The Profile of Mother-Tongue Teachers

Liliana Mâță

"Vasile Alecsandri" University of Bacău, Romania

Abstract. This study aims at elaborating the profile of mother-tongue teachers. In terms of theory, there are analyzed the most relevant approaches and the current research in the field of mother-tongue teacher education and the basis for the mother-tongue teacher profile. From methodologically point of view, there is realized an qualitative study concerning the analysis of the syllabi of Mother-tongue Didactics at the level of initial training programs for secondary education, in terms of the professional standards suggested by the educational objectives and contents.

Keywords: Teacher Education, Professional Standards, Mother-Tongue, Language and Literature Didactics

1. Introduction

The concern of researchers and practitioners with creating a profile of mother-tongue teachers in the field of training language teachers is motivated by the need to provide future teachers with the right to access the best initial training in professional institutions, and also with the possibility of attending continuous training programs that meet the requirements of current exigencies. Some efforts that seek to define what mother-tongue teachers should know have been undertaken in a single research realized by Delnoy et al [1], which aims to elaborate the portraits in mother tongue education. One may notice that at the beginning of the effort of developing professional standards for mother-tongue teachers there are no such explicitly stated standards.

As Liddicoat et al [2] note, "Professional standards for accomplished language teachers have not been widely developed, although many governments have minimum standards for registration of teachers, including language teachers." In most countries, most of these standards are generic. Examples include standards developed by the General Teaching Councils in England and Scotland, and the New Zealand Teachers Council. Such standards may be suitable for certain regulatory purposes, such as registration and licensing, but it is now becoming widely recognized that if standards are to be really useful for teachers' professional learning, including teacher education programs, they need to 'drill down' past the generic level to describe what teachers know and can do in the various complex areas of their subjects and fields of teaching [3].

In Europe, all secondary school language teachers are required to acquire a body of academic knowledge in the course of their studies in higher education. The precise profile varies from country to country and from language to language, but the general areas of expected expertise are widely shared. Kelly et al [4] elaborated the *European Profile for Language Teacher Education*. It deals with the initial and in-service education of foreign language teachers in primary, secondary and adult learning contexts and it offers a frame of reference for language education policy makers and language teacher educators in Europe. The Profile contains 40 items. Each item contains an important element of foreign language teacher education. The Profile is divided into four sections: Structure; Knowledge and Understanding; Strategies and Skills and Values. The EAQUALS (European Association for Quality Language Services) *Profiling Grid for Language Teachers* seeks to summarise the key features of qualifications and competences at different stages of a language teacher's development [5].

The profile suggested in this study for mother-tongue teachers turns to advantage and elaborates both the models previously presented and, particularly, the annotations for other languages developed by de

AFMLTA in 2007, and also the model based on developing the skills of language teachers developed through previous research conducted within the project "INOVACOM - curricular innovations for the development of pedagogical competencies of teachers of Romanian language and communication through initial training programs for teachers". By implementing the assumption that the formulation of standards requires: the naming of a range of situations in which they are employed; the listing of the sub-actions whose combination determines the profile, and a "tighter" definition of the standard that aims at pre-shaping the behavioural or performance possibilities, we can assess the teachers' acts in a real classroom more accurately [6].

The main categories of behaviours expected of a mother-tongue teacher will be organized in a model of the didactic professions with a structured and operational nature. The model shall integrate the basic knowledge, skills, attitudes, values and personal qualities that a mother-tongue teacher should have. These will be further structured on levels ranging form simple to complex, so that a concrete model of professional standards for mother-tongue teachers in secondary education may be created. The main constitutive elements of this profile are: Educational theory and practice; Language and culture; Language Pedagogy (Didactics); Ethics and responsibility; Professional relationships; Active engagement with wider context; Advocacy; Personal characteristics. The first three elements are characteristic of mother-tongue teacher training whereas the other elements are general, characteristic of training of all teachers.

2. Research regarding the profile of mother-tongue teachers

2.1. Investigation objective and hypothesis
2.1.1. The objective of the investigation
The objective of the present study consists in the analysis of the syllabi for the discipline Mother-tongue Language and Literature Didactics at the level of initial training programs for secondary education in Europe, in terms of the constituent elements of the professional standards suggested by the educational objectives and contents. The contents of syllabi will be analyzed in general terms, from the perspective of professional standards and in specific terms, only for the category Language Pedagogy, because we consider that it is the most representative for the subject mother-tongue Language and Literature Didactics.

2.1.2. The investigation hypothesis
General hypothesis 1
The educational objectives and contents included in the syllabi for the discipline Mother-tongue Language and Literature Didactics at the level of initial training programs for secondary education predominantly reflect the constituent elements of the category of Language Pedagogy in terms of professional standards.

General hypothesis 2
The educational objectives and contents included in the syllabi for the discipline Mother-tongue Language and Literature Didactics at the level of initial training programs for secondary education reflect, in a different manner, the constituent elements of professional standards.

Specific hypothesis 2.1
The educational objectives and contents included in the syllabi for the discipline Mother-tongue Language and Literature Didactics reflect, in a different manner the constituent elements of professional standards, in relation with the indicators of the Language Pedagogy category.

Specific hypothesis 2.2
The educational objectives and contents included in the syllabi for the discipline Mother-tongue Language and Literature Didactics reflect, in a different manner the constituent elements of professional standards, in relation with the mother-tongue.

2.2. Qualitative Research Methodology
2.2.1. The promptness of the concepts
The content analysis of the syllabi for the discipline Mother-tongue Language and Literature Didactics at the level of initial training programs followed five types of indicators of profile of Mother-tongue teachers

for the category Language Pedagogy, respectively: 1) Curriculum frameworks; 2) Objectives; 3) Methodology; 4) Lesson planning and 5) Assessment.

All these categories of indicators reunite themes which aim at abilities, capacities and specific competences, skills for the constituent elements of professional standards in agreement with the profile for training mother-tongue teachers described in the theoretical part.

2.2.2. Method

To identify the constituent elements of professional standards for the category Language Pedagogy in the syllabi for the discipline Mother-tongue Language and Literature Didactics we have used the *thematic content analysis* in order to distinguish among the themes and the specific categories that correspond to each indicator.

2.2.3. The variables

The dependent variable is represented by the professional standards, while *the independent variables* are: the indicators of Language Pedagogy category, the mother-tongue (Dutch, French, Italian, Norwegian, Portuguese, Romanian, Spanish).

2.2.4. The procedure

The content analysis of the syllabi for the subject Mother-tongue Language and Literature Didactics at the level of initial training programs for secondary education was realized in the period June – December 2011. The analysis of the syllabi for the Didactics of Italian and Spanish as mother tongues was possible due to the conducting of two research stages at the University of Siena, Italy, in July 2011 and at the University of Granada, Spain, in November 2011. The syllabi for the Didactics of the French and Portuguese languages were taken from the sites of Katholieke Hogeschool Leuven University, Belgium (Dutch), The Catholic University of Louvain, France, Mons University, Belgium (French), University of Agder, Norway (Norwegian) and Polytechnic Institute of Bragança, Portugal (Portuguese). The syllabi for the Didactics of Romanian Language and Literature were provided directly by the one teaching this subject at the university where the project INOVACOM is being implemented, "Vasile Alecsandri" University of Bacău.

2.3. Presentation and interpretation of results

This study presents the results of the comparative analysis of syllabi for the subject Mother-tongue Language and Literature Didactics at the level of initial training programs for secondary education.

The *general hypothesis 1* is not confirmed, because the educational objectives and contents included in the syllabi for the subject Mother-tongue Language and Literature Didactics at the level of initial training programs for secondary education do not reflect, in a predominating manner, the constituent elements of the Language Pedagogy category regarding professional standards.

Frequency analysis for specific themes obtained by content analysis indicates that the educational objectives and contents included in the syllabi for the discipline Mother-tongue Language and Literature Didactics predominantly reflect the constituent elements of professional standards at the level of the Language and culture category:

- Educational theory and practice (5): theories of pedagogy (2); current educational approaches (2); professional development (1);
- *Language and culture* (33): classroom-related functions (3); mother-tongue literature (8); mother-tongue linguistic system (18); mother-tongue values, attitudes and linguistic and cultural practices (4);
- Language Pedagogy (23): curriculum frameworks (1); objectives (2); methodology (10); lesson planning (4); assessment (6).

The general hypothesis 2 is confirmed, because the educational objectives and contents included in the syllabi for the discipline Mother-tongue Language and Literature Didactics at the level of initial training programs for secondary education reflect, in a different manner, the constituent elements of professional standards.

2.1. The syllabi for the subject Mother-tongue Language and Literature Didactics reflect, in a different manner, the constituent elements of professional standards, in relation with the indicators of the Language Pedagogy category.

Frequency analysis for specific themes obtained using content analysis at the level of the indicators of the Language Pedagogy category indicate that the educational objectives and contents included in the syllabi for the subject Mother-tongue Language and Literature Didactics predominantly reflect the elements for sub-category of methodology:

- curriculum frameworks (1): curricular documents (1);
- objectives (2): concrete objectives (1); general objectives (1);
- *methodology* (10): teaching methods (3); instruments (2); strategy/ methods of reading (1); traditional methods (2); modern methods (1); methods of teaching and learning of mother tongue (1);
- lesson planning (4): elaboration of various types of lessons (1); planning of the tuition/ learning process (3);
- assessment (6): assessment and language skills education (1); assessment methods (1); evaluation of the tuition/ learning process (4).

2.2. The syllabi for the subject Mother-tongue Language and Literature Didactics reflect, in a different manner, the constituent elements of professional standards, in relation with the mother tongue.

The frequency analysis of the specific themes obtained using content analysis at the level of the indicators of the Language Pedagogy category indicate that the educational objectives and contents included in the syllabi for the subject Mother-tongue Language and Literature Didactics predominantly reflect the constituent elements of professional standards.

The educational objectives and contents included in the syllabi for the subject Mother-tongue Language and Literature Didactics reflect, in a predominant manner, the constituent elements of the professional standards at the level of the Language and culture category:

- Educational theory and practice: Norwegian Didactics (4); Spanish Didactics (1);
- *Language and culture*: Dutch Didactics (1); French Didactics - France (2); French Didactics – Belgium (3); Italian Didactics (8); Norwegian Didactics (5); Portuguese Didactics (5); Romanian Didactics (2); Spanish Didactics (7);
- Language Pedagogy: Dutch Didactics (3); French Didactics - France (4); Italian Didactics (1); Norwegian Didactics (2); Portuguese Didactics (4); Romanian Didactics (9).

The main conclusion of this research consists in the fact that the educational objectives and contents included in the syllabi for the subject Mother-tongue Language and Literature Didactics at the level of initial training programs for secondary education are not formulated as unitary and in agreement with the profile of professional standards.

3. Conclusions

Elaborating a system of professional standards for mother-tongue teachers contributes to creating a powerful and receptive teaching body in which excellent teachers find opportunities of professional recognition and promotion. Clearly, the development of competency specifications for mother-tongue teachers may significantly contribute to quality assurance and the specification of professional or pedagogical standards for language teachers. They provide a rigorous way in which to identify, specify and evaluate the minimum skills that first language teachers should display in order to provide high quality language programs. Well-qualified and motivated teachers are needed for the implementation of this new concept of mother-tongue teaching. These teachers need to have both proven high-level language competences and solid methodological-didactic competences. Ingram [7] considers that standards also assist substantially in the development of pre-service and ongoing language teacher education programs.

The analysis of the statistical data identified at the general hypothesis level, shows that the syllabi for the subject of Mother-tongue Language and Literature Didactics at the level of initial training programs for secondary education include more and more elements regarding the professional standards at the level of Language and culture category.

Also, we may draw some particular conclusions, starting with the specific hypothesis. At the level of the indicators of the Language Pedagogy category of professional standards, the educational objectives and contents included in the syllabi for the subject Mother-tongue Language and Literature Didactics reflect, in a

predominant manner, the element for the sub-category of methodology. From the perspective of the mother-tongue analyzed, the educational objectives and contents included in the syllabi of Didactics predominantly reflect the constituent elements of professional standards at the level of Language and culture category.

The analysis of the results of the research indicate the fact that professional standards for mother-tongue teachers are not formulated explicitly and are not organized so as to support a consistent and coherent standard program of initial training for future teachers. Generally, the professional standards are subjective, opaque and not accurate enough so as to be understood. Also, there is lack of coherence between professional standards regarding the educational contents from the syllabi of Mother-tongue Didactics and the professional standards regarding the initial training programs. Certain syllabi include professional standards that focus on academic knowledge whereas others are more focused on the professional skills of the mother-tongue teacher. The professional standards are consistent neither with the standards from the initial training programs of mother-tongue teachers nor with those from the continuous training programs from the activity of curricular development. Thus, we may consider that the existing courses in the domain of mother-tongue Didactics provide minimal preparation for language teachers.

The product of this study's effort of identifying, defining and describing the professional standards for language teachers represent a challenge and a positive experience of covering the path of professional development. The professional standards for mother-tongue language teachers are not static. New models and approaches to first language teacher education that place prospective teachers at the center need to be explored. In our future research we intend to structure the profile of professional standards for mother-tongue teaching into levels, from simple to complex, in order to emphasize the stages of mother-tongue teacher training.

The structure of profile of mother-tongue teachers would suggest that, as the needs of society change and as our understanding of the factors that determine the principles and goals of language education evolve, so our understanding of the attributes required of a language teacher and hence of language teacher standards should also evolve with corollary implications for pre-service and on-going language teacher education.

4. Acknowledgements

5. References

[1]   R. Delnoy, W. Herrlitz, S. Kroon, and J. Sturm (Eds.). *Portraits in mother tongue education: Teacher diaries as a starting point for comparative research into standard language teaching in Europe*. Enschede: SLO. (Studies in mother tongue education, 4), 1988.

[2]   A. Liddicoat, R. Tognini, V. Fischmann, L. Harbon, M. Kohler, M. McLaughlin, et al. *Final Report on the Development of Standards for Teachers of Indonesian project*: Australian Federation of Modern Language Teachers Associations, 2005, p. 24.

[3]   E. Kleinhenz, J. Wilkinson, M. Gearon, S. Fernandes, and L. Ingvarson. *The review of teacher education for languages teachers: Final report*. ACER, Australian Government, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2007, p. 49.

[4]   M. Kelly, M. Grenfell, R. Allan, C. Kriza, and W. McEvoy. *European Profile for Language Teacher Education – A Frame of Reference*. A Report to the European Commission Directorate General for Education and Culture, 2004.

[5]   B. North. *A Profiling Grid for Language Teachers*. International Meeting on Training, Quality and Certification in Foreign Language Teaching, Siena, 9-10 February 2009.

[6]   F.K. Oser, U. Renold. Modelling teacher competencies: identifying and measuring standards. In: F.K. Oser, et al (eds.), *Competence Oriented Teacher Training*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers. 2006, pp. 23-47.

[7]   D.E. Ingram. Standards in the context of Teacher Accreditation. *APEC Seminar on Standards for English and other Foreign Languages in APEC Economies*, Taipei, Taiwan, 3 to 5 December, 2007.