laboratory activities. The use of modern communication technologies, virtual reality technologies is useful and necessary for students



who will go to a diversity class (in terms of children's education, motivation for learning, family education styles, cultural and ethnic diversity etc.).

The problem of teacher training is a strategic issue for each country and it requires a systemic approach and systematic actions.

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## **ПІДГОТОВКА ВЧИТЕЛІВ У РЕСПУБЛІЦІ МОЛДОВА: ТРАДИЦІЇ ТА ТЕНДЕНЦІЇ**

**Отілія Дандара**

*Молдавський державний університет,  
вул. А. Матеевича, 60, Кишинев, Молдова, MD–2009*

Автор аналізує систему підготовки вчителів у Республіці Молдова. Підготовка вчителів є стратегічним питанням для Республіки Молдова, оскільки освіта проголошена національним пріоритетом, а також тому, що існують певні труднощі у забезпеченні системи освіти кваліфікованими фахівцями. Підготовка вчителів та якість підготовки цієї професійної категорії власне і є пріоритетом. Підготовка вчителів – це широкомасштабний процес, який охоплює педагогічні коледжі та університети. Порівняно з університетами, коледжі роблять приділяють більше уваги навчанню за допомогою діяльності. Пріоритетність підготовки вчителів також

визначена програмними документами. Автор описує цю нормативно-правову базу та різні програми професійної підготовки вчителів у Республіці Молдова. Описані навчальні програми передбачають професійну підготовку в фахових та педагогічних галузях, однак аналіз навчальних планів та результати опитувань показують, що деяким аспектам психолого-педагогічної підготовки надається більша вага, а іншим певним чином ігнорується. Професія вчителя не є однією з найпопулярніших в Республіці Молдова, хоча реалізується програма залучення молоді до вчительської діяльності та утримання молодих спеціалістів у системі освіти. Щодо мотивації вчителі зазначають, що розмір заробітної плати не має великого значення; скоріше їм подобається галузь/предмет, який вони викладають; їм подобається працювати з дітьми та молоддю; вони хочуть змінити життя дітей та молоді. Сьогодні в системі освіти Республіки Молдова працюють спеціалісти різних рівнів кваліфікації. Враховуючи важливість підготовки вчителів з точки зору якості освіти, модернізація програм підготовки та вдосконалення програм для сприяння професії вчителя має бути постійною турботою компетентних установ.

*Ключові слова:* професійне навчання; психолого-педагогічний режим; кар'єрне навчання; професійна кваліфікація.