

IMPERATIVES FOR CHANGE IN THE CONTINUING TEACHER TRAINING. AN INTERNATIONAL AND ROMANIAN PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

The current study advocates for the critical role of teachers and their adapted and specific continuing training in providing qualitative educational services. Current trends, measures and principles of education evolution at the international and national level as they appear in consultative and strategic international (OECD, UNESCO, European Commission) and Romanian documents are selected according to pre-set criteria. They are comparatively and thoroughly analyzed and twelve specific topics with important implications for the improved continuing training of teachers. We identified topical issues that both indicate new general accents of education as well as new accents emerging from the recent sanitary crises. The topics are grouped in two categories: topics related with the need for teachers' and students' upskilling and reskilling and topics related to school organization and curriculum vision. The highlighted topics are detailed and discussed, in order to extract and promote specific imperatives these topics create for the continuing teacher training.

Keywords: *continuing teacher training; educational trends; change in education;*

INTRODUCTION. CONTEXT

The teaching profession faces challenges and new accents that come today at an unprecedentedly fast rate. The rapid and diverse changes in the societies and communities have a direct or indirect impact on the initial and continuing teacher training agendas. Given the responsibility of teachers to prepare the new generation of citizens and the continuing pressure to offer education at a high degree of quality, teachers are the main agents of change. The current research stresses the critical role that teachers have in providing qualitative educational services (Hattie, 2014) and in responding adequately to the new needs and expectations of society, pupils and families (UNESCO-IBE, 2021). While a lot of innovative and new educational resources are used in schools, it seems that teachers, their skills and abilities to make a good use of these resources and accommodate them into effective educational situations are particularly essential in maintaining the learning and development of students (Sahlberg, 2013).

The importance the good use of resources and of teachers' adaptability have in order to ensure the meeting of the new and topical educational imperatives became obvious in the Coronavirus pandemic period we all have passed through. The sanitary crisis imposed new educational goals and priorities that teachers had to meet. The world of education responded promptly, by exploring and testing new ways to ensure education. A lot of innovative

educational resources were promoted in order to meet these new needs, new forms of teacher training were adopted and different the important structures that are involved in ensuring the quality of education were active in guiding teachers in this endeavor (*Darling-Hammond, L.,2022*). Considering all these topical challenges the educational systems and processed face, the present paper explores the lines of coherence that can be identifies in the large spectrum of educational trends and consequently highlights their main implications for the continuing teacher training.

Important global and European agencies such as European Commission, UNICEF, UNESCO, UNESCO IBE and OECD periodically initiate systemic research actions that highlight the recent trends, needs, successes and limits of education and educational systems of the world. At the same time, new international agendas of education with a global impact, that tend to be evoked and followed at our national level appear. It is the case of the UNESCO's Education 2030 Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action for the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 4 or European Commission's initiative on achieving a new European Education Area by 2025.

These documents and strategies advance new understandings on the concept of Quality of education and set the trends for new approaches in the continuing teacher training.

Such initiatives are even more present in the wake of the Covid 19 pandemic. The urge of tackling it effectively led governing and consultative European and world organizations to undertake important declarations, research actions and strategic plans that have implications for shaping the future of continuing teacher training.

The declarations and studies of the last years that enter this category approached both general educational issues as well as specific ones. Thus, the impact of the sanitary crises on the quality of early education was studied by Nugroho, Jeon, Kamei & Lopez Boo (2021) and reported in the paper *It's Not Too Late to Act on Early Learning: Understanding and recovering from the impact of pre-primary education closures during COVID-19* (Innocenti Research Briefs no. 2021-03). The costs of global digital education were highlighted by Yao, Brossard, Mizunoya, Nasir, Walugembe, Cooper, Rafique & Reuge (2021) in *How Much Does Universal Digital Learning Cost?* Policy Brief). OECD issued reports on the current state of education (OECD, 2021a) and discussed adapted solution related to the use of the digital technologies for continuing of the educational processes (OECD, 2021b).

Two types on new imperative arise from these recent research reports. A category of imperatives that are related with the new evolutions in access to technologies, globalization and world issues, and a distinct category of imperatives that are emergent from the lessons we came to learn during the recent sanitary crises of Covid 19, and from the even more recent war conflict in Ukraine.

1. STUDY QUESTIONS

In the light of the dramatic changes most educational systems and societies face today, the need for a restructuration of the continuing teacher training in order to offer a more relevant teacher preparation for these imperatives. The present paper aims at offering certain answers on the questions:

- What would be the main topics of change that must be considered in the effort of continuing teacher training upgrading?

- How these topics are detailed and explained at the international (world and European) and at the Romanian international level?
- Is there a connection between the new general accents of education and the new accents emerging from the recent sanitary crises? 2.

2. METHOD

In order to articulate the answers to the above-mentioned questions, we selected a number of international and national studies and strategies which we considered correlated. By critically analyzing them, we identified certain topical issues that reflect relevant trend in education and possibly have implications for the continuing teacher training. We selected:

- three OECD studies:
 - (a) OECD (2020), *TALIS 2018 Results (Volume II): Teachers and School Leaders as Valued Professionals*, TALIS, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/19cf08df-en>
 - (b) OECD (2022), *Trends Shaping Education 2022*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/6ae8771a-en>.
 - (c) OECD (2020), *Back to the Future of Education: Four OECD Scenarios for Schooling*, Educational Research and Innovation, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/178ef527-en>.
 - three UNESCO (two UNESCO IBE) studies:
 - (a) UNESCO The International Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030 2022-2025 Strategic Plan <https://teachertaskforce.org/knowledge-hub/2022-2025-strategic-plan-international-task-force-teachers-education-2030/>;
 - (b) UNESCO-IBE: Hybrid Education, Learning and Assessment (HELA): Eight clues on hybrid education, 2021, <http://www.ibe.unesco.org/en/news/hybrid-education-learning-and-assessment-hela>
 - (c) UNESCO-IBE: Ten clues for rethinking curriculum, Operti, R. (author), 2021, In-Progress Reflection No. 42, *Current and Critical Issues in Curriculum, Learning and Assessment* <http://www.ibe.unesco.org/en/news/ten-clues-rethinking-curriculum>
 - one European Commission strategic document:
 - (a) Communication from the commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - on achieving the European Education Area by 2025 (2020)
<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0625&from=EN>
 - two Romanian strategic documents:
 - (a) The Educated Romania Project – Educated Romania Report 2021 [Raport-Romania-Educata], <http://www.romaniaeducata.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Raport-Romania-Educata-14-iulie-2021.pdf>
 - (b) The strategy of Romanian Education Digitalisation [Strategia privind digitalizarea educației din România], Ministerul Educației și Cercetării, <https://www.edu.ro/sites/default/files/SMART.Edu%20-%20document%20consultare.pdf>
- The selection *criteria* we used were:
- the document dates from 2020 onwards, so the pandemic period is reflected.
 - the document benchmarks the considerations in both the current pandemic situation as well as in the general trends of education highlighted in the contemporary European and global discourse.

- the document includes practical and statistical proves for the principles it promotes.

The thorough and comparative analysis of the documents allowed us to select a set of twelve topics reflecting recent trends and accents in education that must be considered in the continuing teacher training programs elaboration, delivery and evaluation:

Table no. 1. Topical issues with implications for the continuing teacher training

I. Topics related to the need for students and teachers' upskilling and reskilling	I. Topics related to school organization and curriculum vision
I.1. Knowledge management	II.1. Valorization of teachers and teaching
I.2. Transversal skills	II.2. Child-focused education
I.3. Personal and interpersonal development	II.3. Increased inclusiveness and equity
I.4. Change and crises management education	II.4. New and extended understanding of learning
I.5. Good use of digital technologies in education	II.5. Curriculum and teaching contents developments
I.6. Teachers' collaboration and learning communities	II.6. Coordinated and coherent measures for quality education

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

I. Topics related to the need for students and teachers' upskilling and reskilling

The need for students and teachers' upskilling and reskilling conveys in general terms one of the central exigencies nearly all educational systems have today. The important world mutations such as the globalization, the economic growth and technologization, on one hand and the recent world experience of pandemic, on the other hand are just some of the sources for this general need. The OECD document Trends in Shaping Education (2022) associates this need with the economic growth and with the changes we face on the labor market, including the new models of shorter working hours and working from home.

The immediate recommendation is that of capacitating teachers and students with lifelong learning skills and attitudes and with particular dispositions such as adaptability and resilience. The UNESCO-IBE document on Hybrid Education Learning and Assessment Eight clues for hybrid education (2021) invites us to shift the educational efforts towards teaching contents able to equip students with knowledge and skills involved in them building a "better future".

Knowledge management

Certain categories of skills seem to suit this aim and must be developed both in teachers and students. Knowledge management skills are essential, in a world of a permanent information enrichment and of open access to information, knowledge management skills. Both teachers and students face the tasks of approach knowledge in a critical manner, with a stronger capacity to select, reorganize, effectively use and promote the knowledge. The Hybrid Education trends document (2021) associates the capacity with power, defined as access to data, making decisions and solving problems, discriminating false information the capacity to use the collective intelligence. Moreover, the declaration on achieving the European Education Area by 2025 (2020)

refers to educating students' basic skills and digital skills as prerequisites for a successful insertion on the work market and active citizenship. In another perspective, the TALIS report (2020) highlight that today teachers spend about 20% of their teaching time with discipline and administrative tasks, a reality that could be explained by the changing of students' profile and needs and by the changing of teachers' tasks and roles.

In the light of these understandings a new teacher training agenda must be considered as the training programs and the manner they are delivered should inform attendees on the ways such *new skills* related with knowledge management can be thought in an integrated way.

Transversal skills

In connection with the previous imperative, the selected documents widely speak about the need for educating the so-called transversal skills in today students. There is a growing expectation that society has of schools and teachers for fostering higher order skills. The declaration on achieving the European Education Area by 2025 (2020) mentions critical thinking skills, life skills, entrepreneurial DNA, creativity and civic involvement, and mentions as useful didactic instruments the transdisciplinary and challenges-based approaches.

At the Romanian national level, the project Educated Romania mentions the need for developing active citizens and highlights the importance of functional literacy skills. All these accents imply training teachers for teaching their specialty subjects in a manner that can lead to training students' transferable capabilities.

Personal and interpersonal development

The reflections on quality education that the international and national documents include continue in the line of upskilling and reskilling, with the idea of enriching the formative initiatives in the direction of personal and interpersonal development of students and teachers as a solution for a more efficient approach of the nowadays life and labor market challenges. Alongside with the (lifelong) learning skills, the documents mention communication and interrelation skills, self-management and self-regulation skills (OECD, 2020), intellectual autonomy and socio-emotional skills, self-confidence, self-awareness, empathy and collaboration (UNESCO-IBE, Opertti, 2021).

Change and crises management education

A special attention is given in the recent international and national educational trends and imperative documents to the change and crises management abilities. It is a category of imperatives that must be regarded from both the perspective of teachers and students. The recent times of crises and emergency urged for teachers' upskilling on temporary remote teaching and online teaching, on offering emotional support and on collaborating with families and community in order to continue offering a quality education.

OECD's document Back to the Future of Education (2020) mentions the trend of rising the participation of students in formal education, while the UNESCO document on Ten clues for Rethinking Curriculum (UNESCO-IBE, Opertti, 2021) offers an interesting perspective on the ability of teachers to identify and fight against vulnerability in all its forms and to delivering an education that promotes freedom. A supplementary perspective in this respect is given in the European Education Area by 2025 (2020) communication that mentions the aim for secure, bullying free educational environments as an indicator of quality education. In terms of teacher training priorities, these accents indicate the need for training teachers to tackle community problems that can be sources of crises or emergency.

Good use of digital technologies in education

In relation with the recent online teaching experiences, the priority of training students' and teachers' digital skills came out as a mega-priority. At both national and international levels, the need of covering this gap in educational actors' capabilities is stressed and explained.

The context is favorable, as in the last decade we witnessed a rapid evolution of the information and communication technology and the development of a variety of digital learning management systems and instruments for information and content creation, for the cooperation and promotion of knowledge.

The key is here to train and empower teachers for the qualitative use and integration of digital instruments in their teaching, evaluation and supporting of learning. It is an accent mentioned in all selected OECD, UNESCO and national documents. It is also a training need particularly highlighted by the TALIS report (2020).

The national project Educated Romania advances ways of tackling the important issue of ensuring digital competences in teachers and students, while the National strategy for Digitalization of Education (2021) speaks about a new digital pedagogy and about the importance of reconsidering the whole teaching process in the light of digitalization. The later seems to be a solution against teachers' limited understanding on learning process and their need for centralized digital resources.

Teachers' collaboration and learning communities

A special category of continuing teacher training needs emerges from the invitation iterated in the UNESCO, OECD and national documents for teachers' collaboration and creation of learning communities. *Back to the Future of Education* document regards *teachers as knowledgeable and networked professionals* (OECD, 2020, online). The paper associates the increased pedagogical knowledge and networking with an increased preoccupation for meeting students' needs, diversification of teaching strategies, and teachers undertaking the role of curriculum developers. UNESCO Hybrid education paper (2021) stresses the need for rethinking the relation between schools, teachers, families and communities on the bases of mutual trust. This involves initiatives of parental education and of lifelong learning in a functional partnership with the community.

The paper also highlights the need for teachers contributing to the production and dissemination of knowledge in a humanistic and ethical vision. At the national level, teachers' collaboration is considered a topical issue for continuing teacher training in the frame of the Educated Romania project. As cooperation and networking in education imply specific skills, the continuing teacher training experiences must include explicit and implicit exercises in this respect.

II. Topics related to school organization and curriculum vision

The second category of topics that generate imperatives for the continuing teacher training structures and profile regard the teacher as a member of the school community and as a curriculum developer. While the selected papers highlight the importance of the teacher as a key factor in improving the quality of education, we agree with the vision of Pasi Sahlberg when speaking about the three pillars of the successful human capital in Finland (2013). Together with the quality of initial teacher training, the author mentions the importance of relationships and that of teachers' power. It is the power of decision taking in curriculum matters as well as in the organization on classroom educational milieu.

Valorization of teachers and teaching

A new perspective on value of teachers and teaching is promoted both nationally and internationally. The Teacher Task Force Strategic Plan for 2022-2025 (2022) include two main outcomes related to the valorization of teachers: promotion of knowledge on teachers and teaching and Advocacy for the critical role of teachers. The document argues that" Covid

19 crises revealed teacher's potential" (UNESCO-TTF, 2022). At his turn, Operti (2021), the main author of UNESCO document of rethinking the curriculum, delineates the topic as one of the ten clues for rethinking curriculum, and puts in in very powerful words of *inspiring affection for educators*. The sources of teachers' valorization are, in Operti's and UNESCO's understanding, the promotion of innovation in the context of crises, teachers' collaboration, production and dissemination of effective teaching materials, the reduction of generational gap by teachers' digital expression. All these sources have the potential to modify the agenda of continuing teacher training, in the sense of ensuring teachers the correlated specific skills. At the national level, The Educated Romania project (2021) aims at defining a new standard of professional competences for teachers and invest teachers with new accent roles of mentor and facilitator.

Child-focused education

The stress for an increased child-focused education is a common topic in the selected international and national documents. Beyond the affirmation of the principle, the UNESCO document on Ten clue of rethinking curriculum (2021) gives an interesting perspective on the topic by referring at the need to understand the young generation, a priority that, in terms of the way is detailed in the document and in the perspective of teacher training, would mean focusing on skills for understanding younger generation vulnerabilities, teaching skills and instruments related to supporting students' personal and inter-personal development.

This agenda is completed with certain priorities highlighted by the UNESCO paper Education 2030: Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action Towards inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all, that stresses the importance of flexible learning pathways and a new system for recognition of learning outcomes. From the perspective of hybrid education (UNESCO-IBE, 2021), child focused education is associated with a renewed student-teacher relationship, ensuring students' well-being and development on the bases of diverse learning experiences. Consequently, teacher training agenda must include preparation of teachers for a flexible approach to learning and curriculum development and delivery.

Increased inclusiveness and equity

One on the main needs for training mentioned by the teachers worldwide is that for professional skills for approaching diverse students, students with special educational needs, students at risk, immigrant students and for education in multicultural and multilingual classrooms. This priority for continuing teacher training is promoted through the European Education Area by 2025 (2020) communication that has as a main pillar the idea of inclusion and gender equality.

The idea is related to ensuring an adequate level of instruction disregarding the issues of individual differences that could cause discrimination, teaching of lifelong learning strategies, tackling the gender issues and international cooperation and mobility as a source on new educational models and experiences.

At the national level, promotion of an equitable system of education, and of the integrity and ethical professional principles comes in the same line (Educated Romania Project, 2021). Seen from an axiological perspective, valuing diversity and promoting a certain synergy and common understanding between values of freedom, justice, solidarity, inclusion, excellence, cohesion etc. are considered important benchmarks for rethinking curriculum (UNESCO-IBE, Operti, 2021).

A new and in-depth understanding of learning

The focus on quality teaching for quality learning must be prepared continually through improved teacher training initiatives by integrating new evidence-based perspectives on learning. The selected international and national documents detail the new understanding teachers are invited to have on students' learning by referring to it from the perspective of hybrid education (UNESCO -IBE, 2021). In this line, the recommendations are for extension and democratization of learning opportunities, an initiative facilitated by the use of digital technologies, the alignment of teaching efforts with the teaching objectives and expected learning outcomes and with the teaching pathways and processes, the selection, prioritization and sequenced approach to key competences development, increasing the decision power of teachers for a differentiated management of instructional time and resources. These recommendations create imperatives for specific teacher training in curriculum decision making.

On the other hand, the vision on learning is also promoted in terms of understanding the role of the non-cognitive components for the efficacy of learning: motivation, attitudes towards learning and emotions (UNESCO-IBE, Operti, 2021), equipping students with lifelong learning and self-regulation skills and promoting deep learning (OECD, Back to the future of Education. Trends in Education and Schooling, 2020). There are specific suggestions that generate imperatives for teacher training in the line of effective application of evidence-based learning principles.

Curriculum and teaching contents developments

The global and national mutations require approaching new educational dimensions and contents, and measures of reorganization of some of the existing contents. The UNESCO-IBE documents highlight the need for education for a sustainable planet and education for disease prevention. OECD trends highlight the idea that schools are agents of knowledge society development. European Education Area by 2025 (2020) document details the important for directing education towards preparing students for the green and digital transition as well as for understanding and valuing diversity. The national paper Educated Romania Project highlight the need for STEM education and for training teachers in this approach. Certain trends with implications for the teacher training new initiatives are obvious in the didactic approaches for curriculum. Thus, there is an invitation for a responsible curriculum alignment (UNESCO-IBE, 2021), a responsible and improved way of using digital technologies for learning (Romanian national strategy for digitalization of education, 2021), an improved way of understanding classical competences such as that of literacy, and the aim of developing them in the teaching of all school disciplines (OECD, Back to the future of Education, 2020).

Coordinated and coherent measures for quality education

Quality education is a key concept in all the selected international and national documents. They promote the idea of a concerted approach at the level of educational systems, translated in national and regional educational policies (UNESCO-Teacher Task force 2022-2025 Strategic plan, 2022) and in an increased power for schools and teachers to co-develop the curriculum (UNESCO-IBE, Operti, 2021). Insuring the coherent and coordinated approach in undertaking of measures for a quality education at all levels of the educational system implies focusing the continuing teacher training on getting teachers familiar with the new international and national policies and empowering them for co-creation of the curriculum.

CONCLUSIONS

The importance of a quality and specific continuing teacher training for the actualization of teachers in relation to the new global and national trends and, topics and issues is undeniable. We highlighted a set of imperatives in teachers' professional development related to new sets of skills they are required to accumulate in order to tackle effectively the new issues educational systems face and with new competences and roles they must undertake regarding the development and delivery of the curriculum. The imperatives are correlated with the recent international and national strategic initiative and recommendation for a quality education.

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