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Adrian Barbaroş, Muşata Bocoş

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Adrian Barbaroș^{a*}, Mușata Bocoș^b

^a Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, Babeș-Bolyai University, 7 Sindicatelor Street, Cluj-Napoca 400029, Romania

*Corresponding author: adribarbaros@yahoo.com

Abstract

Keywords:

mentorship; beginning teachers,
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Mentorship in education plays a crucial role in facilitating the smooth integration of beginning teachers into the Romanian education system. Specifically designed for beginning teachers, this form of mentorship focuses on addressing their training needs through specific goals and implementation strategies. This study aims to identify the training needs of primary school beginning teachers across eight counties in Romania, including the municipality of Bucharest. The goal is to propose improvement measures to maximize the effectiveness of the mentorship program in which beginning teachers participate. The research methodology employed an online survey-based questionnaire administered in June 2023. Throughout the study, the authors shed light on various training needs relating to the teaching competencies of beginning teachers, including self-analysis of teaching activities, teaching methods, and satisfaction levels regarding the mentorship program. The findings highlight the diverse training needs of primary school beginning teachers from Romania and emphasize the importance of a coherent implementation of the mentoring programmes to address these needs effectively. This paper serves as a guiding resource for the development of mentorship and training programmes, as well as education policies aimed at enhancing the integration of beginning teachers into the Romanian education system.

Zusammenfassung

Schlüsselworte:

Mentoring; angehende Lehrer,
Ausbildungsbedarf;
Grundschulbildung.

Mentoring im Bildungswesen spielt eine entscheidende Rolle bei der Erleichterung der reibungslosen Integration angehender Lehrkräfte in das rumänische Bildungssystem. Diese Form des Mentorings ist speziell für angehende Lehrkräfte konzipiert und konzentriert sich darauf, deren Ausbildungsbedarf durch spezifische Ziele und Umsetzungsstrategien zu berücksichtigen. Das Ziel dieser Studie ist es, den Ausbildungsbedarf von Grundschulanfängern in acht Landkreisen Rumäniens, einschließlich der Gemeinde Bukarest, zu ermitteln. Ziel ist es, Verbesserungsmaßnahmen vorzuschlagen, um die Wirksamkeit des Mentoring-Programms, an dem angehende Lehrkräfte teilnehmen, zu maximieren. Die Forschungsmethodik nutzte einen auf einer Online-Umfrage basierenden Fragebogen, der im Juni 2023 durchgeführt wurde. Während der gesamten Studie beleuchteten die Autoren verschiedene Schulungsbedürfnisse im Zusammenhang mit den Lehrkompetenzen angehender Lehrkräfte, einschließlich einer Selbstanalyse der Lehraktivitäten, Lehrmethoden und des Zufriedenheitsgrads mit dem Mentoring-Programm. Die Ergebnisse verdeutlichen den vielfältigen Ausbildungsbedarf von Grundschullehrern aus Rumänien und unterstreichen die Bedeutung einer kohärenten Umsetzung der Mentoring-Programme, um diesen Bedarf wirksam zu decken. Dieses Papier dient als Orientierungshilfe für die Entwicklung von Mentoring- und Schulungsprogrammen sowie für Bildungspolitiken, die darauf abzielen, die Integration angehender Lehrkräfte in das rumänische Bildungssystem zu verbessern.

1. Introduction

In the context of the education reform in the Romanian educational system, particularly within the framework of the Educated Romanian Presidential Project, the importance of teachers' initial and continuous training has been significantly emphasized. The recently Secondary National Educational Law adopted by the Romanian Parliament on May 22, 2023, has brought greater attention to mentorship programmes in secondary education in Romania. Although the concept of mentorship is not new or innovative in school-level education practices, the new Secondary Educational Law mentions it 19

times, compared to only two mentions in the previous Educational Law of 2011.

Research in recent decades has consistently shown the crucial role of mentorship in facilitating the successful integration of individuals into their new profession. It has been established that mentoring programs need to address the specific needs of participants, ensuring that the program enhances their work-related competencies based on a comprehensive needs analysis.



The paper presents an exploration of the findings from a study conducted with beginning primary school teachers in eight counties of Romania, including the municipality of Bucharest. The study involved an online-based survey administered in June 2023. The survey aimed to understand the training needs of beginning primary school teachers, assess their willingness to participate in mentoring programs, and facilitate self-analysis of their teaching activities. Furthermore, the survey sought to examine their expectations regarding the mentoring program for beginning teachers.

The theoretical foundation serves as the cornerstone of this study, providing the essential epistemic scaffold on which the entire research has been designed and constructed. In theoretical section of this study, our aim is to delve into the meaning, essence, and principles of mentorship in education, particularly into its connection to the training needs of beginning primary school teachers. Moving forward to the research methodology, we outline the overall framework of this study, which will be intertwined with the subsequent subchapter on results.

2. Theoretical foundation

The concept of *mentoring* has a long history, with several political and cultural figures participating in what we now refer to as *mentoring programs*. Examples include Aristotle, Alexander the Great, and Martin Luther King (Koleva, 2006). However, over time, the concept has evolved, encompassing more implications beyond its initial purpose of transferring information. Today, it is recognized as a tool for ensuring induction and transition in almost any field. In the field of education, Mariana Crașovan (2005, p.64) describes mentoring as "a one-to-one learning relationship between two individuals, one of whom is more mature (the mentor), but not necessarily older than the other. It is a relationship based on modelling behaviour and engaging in an extended dialogue between them." This definition provides essential operational guidelines for the mentoring activity, emphasizing the existence of two persons: one in the process of formation and one assigned with the task of guiding the other. Another characteristic highlighted by this definition is that there is no requirement for an age difference between the two individuals; instead, the focus is on the professional repertoire that the mentor brings to the mentoring process. Especially for beginning teachers, the mentoring programmes allows them to gain new competences, tailor-made to their needs, ensuring that the process is personalized and

designed according to the interests of the beginning primary schools teachers.

In this regard, the training needs are described as following: "the set specific needs for learning, training and development of the learner, which ensure the management of their own development and training" (Bocoș, 2018, p. 302). This definition outlines several of the specific feature of the concept of *training needs*, as follows:

a) training needs are own and individual; they arise from the individual's desire for training and development in a certain field or skill.

b) training needs facilitate the management of development at the individual level, empowering individuals to select appropriate training opportunities and establishing their own goals and ways of achieving them.

The analysis of training needs, or the identification of these needs, is represented according to Farla et. al (2007), in the form of four distinct stages: *diagnosis*, *design*, *delivery* and *evaluation*.

3. Research methodology

The present research aims to identify the training needs of primary school beginning teachers from the following counties of Romania: Suceava, Vrancea, Giurgiu, Arad, Cluj, and the municipality of Bucharest. The research is guided by the following research questions:

- At which level do the participants in the study believe their professional competence is?
- Are the beginning primary school teachers interested in participating in mentoring and continuous training?
- What are the most stringent training needs perceived by the participants in the study?

To test the hypothesis that beginning primary school teachers identify a high level of training needs, including training courses and mentorship programs, we utilized a survey-based questionnaire. The questionnaire used is adapted from the "Analiza nevoilor de formare cadrelor didactice la început de carieră" (The analysis of the teachers' training needs at the beginning of the career) developed by I. Ioja in 2020. We obtained written permission from the original instrument's author and followed ethical guidelines in the research.

The questionnaire gathers data on two main sets of information:

a) Demographic data: This includes gender, area of residence, educational institution graduated from, and the county of residence.

b) Training-related data: This includes self-assessment of pedagogical competences, openness to participating in mentorship and continuous training programs, and identification of specific training needs.

We estimated the required sample size for their study using a priori power analysis conducted with G*Power. They set the effect size (ρ) to 0.3 and aimed for a statistical power ($1-\beta$) of at least 0.95. Based on these parameters, we determined a sample size of $N = 111$ with degrees of freedom (df) = 109. Consequently, we selected a sample of 111 beginning primary school teachers from 8 counties in Romania.

The survey took form of a Google Form questionnaire, which was disseminated online through social media platforms, targeting the beginning primary school teachers from the eight participating counties from Romania.

4. Results

The data obtained from the online questionnaire were entered into the statistical interpretation program IBM SPSS, the Free Trial version. The results obtained from the statistical processing of the data are presented logically, following the order of the items within the research instrument. As the quantitative data analysis is closely connected with the research questions and the research hypothesis, we thus, propose to divide this chapter into three distinct sections, each corresponding to one of the three research questions.

4.1. Descriptive statistics regarding the level of pedagogical competences of beginning primary school teachers

Table 1 presents the frequencies and percentages of beginning primary school teachers who incorporate the educational objectives into their teaching activities. Based on the Table 1, 42.3% of the study participants believe they consistently capitalize on the educational goals. In contrast, only a cumulative 11.7% capitalize on these goals either partially or not at all. This observation pertains to the range of activities that beginning primary school teachers can undertake concerning educational objectives within learning activities, including, for instance: setting the objectives, explaining them at the level of school students' comprehension, but also assessing their successful implementation.

Table 1. Statistical data regarding the incorporation of educational objectives within the teaching activities

		Frequency	Percent	Valid percentage	The cumulative percentage
Educational objective	Always	47	42.3	42.3	42.3
	Not at all	11	9.9	9.9	52.3
	To a great extent	34	30.6	30.6	82.9
	To a small extent	2	1.8	1.8	84.7
	Sometimes	17	15.3	15.3	100
	Total	111	100.0	100.0	

When questioned about their approach to adapting their teaching to cater to individual student characteristics and ensuring differentiated instruction, the survey results reveal interesting insights. Based on Table 2, the majority, comprising 27% of the participants, believe they consistently adapt their teaching methods and strategies, by choosing "every time" option. Additionally, a significant portion, constituting 26%, reported that they do so "sometimes".

Table 2. Statistical data regarding the beginning primary school teachers participating in the study who ensure differentiated instruction

		Frequency	Percent	Valid percentage	The cumulative percentage
Differentiated instruction	Every time	27	24.3	24.3	24.3
	To a great extent	56	50.5	50.5	74.8
	To a small extent	2	1.8	1.8	76.6
	Sometimes	26	23.4	23.4	100
	Total	111	100.0	100.0	

Upon analyzing Table 3, which presents statistical data on beginning primary school teachers' opinions regarding how they adapt their teaching to maintain high expectations for the entire class, a positive trend in self-evaluation of their didactic practices becomes evident. The study participants ($N=111$) responded to this questionnaire question using only three options: "every time" (50.5%), "to a great extent" (24.3%), and "sometimes" (25.2%). This data once again highlights a significant level of self-appreciation among the teachers for their own instructional efforts.

Table 3. Statistical data regarding the opinions of the beginning primary school teachers participating in the study in relation to the adaptation of the teaching to school students' expectations.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid percentage	The cumulative percentage
The adaptation Of teaching	Every time	56	50.5	50.5	50.5
	To a great extent	27	24.3	24.3	74.8
	Sometimes	28	25.2	25.2	100.0
	Total	111	100.0	100.0	

By analyzing Table 4, the following data emerges: 42.3% of the participating teachers indicate that they provide attention to the feedback given to students by guiding them to enhance their learning efficiency, every time. In contrast, 25.2% of teachers pay to a large extent attention to the feedback, and 32.4% do so only sometimes.

Table 4. Statistical data on the perception of beginning primary school teachers regarding the attention they give to the feedback provided to students

		Frequency	Percent	Valid percentage	The cumulative percentage
The feedback the students	Every time	47	42.3	42.3	42.3
	To a large extent	28	25.2	25.2	67.6
	Sometimes	36	32.4	32.4	100.0
	Total	111	100.0	100.0	

Table 5. Statistical data regarding the degree of concern of teaching staff for the presentation of contents in a varied way

		Frequency	Percent	Valid percentage	The cumulative percentage
Educational content	Every time	54	48.6	48.6	48.6
	To a large extent	27	24.3	24.3	73.0
	To a small extent	2	1.8	1.8	74.8
	Sometimes	28	25.2	25.2	100
	Total	111	100.0	100.0	

Based on the statistical table of percentages and frequencies (Table 5) regarding beginning primary school teachers' opinions on their level of concern for presenting the educational content in a varied manner to maintain school students' interest, the following observations can be made: only a small percentage, specifically 1.8% (N=2), state that they have this

concern to a small extent. In contrast, a significant number of 54 participants, representing 48.6% of the study sample, express that they have a strong concern for presenting content in a varied manner each time. Furthermore, when we combine those who have this concern to those who chose "to a large extent", the cumulative percentage reaches 72.9%, which accounts for about two-thirds of the total participants.

4.2. Descriptive statistics regarding the need to implement professional training and mentoring programs

Table 6 provides, in the form of frequencies and percentages, valuable information regarding the availability of teachers to participate in professional training programs. We find that the results are diverse, contrary to the previous items, and each sub-item is predominantly equal. So, we can see that the highest percentage belongs to teachers who consider that professional training programs are very useful, respectively a percentage of 32.4.

Table 6. Statistical data regarding the perception of beginning primary school teachers and their willingness to participate in professional training programs

	Frequency	Percent	Valid percentage	The cumulative percentage
Very useful	36	32.4	32.4	32.4
Largely	20	18.0	18.0	50.5
To a small extent	36	32.4	32.4	82.9
Environment	19	17.1	17.1	100.0
Total	111	100.0	100.0	

Analyzing the table of frequencies and percentages (Table 7) of the beginning teaching staff participating according to their opinion regarding the usefulness of a mentoring program, we find that in a proportion of 80.2% of the teaching staff participating in the study consider the fact that such a program would be very useful, followed by a percentage of 18.9% who consider such a program to be largely useful, and with a percentage of .9% who consider that such a program would be to a small extent effective.

We observe a great openness to mentoring programs on the part of beginning primary education teachers, considering them very useful. Through the mentoring programs, beginning teachers develop their skills, update their existing information, in close coordination with a mentor teacher.

Table 7. Statistical data regarding the perception of novice teachers regarding the usefulness of a mentoring program for beginning primary school teachers

	Frequency	Percent	Valid percentage	The cumulative percentage
Very useful	89	80.2	80.2	80.2
Largely	21	18.9	18.9	99.1
To a small extent	1	.9	.9	100.0
Total	111	100.0	100.0	

4.3. Descriptive statistics regarding the training needs of beginning primary school teachers

Among the beginning teachers in primary education who participated in the study (111 respondents), the top three identified training needs are as follows:

1. Curricular development, adaptation, and individualization, which was selected by 95.49% of the respondents.

2. The development of effective methods of interactive teaching, chosen by 94.59% of the respondents.

3. Implementation of new learning strategies, selected by 92.79% of the respondents.

Parallely, the aspects related to evaluation generated the least interest. The planning and design of evaluation ranked penultimate, while the development of evaluation tools ranked last. This might be attributed to the wide variety of evaluation tools available to primary education teachers, including a simplified grading system compared to other levels of secondary education.

When it comes to the preferred methods for conducting professional training activities, as perceived by beginning primary school teachers, the participants were asked to select the most suitable options from a list of 7 items. Analyzing the data reveals the following options, which received a very high weight in the "very important" category:

- Methodical activities, with a percentage of 93.7%;
- Face-to-face activities, selected by 100% of the participants;
- Individual study, which received 70.3%;
- Mentoring, favored by 84.5% of the participants.

The analysis of these items allow us to identify the main trends and references concerning training activities for beginning teachers in primary education, providing valuable insights for future professional training endeavors.

5. Discussion and conclusions

On one hand, the analysis of the results regarding how teachers self-assess their teaching activities highlighted that a significant number of participants in this study evaluated their own activity positively. Many of the participants indicated that they consider the specific needs of their students' age, set clear objectives, provide constructive feedback, and invest time and effort into their teaching.

On the other hand, concerning teachers' willingness to participate in professional training courses and mentoring programs, two relevant aspects emerge from the research. Firstly, the interest in vocational training programs is relatively low, as only 50.4% of the participants expressed interest in participating, while a considerable 32.4% stated they do not want to take part in such programs. Secondly, when it comes to didactic mentoring activities, there is a notable interest among the study participants, with 80.2% expressing willingness to engage in such programs.

Moreover, the results regarding the assessment of training needs among beginning primary education teachers revealed three main areas of identified training needs: curricular development, adaptation, and individualization; the development of effective interactive teaching methods; and the implementation of new learning strategies.

Authors note:

Adrian Barbaroş is a Primary School Teacher, Trainer and Facilitator with a strong expertise in international education and learning. Mr. Barbaroş holds a double-degree in European Studies and Pedagogy at the Babeş-Bolyai University. His research is orientated towards mentorship in education, home-schooling, global citizenship education and internationalization of higher education.

Muşata Bocoş is a University Professor and Ph.D. coordinator at Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences at the Babeş-Bolyai University. She has obtained a Ph.D. in Educational Sciences in 1997 at Babeş-Bolyai University. Her research interests are reflected in a series of studies and articles published in

important national and international journals. Her teaching activity covers several domains such as the theory and methodology of curriculum, general didactics, and educational research.

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