

Chapter 10

Language Students' Training as Future Teachers: A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the chapter is to show to what extent university-based teacher training programs reflect the new educational standards required by the reform applied to the Romanian higher education system. Specifically, it attempts to analyze the relevance of the curriculum that forms the basis of the language teachers' preparation focusing on its content, structure, and educational aims and purposes. It also tries to highlight the degree to which such programs meet not only learners' needs but also the ones of today's society. Last but not least, the study aims to identify what elements resulted from the Romanian educational reform could be useful for the researchers interested in the field of initial language teacher training.

INTRODUCTION

In the context of an ever-changing society, teacher education has been a permanent concern of practitioners, researchers and education policy makers. The European education policy has aimed to reconceptualize and reshape pre-service teacher training in an attempt to foster and assure high quality education in all the countries of the continent. In the particular case of Romania, an ex-communist country that is now part of the European Union, any discussion about the teaching and learning process has to refer to two major periods, that is, before and after the implementation of the Bologna reform in the education system. Briefly speaking, the Bologna process, which was named after the Bologna Declaration signed by 29 countries on the 19th of June 1999, lasted until 2010 and had as main objectives to establish a European higher education area and increase its international competitiveness by promoting common organizational

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and educational principles and values. As László (2014, p. 257) shows, “the primary goal of the accords is the coordination and harmonization of the various European higher education systems without losing their colorful diversity and individual features, thereby making European higher education even more attractive for students and scholars from all over the world.” In other words, national systems were to adopt a two-cycle curriculum consisting of an undergraduate level (bachelor’s degree) and a graduate level (master’s degree), and use a system of transferable credits (ECTS) meant to “promote European citizens’ employability and the international competitiveness of the European higher education system” (1999, p. 3). Universities were invited to affirm their autonomy and independence within a general framework of values consisting in stimulating free movement and student and teacher mobility as well as in strengthening cooperation in terms of quality assurance by “developing comparable criteria and methodology” (1999, p. 4). According to the same Declaration, all countries were to base their policies on the “promotion of the necessary European dimensions in higher education, particularly with regards to curricular development, inter-institutional co-operation, mobility schemes and integrated programs of study, training and research” (1999, p. 4).

As to pre-service teacher education in Romania, it should be noted that before the Bologna process schools and universities were dominated by a traditional educational trend that survived in various forms ranging from curriculum design to teaching methods and styles. After the introduction of the Bologna model, teacher training had to adapt to new educational purposes required by a new social and historical environment. Consequently, the new initial teacher training programs shifted from teacher-centered education to the various advantages of student-centered education, to competence-based curriculum and assessment, and a better interrelationship between theory and practice.

Starting from these prerequisites, the purpose of the chapter is to show to what extent university-based teacher training programs reflect the new educational standards required by the reform applied to the Romanian higher education system. Specifically, it attempts to analyze the relevance of the curriculum that forms the basis of the language teachers’ preparation focusing on its content, structure, and educational aims and purposes. It also tries to highlight the degree to which such programs meet not only learners’ needs but also the ones of today’s society. Last but not least, the study aims to identify what elements resulted from the Romanian educational reform could be useful for the researchers interested in the field of initial language teacher training.

BACKGROUND

Over the past decades, teacher education has been critically reviewed by numerous researchers and educators in an attempt to rethink the model of teacher learning and adapt it to the requirements of a constantly changing world. There have been various studies in the field of language and literature teaching, which have helped the conceptual understanding of the process and have led to the design of better pre-service teacher education programs. From the vast amount of existing research, the present analysis has selected several views and principles that lie at the basis of teacher education. Thus, some researchers (Bansal, 2009) draw a distinction between “the technical rationality” approach and the “realistic approach” to teacher education. The former represents the “rational or logical” (Bansal, 2009, p. 33) side of learning, whose main focus is on processing information. The latter, on the other hand, adds to the cognitive processes involved in learning teaching an affective dimension consisting in the feelings, emotions, beliefs, values and attitudes, which are inherent in any teaching activity. The author

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