

# MODERN APPROACHES REGARDING CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT OF TEACHERS FROM UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION SYSTEM, IN THE CONTEXT OF COVID-19 GLOBAL PANDEMIC

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## Abstract:

*In the current social and economic context of Romanian society, deeply negatively impacted by the Covid-19 global pandemic, the Romanian education system necessitated an urgent paradigm change through whole its structure. The whole teaching-learning-evaluation process has transferred from classroom to on-line environment. To better respond and adapt to the new challenges, the teacher / professor must adapt his educational approaches and techniques, switching the traditional teaching methods with the more modern ones.*

*In the present article, it is presented the modality or approach used by the teachers from Bucharest Municipality to successfully adapt to the new challenges ahead, by actively participating to continuous improvement programs and classes regarding the use of modern on-line teaching platforms, as well as new teaching methods applicable to on-line classes environment.*

**Keywords:** *education, Covid-19, method, education platform, on-line environment*

**JEL Classification:** *I 21*

## INTRODUCTION

In Romania, the continuous training of teaching staff is a right that is carried out mainly through professional training and retraining.

The career development of teaching staff in school education is achieved by promoting the examination of the completion of education and the taking of teaching grades II and I.

In conjunction with the specific regulations for adult education and permanent education, teacher training is carried out through compulsory training. Continuous training periods ensure the professional development of teaching staff and enter the system of assessment/equivalence through transferable vocational credits, with the obligation of the teacher to accumulate 90 credits over a period of 5 years.

Lifelong teacher training programs are organized modularly in the following main areas: specialty, pedagogy, psychology of education, specialized teaching, ICT, educational management.

Continuing training ensures that the competences of teaching staff are updated and developed, including the acquisition of new skills, in line with developments in education needs and educational curricula, as well as with the requirements for adapting teaching staff skills to changes in education structures/processes. According to its main destinations, continuing training is aimed at:

- a) Updating and developing, through regular training/refresher programs, skills in the field(s) of specialization corresponding to the teaching activities acquired through initial training;
- b) Developing skills for learning career progression through the education and training system;

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- c) Acquisition or development of managerial skills, guidance, control, evaluation in education structures and organizations;
- d) Acquiring new skills through retraining/retraining programs for new specializations and/or new teaching functions other than those obtained through initial training;
- e) The acquisition of complementary or additional skills that broaden the range of activities and functions that can be provided by teaching staff (e-learning, language teaching, educational counselling and career guidance, adult education and so on);
- f) Development and expansion of transversal skills related to social roles and personal and professional development, interaction and communication with the social and educational environment, taking responsibility for the organization, management and improvement of the strategic performance of professional groups, self-control and reflective analysis of their own activity and so on.

The continuous training of teaching staff is based on the paradigm of a skills approach and the concept of cumulative development of the level of competence of teaching staff. The level of competence covered by the continuing training/refresher programs and activities shall be assessed on the basis of:

- a) The ability of the teaching staff to mobilize, combine and use autonomously the knowledge, skills and general and professional skills, in accordance with the different requirements of a particular context, situation or problem;
- b) The ability of the teaching staff to cope with change, complex and unforeseen situations.

Since the beginning of 2020, under the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic, the education system in Romania has been undergoing a process of major change. The effects and impact on society of the spread of the COVID-19 virus have led the education system to adapt to current requirements, in the pandemic context we are in.

Since the virus spread over the population is to be reduced between April and May 2020, the courses in the Romanian school and university education system were suspended, the start of the new school year being achieved with the highest weight in the yellow scenario, with hybrid classes, and in the present they are carried out under the red scenario, with exclusive online teaching.

Viewed from the perspective of online teaching-learning-evaluation, the Romanian school, being by excellence a traditional one, was initially not prepared to meet this challenge, But through the educational policies and measures taken by the Ministry of Education and Research, the Romanian school and the pre-university education were aimed at adapting as soon as possible to the current context.

Of the measures undertaken by the Ministry of Education and Research, the most important are the following:

- Updating legislative documents to adapt them to the current context.
- Creation of the legal framework for the acquisition, through county school inspectorates and Bucharest municipality, as well as local authorities, of technological and information equipment in order to equip educational establishments to carry out the educational process under oppression.
- Purchase of tablets for pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, but also for those who do not have devices to participate in online courses.
- Development of support tools for all actors involved in the educational process: Pupils, teachers, parents, inspectors, directors.
- Facilitating access by educational establishments to connect them to learning platforms, monuments and resources needed to conduct online activities.
- Facilitating the access of teachers to participate in training courses to develop skills on teaching-learning-online evaluation and the use of educational platforms.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The Ministry of Education is the institution which sets the objectives and coordinates the continuous training of teaching staff at the level of the school education system, in accordance with national strategies and policies.

Continuous teacher training includes professional development and career development according to Article 242, paragraph 1 of the national Education Law No. 1/1011, as amended and supplemented.

The evolution in the teaching career is carried out through the teaching degree II and the teaching degree I, the certification exams of the different levels of teaching skills.

In-service training is both A RIGHT and AN OBLIGATION under the legislation in force.

The main ways of carrying out continuing training:

1. Programs and activities to improve scientific and educational training;
2. Training programs in the fields of management, guidance and evaluation of education;
3. Training courses and examination of grades II and I;
4. Vocational conversion programs;
5. Studies appropriate to a specialization in the field of license.

This research is intended to contribute positively to the identification of teachers who have participated in continuous training programs, in the context of the pandemic with COVID-19, on access and use of educational platforms and on-line learning methods.

The study was carried out within the Bucharest School Inspectorate and aimed at gathering information on the number and categories of teaching staff who participated in free training courses organized through the House of the teaching Body of the Bucharest workers, the Education and Research Ministry approved by the Education and Research Ministry as well as the teaching staff who participated in the free webinars.

The analysis under consideration covers the period August to November 2020. The legislative framework governing the organization of training courses is ORDER No. 4862/08.07.2020, setting up support measures for teaching staff in pre-university education supported by continuing training activities, organized and carried out through the teaching staff houses - CCD - for the purpose of ensuring the quality of teaching - learning-evaluation, including blended learning and online, in the context of the COVID pandemic – 19.

## **RESULTS**

The budget allocated to the training of the teaching staff by the school inspectorate in 2020 is 111.800 lei and is divided into classes according to Table 1. The training programs address all teachers who are interested in taking and improving teaching-assessment skills in the online environment, thus successfully responding to the challenges of this period.

The training courses of the Education Corps House in Bucharest are also supported under a payment scheme, based on the number of registrations / course.

**Table 1. Breakdown of the budget allocated to the ongoing training of teaching staff in 2020**

<b>Curr. No.</b>	<b>Name of the continuous training program</b>	<b>Target group</b>	<b>Formable number</b>	<b>Estimated Budget</b>
1.	Online class and home schooling	Teaching staff in school education	100	16.000 lei
2.	SOIL methods, practical applications in the online platform	Teaching staff in school education	100	16.000 lei
3.	Educational platforms and online evaluation tools	Teaching staff in school education	100	16.000 lei
4.	Online applications useful in civic skills development	Teaching staff in school education	50	8.000 lei
5.	English for the implementation of international projects I	Teaching staff in school education	20	2.400 lei
6.	English for the implementation of international projects II	Teaching staff in school education	20	2.400 lei
7.	Strategies to develop the learning autonomy of pupils in the environment online	Teaching staff in school education	50	6.000 lei
8.	Harnessing the multiple intelligence in digital education	Teaching staff in school education	25	3.000 lei
9.	Digital tools for online pre-school work	Teaching staff in pre-primary school education	50	6.000 lei
10.	The efficient classroom teacher to the virtual classroom	Teaching staff in school education	50	6.000 lei
11.	Use of visual tools in the online environment	Teaching staff in school education	25	3.000 lei
12.	Computer use in auxiliary teaching staff	Auxiliary teaching staff	50	6.000 lei
13.	Digital educational resources in CDI/school library	Auxiliary teaching staff	25	3.000 lei
14.	Tools useful for school inspection design	Methodist teachers	75	6.000 lei
15.	Training program for applicants for national competitions and examinations of pre-university teachers (completed/title/gr. II)	Teaching staff in school education	150	12.000 lei
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>890</b>	<b>111.800 lei</b>

The purpose of the training programs is to develop the digital skills of teachers and auxiliary teaching staff in Bucharest pre-university education with regard to the quality of designing and carrying out teaching activities online, as well as training teachers for national competitions and preparing the group of metositi teachers in the course of school inspection in the context of online education.

The skills to be acquired are important for the qualitative growth of education from the perspective of online teaching-learning-evaluation, among which the following are most relevant:

- Assimilation of the concept of innovative and effective practices associated with learning individualization strategies.
- Providing language support for the utilization of digital platforms, as well as for effective communication in virtual connection with teachers from other European countries.
- Selecting appropriate digital learning methods and means to achieve inclusion, respect for diversity and promote participation and cooperation for all students.
- Acquiring digital skills in working with spreadsheets, the Edusal application, other software programs set up at school inspectorate level.
- Legislative aspects on the use of digital resources.
- Creation of evaluation and feedback tools in the teaching activity.
- Use of digital platforms, such as: ZOOM, Microsoft Teams, Google Classroom, WebEx, Class-tools, Kahoot, open Board, Mentimeter, BookCreator, Quizizz.
- Effective communication with pupils and their parents using digital means
- Creation of online lessons and assessment tools adapted.
- Creation of online lessons and assessment tools adapted to the level of appropriate teaching (pre-school, primary, secondary and upper secondary education);
- The implementation of projects, teaching plans and assessment tools adapted to online teaching-learning-evaluation, using means, the monuments and the teaching methods are old;
- Advice to parents in the leisure activities they carry out with children during the time spent together at home;
- The acquisition of skills and competences which aim to stimulate pupils' behavior in promoting values relating to social responsibility, personal development, health education, inter-culturalism, tolerance and empathy toward those in the family, and the development of skills for continuous adaptation to the external environment, in the current pandemic context;
- Increasing self-esteem by satisfaction with the need for self-awareness and the ability to adapt teaching to different critical situations, which often cannot be anticipated.

The following results were recorded from the centralized data on the categories of teachers/auxiliary teaching staff participating in the training courses budgeted through the fund allocated by the Bucharest School Inspectorate for training: (Table no. 2 and table no. 3).

Table 2. Distribution of teachers formed of the budget of the Bucharest School Inspectorate by teaching level.

<b>Curr. No.</b>	<b>Level of study</b>	<b>Numeric Value / Percentage</b>
1.	Pre-primary school level	206 (23%)
2	Primary and secondary school level	310 (35%)
3.	High-school level	359 (40%)
4.	CMBRAE	15 (2%)

Table 3. Distribution of teachers/auxiliary teaching staff made up of the budget of the Bucharest School Inspectorate for the purpose of the assignment.

<b>Curr. No.</b>	<b>Classification discipline</b>	<b>Numeric value</b>
1.	Pre-primary education	206
2	Primary education	310
3.	Mathematics	48
4.	Romanian language and literature	57
5.	Foreign languages (English, French, German, Spanish, Italian)	45
6.	History, socio-humanitarian	15
7.	Biology, chemistry, physics	20
8.	Physical education and sport	26
9.	Musical education / Plastic education	23
10	Economics / technical based disciplines	75
11.	School Advisors	15
12.	Librarians	25
13.	Asset managers/secretaries	25

From the centralized data, a uniform distribution of the teaching staff and auxiliary teacher's personnel groups on accessing courses for the use of digital platforms in the teaching process is observed.

Training activities are not limited solely to the budget and funding of the School Inspectorate of the Bucharest workers. The training of teachers to develop the skills of using online platforms has been done through a number of counselling activities supported by the teachers of the teaching staff.

Specialized school inspectors and educational experts were invited to participate in the 50 free webinars, so that in the 2019-2020 school year and with the highest share during the period May to November 2020, when it was observed that there was increased interest in accessing the courses of use of educational platforms for e-learning, a number of 11.368 auxiliary/non-teaching staff from the pre-university education in Bucharest attended the training. (See table no. 4).

Table 4. Statistics on the participation of teaching/non-teaching/auxiliary staff in training activities through the Bucharest CCD.

<b>Category of staff</b>	<b>Number of staff involved in training actions in the school year 2019-2020</b>
Teaching staff	10560
Kindergarten teacher	2299
Teachers / Instructors	3251
Professors	4706
Instructor Masters	0
Teaching staff in management, guidance and control functions	304
Auxiliary teaching staff	634
Non-teaching staff	174
<b>Total</b>	<b>11368</b>

## CONCLUSIONS

The effect of the crisis and the reduction of its risks on pupils and all educational actors is evident to be sustained.

However, the following problem can be raised: Is the Romanian society ready to cope with these efforts to support the educational act in the future? Are parents and the family environment in which students are part of these challenges prepared? This is certainly a subject of reflection for future research.

The process of digitization and e-learning, with appropriate modern teaching-learning methods, also needs to be introduced in the future into the curriculum of initial teacher education, teaching disciplines and specialized practice programs to develop the skills to integrate technology into teaching-learning.

## REFERENCES

- National Education Law no. 1/2011, as amended and supplemented later.
- Order No 5561/2011 of 7 October 2011 for the approval of the methodology for the continuous training of staff in pre-university education.
- ORDER No. 4862/08.07.2020 on the establishment of support measures for teaching staff in pre-university education, supported by continuous training activities organized and carried out through the teaching staff's homes - DCF - for the purpose of ensuring the quality of teaching - learning and evaluation, Including blended learning and online in the context of the COVID pandemic – 19.
- Decision No 6/09.03.2020, of the national Committee on Special emergencies, on the suspension of courses in state and private educational establishments.
- OMEC no. 4135/21.04.2020 approving the instruction on ensuring the continuity of the learning process at the level of the school education system.
- Government Emergency Ordinance No 70/2020, on the Regulation of certain measures from 15 May 2020, in the context of the epidemiological situation caused by the spread of SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus, for the extension of certain deadlines, for amending and supplementing Law No 227/2015 on the fiscal Code, of the national Education Law No 1/2011, as well as other normative acts.
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