Pedagogical Competencies for Mother–Tongue Teacher Education

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Abstract

This study aims to elaborate a framework for both the foundation and application of professional standards for mother-tongue teachers. The main issue with which this study is concerned constitutes the lack of a set of clear standards for the initial training of mother-tongue teachers. In terms of theory, that which has currently been analyzed in this study relates particularly to the most relevant approaches and the current research in the field of professional standards for language teachers at a general level, and to the reference documents for mother-tongue teacher education at a specific level. In agreement with current approaches, an innovative approach for the training of pre-service mother-tongue teachers with the goal of developing pedagogical standards has been elaborated in this study. The objective of the current research endeavors to identify specific pedagogical competencies at the level of initial programs for mother-tongue teacher education. The operational categories of pedagogical competencies were subjected to the expertise of a group of 38 specialists in the field of language education in higher education. The results of the questionnaire research highlight the openness of subjects toward a new perspective of forming professional standards for pre-service mother-tongue teacher education.

Key Words

Mother-tongue, Pedagogical Competencies, Pre-service Teacher Education, Questionnaire, Standards.

Traditionally, teacher education has been divided into theory and practice. Language education should be seen as multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary with a complex range of theories behind different teaching approaches. Nicholas, Moore, Clyne, and Pauwels (1993) have identified a key issue in the pre-service education of languages teachers; namely, the tension between language as an area of specialist understanding and language teaching that is required to be integrated into the general teaching of the new curriculum. Kelly, Grenfell, Allan, Kriza, and McEvoy (2004) consider that closer cooperation between first language departments and teacher education units is crucial in order to achieve the integration of academic subjects and practical experience. Therefore, as Kleinhenz, Wilkinson, Gearon, Fernandes, and Ingvarson (2007, p. 72) argue, "language expertise and educational expertise need to be brought together." The premises for elaborating the pedagogic standards for the initial training of mother-tongue teachers may be created only on the basis of interaction and interdisciplinary connections.

The concern of researchers and practitioners with creating a system of professional standards in the field of training language teachers is motivated by the need to provide future teachers with both the opportunity to access the highest possible quality of initial training in professional institutions and also with the possibility of attending continuous

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training programs that meet the requirements of current demands. Defining professional standards supports the language teacher in knowing exactly what is expected of him/her. Freeman and Johnson (1998, p. 106) argue for a reconceptualization of the current knowledge base present in teacher education which focuses on three "domains:" (1) the nature of the teacher-learner, (2) the nature of schools and schooling, (3) and the nature of language teaching. Therefore, professional standards constitute the reference point guiding training activities for language teachers, which will be elaborated in close connection with the new approach to learning citing the most recent developments in linguistics, language education, and education science. As Liddicoat et al. (2005 p. 24) 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." Therefore, there is a demand for elaborating theoretical models in this field, as well as updated research aimed at defining the standards for the training of future mother-tongue teachers, in agreement with existing educational policies.

Professional Standards for Teachers of Languages

Professional standards represent a set of expectations and demands related to the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that teachers are supposed to display in their activity with students on a level that is qualitatively accepted by society. They refer to those dimensions of a teaching career that may be observed and measured. The minimum of competencies required by language teachers were seen to include scientific knowledge, pedagogical competencies, values, and attitudes. Kelly et al. (2002) specify that the competences described should include the personality attributes typical of a good language teacher, and how these affect classroom learning; the characteristics of a supportive classroom climate, and how this can be created and maintained; and the ways in which a teacher can create and sustain learner motivation, willingness to speak, and group motivation, while also taking into account individual learner differences and individual contexts. From the perspective of initial training, professional standards gradually integrate the basic knowledge and skills that are required by language teaching, for the efficient integration in the didactic career.

There are several approaches concerning the *types of professional standards* involved in training language

teachers. Table 1 highlights the main categories of standards according to relevant authors who have approached the issue of classifying the professional standards for language teachers' training. According to Shulman (1987), professional competences are divided into five distinct categories based on the main types of knowledge. Commins (1995) distinguishes five broad areas of competence, covering knowledge, tasks involved in actual classroom practice, and interpersonal skills and attitudes. The knowledge base of language teachers consists of four types of knowledge according to the model elaborated by Day and Conklin (1992). As can be seen from the analysis of the main types of professional standards regarding the training of language teachers, an important role is played by building pedagogic competences. The pedagogic training of language teachers constitutes one of the key competences of the training of future teachers. Concerning initial training, pedagogic competences integrate the set of fundamental knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes which future teachers will need in their language teaching, learning, and evaluation.

Table 1.
The Classification of Professional Standards for Preparing Language Teachers

Authors	Categories of professional competences
Shulman (1987)	- knowledge of the target language and culture; - pedagogical knowledge – learning theories, approaches and strategies; - disciplinary knowledge – applied linguistics (theories of language learning); - professional and contextual knowledge; - ethical knowledge (engaging with otherness, responsibility and evolving self)
Commins (1995)	- using and developing professional knowledge and values; - communicating, interacting and working with students and others; - planning and managing the teaching and learning process; - monitoring and assessing student progress and learning outcomes; - reflecting, evaluating, and planning for continuous improvement
Day and Conklin (1992)	- *content knowledge* of the subject matter as represented by courses in syntax, semantics, phonology, and pragmatics as well as literary and cultural aspects; - *pedagogic knowledge*, focusing on knowledge of generic teaching strategies, beliefs, and practices, regardless of the focus of the subject matter (how we teach), e.g. classroom management, motivation, decision making; - *pedagogic content knowledge* (the specialized knowledge of how to represent content knowledge in diverse ways so that students may understand; knowledge of how students come to understand the subject matter, what difficulties they are likely to encounter when learning it, what misconceptions interfere with learning, and how to overcome these problems); - *support knowledge*, referring to the knowledge of the various disciplines that inform our approach to the teaching and learning of mother-tongue language (psycholinguistics, linguistics, first language acquisition, sociolinguistics, research methods)

Regarding the concerns for elaborating *approaches* to professional standards for language teachers, as well as a frame for developing them, there have been various contributions by different authors. Among such contributions, De Jong and Harper (2005) propose a framework that describes the knowledge and skills teachers should have in addition to what they acquire through regular teacher preparation, suggesting that mainstream teachers should develop knowledge, skills, and dispositions that reflect an awareness of the process of second language learning as well as the roles of language and culture as a medium in teaching and learning coupled with the need to set explicit linguistic and cultural goals. Kelly et al. (2002) describe the main conditions for elaborating on the professional standards for language teachers training. Synthetically speaking, these standards: (1) define an ideal professional profile for trained language teachers, (2) summarize the agreed understanding of what the objectives of language teacher training should be, (3) identify good practices in organization, content, and structure, (4) summarize the principles of training and various models of training, (5) provide guidance on the balance of theory and practice in initial teacher training, (6) address aspects of professional competence supplementary to language (the teacher and his/her relation with the law, health, safety, classroom management, the psychology of learning, gender issues, equal opportunities, literacy, and ICT, as well as the philosophy of education), (7) consider issues specific to the career development of teachers: from newly qualified status, to acknowledged basic competence, and on to advanced and expert status, (8) include guidelines on good practice in incorporating peer observation and peer review into teacher training, (9) include guidelines on fostering the knowledge and skills needed for independent language learning, (10) provide guidelines on incorporating elements of pedagogical research into teacher training, and, finally, (11) be produced by an Advisory Group on Language Teacher Training in consultation with a reference group of teacher trainers, as recommended in this report.

To be valid and acceptable, "standards" in the context of language teacher accreditation should relate to the needs of the society; namely, the goals of language teaching and the skills needed by language teachers, if they are to achieve those goals (Ingram, 2007). They may, of course, relate to all aspects of the educational process from policy-making to teacher education, curriculum development, and implementation. In this paper however, reference is made only to standards in the context of language teaching and language teacher accreditation. Only once the professional standards have been established and institutionalized may both the path and the content of the training program for mother language teachers be reconsidered.

We shall further present the *reference documents* in the field of professional standards for language teachers: the International Second Language Proficiency Ratings (ISLPR); the NBPTS Standards for World Languages Other Than English; the Australian Federation of Modern Languages Teachers Associations (AFMLTA); the European Profile for Language Teacher Education; and the EAQUALS Profiling Grid for Language Teachers.

The International Second Language Proficiency Ratings (ISLPR), first published in January 1979, were initially developed by Elaine Wylie and D. E. Ingram in 1978 as the Australian Second Language Proficiency Ratings (ASLPR). This basic scale is designed to measure general proficiency or practical language skills in real-life language contexts in second or foreign language learners. The scale is presented in three columns: the first column provides a "General Description of Language Behavior" and is nearly identical across all versions of the scale, the second provides "Examples of Language Behavior" and is specific to the particular version of the scale, and the third is a "Comment" column that explains, gives definitions, and draws attention to critical features of the descriptor or level. To specify standards of language proficiency for language teachers, the International Second Language Proficiency Ratings – Version for Second Language Teachers was developed in collaboration with a wide-ranging research group including practicing language teachers, professional associations of language teachers, curriculum specialists, and teacher educators (Wylie & Ingram, 1995/99).

Teacher Competencies for Professional Development (Texas Education Agency, 1997) describes the core knowledge that every teacher should have in order to implement the *Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills for Languages Other Than English (TEKS for LOTE)* and provides sample practices of what teachers need to do. These standards, the *TEKS for LOTE*, are organized around five Program Goals: Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities. In order to implement the *TEKS for LOTE*, teachers should have a thorough familiarity with and an understanding

of their content. Teachers should use Teacher Competencies for Professional Development as a tool for self-assessment, rating themselves on each sample practice as good, better, or exemplary.

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 truly useful for teachers' professional learning, including teacher education programs, they need to "drill down" past the generic level to describe what teachers are to know and what they are able to do in the various complex areas of their subjects and fields of teaching (Kleinhenz et al., 2007, p. 49). A great deal of standards development work in recent years has been carried out in the USA. Liddicoat et al. (2005, p. 24) refer to the standards developed by the Foreign Language Standards Collaborative in conjunction with the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL Foreign Language Standards Writing Team, 2002). These standards have now been approved by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), and are being used in a teacher education program review process headed by trained ACTFL/ NCATE reviewers. The NCATE/ ACTFL program standards for foreign language teacher education programs consider three major aspects of teaching: content-area and pedagogic knowledge; skills in teaching; and dispositions for teaching. The document further identifies six content standards that categorize the broad areas in which teachers are expected to demonstrate their knowledge, skills, and dispositions: (1) language, linguistics, and comparisons; (2) cultures, literatures, and cross-disciplinary concepts; (3) language acquisition theories and instructional practices; (4) integration of standards into curriculum and instruction; (5) assessment of languages and cultures; and (6) professionalism.

The most comprehensive set of professional teaching standards for accomplished languages teaching was developed in the USA under the auspices of the *National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS)*. The NBPTS Standards for World Languages Other Than English was built upon this platform with the goal of articulating a knowledge base for accomplished language teachers which is the result of a broad consensus reached by the

professional teachers of languages across the USA. The fourteen NBPTS World Languages Other Than English standards (NBPTS, 2001) were developed on the basis of the five common NBPTS core propositions (Table 2).

Table 2.
The Structure of Professional Standards according to the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS)

Structure	Components
Preparing for Student Learning	- Knowledge of Students, Knowledge of Special Education, Communications, Diversity, Knowledge of Subject Matter
Advancing Student Learning	- Meaningful Learning, Multiple Paths to Knowledge, Social Development
Supporting Student Learning	- Assessment, Learning Environment, Instructional Resources, Family Partnerships
Professional Development and Outreach	- Reflective Practice, Contributing to the Profession and to Education

The aim of the developers of the Standards for World Languages Other Than English was to arrive at a professional consensus on the characteristics of accomplished teaching of languages, based on research and the 'wisdom of practice,' and to provide a profile of the accomplished language teacher.

The *Australian Federation of Modern Languages Teachers Associations (AFMLTA)* has recently (2005) developed a set of professional standards for language teaching. According to this document, the standards are "statements of values about teaching, learning and knowing and the practices of those who teach languages and cultures." These standards provide the most comprehensive description to date of the knowledge and skills of Australian language teachers at an "accomplished" level. The standards are grouped under eight headings (Table 3). Between two and eight standards appear under each heading, making a total of thirty-eight standards. The standards are expressed in prose statements of approximately twelve to fifty words. The standards are designed to assist teachers in understanding and developing their own practice. They are intended to be a guide for thinking through one's current professional work and identifying the needs for future development. The development of the AFMLTA Standards (2005) represents a major step in describing a knowledge base for the profession of language teaching. In a second project on professional standards, which began in 2007, the AFMLTA decided that it was important to extend the number of languages

for which annotations were available. This project, funded by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), developed annotations for six languages: Chinese, French, German, Italian, Japanese, and Spanish.

Table 3.
The Structure of Professional Standards according to the Australian Federation of Modern Languages Teachers Associations

Structure	Components
Educational theory and practice	- current theories of education, general principles of teaching and learning, and classroom management
Language and culture	- intercultural awareness in teaching, awareness and understanding of the role of language and culture in human interaction and identity
Language pedagogy	- current developments in language learning and teaching research
Ethics and responsibility	- responsibility for the teaching and learning relationship and for social and cultural relationships
Professional relationships	- relationships with other languages and cultures teachers, with teachers in other disciplines, with students, with parents and with school communities
Active engagement with wider context	- the ability to connect the local to the global
Advocacy	- the ability to advocate language learning, intercultural communication, and cultural diversity
Personal characteristics	- commitment to their own continuing professional and personal learning, belief in their students

A particular focus of the project developed by Kleinhenz et al. (2007) was the relevance and possible applications of professional teaching standards in teacher education programs, especially the AFMLTA Standards. The project also investigated standards developed in other contexts and countries, especially those used at the professional entry or graduate levels as they may be used to serve the twin purposes of pre-service teachers' professional learning and to ensure the quality of course provision.

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 (Kelly et al., 2002). The precise profile varies from country to country and from language to language; however, the general areas of expected expertise are widely shared. A European Benchmark for Language Teacher Training should be developed in order to provide a common understanding of the

different processes and components involved, and to serve as guidelines for good practice. A European perspective should be taken and European contexts used as a basis for designing program content.

The *EAQUALS (European Association for Quality Language Services) Profiling Grid for Language Teachers* seeks to summarize the key features of qualifications and competences at different stages of a language teacher's development (North, 2009). It is a "grid" because it has two axes; one of which is provided by three broad stages of development "Basic," "Independent" and "Proficient," which deliberately echo the three broad levels (A, B, and C) of the Common European Framework of Reference (Council of Europe, 2001) and which, as in the CEFR, are each split into two in order to give six bands, labeled in the Grid T1 to T6. The second axis is composed of four broad categories intended to reflect the main aspects of a language teacher's profile: "Language" (proficiency/ awareness), "Qualifications" (qualifications/ teaching practice/ experience), "Core Competencies" (methodology knowledge and skills/ planning/ interaction management/ assessment), and "Complementary skills" (teacher development/ digital literacy). Although an individual may possess high-level core competencies, s/he lack significant formal qualifications. Others, however, may have high-level paper qualifications but be lacking in experience and core competencies. Complementary skills may develop during a person's career, or may reflect existing talents brought to the profession.

Kelly et al. (2004) 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, offering a frame of reference for language education policy makers and language teacher educators in Europe. The Profile contains 40 items, in which each item contains an important element of foreign language teacher education. The Profile is divided into the following three sections: Knowledge and Understanding, Strategies and Skills, and Values (Table 4).

Knowing the main approaches centered on defining professional standards and educational policies focused on generating the specific documents, which may include the unitary set of standards for training language teachers, ensures the scientific bases and premises required for building a new normative frame. The innovation process is continued by covering a line from the general, which relates to the professional standards of

language teachers, to the particular, which focuses on elaborating the taxonomy of the pedagogic competences of mother tongue teachers. This process of analysis materializes in a new model of training as a response to the permanent changes and demands for the optimum integration in the teaching career.

Table 4.
The Structure of Professional Standards according to the European Profile for Language Teacher Education

Structure	Components
Knowledge and Understanding	- language teaching methodologies and state-of-the art classroom techniques and activities; - the development of a critical and inquiring approach to teaching and learning; - language proficiency and assessment of trainees' linguistic competence; - information and communication technology for pedagogical use in the classroom; - information and communication technology for personal planning, organization, and resource discovery; - the application of various assessment procedures and ways of recording learners' progress; - the critical evaluation of nationally or regionally adopted curricula in terms of aims, objectives, and outcomes; - the theory and practice of internal and external program evaluation
Strategies and Skills	- ways of adapting teaching approaches to the educational context and individual needs of learners; - the critical evaluation, development and practical application of teaching materials and resources; - methods of learning to learn, training in the development of reflective practice, and self-evaluation; - the development of independent language learning strategies; - ways of maintaining and enhancing ongoing personal language competence; - the practical application of curricula and syllabuses; - peer observation and peer review; developing relationships with educational institutions in appropriate countries; - action research; - incorporating research into teaching; - Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL); - the use of the European Language Portfolio for self-evaluation
Values	- social and cultural values; - diversity of languages and cultures; - importance of teaching and learning about foreign languages and cultures; - teaching European citizenship; - team-working, collaboration and networking, inside and outside the immediate school context; - importance of life-long learning

Pedagogical Standards for Mother-tongue Teachers

Regarding the professional standards for mother-tongue teachers, there is no consensus about the base structure. Yet, efforts seeking to define what mother-tongue teachers should know have been undertaken in a single research project realized by Delnoy, Herrlitz, Kroon, and Sturm (1988), 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 existed no such explicitly stated standards. By defining the range of situations in which standards are to be employed – as a pre-requisite of formulating standards (Oser & Renold, 2006, p. 29) -, listing the sub-actions whose combination determines the profile, and a more accurate definition of the standard which aims at pre-shaping the behavioral / performance possibilities, we can more accurately anticipate how teachers might behave in a real classroom environment. The profile for mother-tongue teachers, suggested in this study, turns to advantage and elaborates upon the models previously presented and, more particularly, the annotations for other languages developed by de Kelly et al. (2004) and the AFMLTA Standards (2005).

A holistic overview upon categories of professional standards is an attempt to unite all these perspectives on two dimensions: on the one hand, the categories of professional standards for mother-tongue teachers and, on the other hand, the three levels (Knowledge and Understanding, Strategies and Skills, and Values). The main categories of which behaviors are expected of a mother-tongue teacher from a pedagogical perspective will be organized in a model of the didactic professions with a structured and operational nature. The model shall integrate the basic knowledge, strategies and skills, and values that a mother-tongue teacher should have.

The pedagogical competencies are structured into six main domains, following the elaboration of the operational model of based on developing the pedagogical competences 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:"

1. Competence to assure the functionality of the educational process:

1.1. using classroom and extra-classroom learning experiences and activities to practice using the first language and culture in real-world situations;

1.2. developing the intellectual, moral, aesthetic, physical, and technological components of education into first language instruction;

1.3. facilitating the compliance of the didactic principles into first language instruction

2. Ability to design curriculum:

2.1. the application of types of curriculum developed at the national level into first language instruction;

2.2. selecting relevant curricular documents for first language instruction;

2.3. integrating the specific knowledge, capacities, abilities, attitudes, values, and behavior for first language acquisition

3. Capacity to establish the finalities of education:

3.1. selecting general and specific competences in the school schedule of first language;

3.2. formulating the concrete objectives for a lesson of Mother-tongue Language and Literature

4. Competence in the use of specific teaching strategies:

4.1. using specific methods of teaching and learning of the first language;

4.2. integrating specific didactic instruments to enable students to use the first language in real-world contexts;

4.3. combining class teaching, pair practice and individual learning in mother-tongue teaching

5. Ability to design the teaching activity:

5.1. elaborating the annual and semester design for the subject Mother-tongue Language and Literature;

5.2. designing plans for different types of lessons of first language learning;

5.3. creating opportunities to use the first language beyond the school setting

6. Competence to use the specific assessment strategies:

6.1. constructing the initial, formative, and final instruments to evaluate the level of first language learning by students;

6.2. using specific methods of assessment of knowledge and capacities for first language acquisition by students;

6.3. using specific methods of assessment of attitudes, values, and behaviors for first language acquisition by students.

The result is a new perspective regarding the representation of the pedagogical standards for mother-tongue teachers. These will be further structured on levels ranging from simple to complex so that a concrete model of pedagogical standards for mother-tongue teachers in secondary education may be exploited in initial training programs.

Rationale

Research focusing on mother-tongue teacher education is conspicuously missing from the large amount of literature available on general teacher education, and issues related to the training of mother-tongue teachers are rarely approached in educational journals. Similarly, the amount of research in this domain is remarkably small compared with the considerable amount of literature on language teaching and learning. The few studies realized in the last 20 years from the perspective of training mother-tongue teachers have focused on different aspects. While Kroon and Sturm (1990) analyzed the context of training mother tongue teachers in the Netherlands since 1970, Wang (2001) investigated the current status of mother tongue teaching in elementary school whose results indicate that although most teachers wish to attend teacher training courses, these classes are insufficient. Starc (2004) elaborates the model of mother-tongue learning and teaching in Slovenia. Under the influence of new didactical research in the 1980s, conditions became favorable for modernizing the curriculum. Since 1998, new curricula have been implemented in which communicative approaches have become prominent in language, grammar, and literature curricula as well as in teaching. Tulasiewicz and Adams (2005) explored mother tongue teaching in a multilingual Europe. Svobodová and Gejgušová (2006) studied the communication component in teacher training focusing on future mother-tongue teachers of Czech language and literature courses. The training of mother-tongue teachers aims to enable future teachers to learn how to support pupils' development and learning processes, to create suitable conditions for achieving this goal, to manage any direct learning process, to uncover and

respect the personal qualities of individuals, and to lead pupils to achieve their personal best.

The study we propose is of a mixed type because it combines the quantitative research methodology, using a questionnaire followed by a qualitative interpretation of the results obtained, with the objective to identify higher education teachers' perceptions regarding the integration of the new model of building pedagogic competencies in future mother-tongue teachers. Compared to previous studies, the novelty of this research lies in its elaboration and validation of a model for training mother-tongue teachers while focusing on the pedagogic component. Another innovative aspect of the study is embodied in its focus on mother-tongue teachers in secondary education.

Purpose and Hypotheses of the Investigation

Our study aims at determining the representations of the teachers from Romanian higher education regarding the categories of pedagogical standards for mother-tongue teachers, developed in agreement with recent approaches.

The study is based on the main hypothesis, according to which teachers with expertise in the domain of language education in higher education are open toward the new model proposed, which is based on developing pedagogical competencies in mother-tongue teachers in the initial training program.

The second hypothesis refers to the fact that certain categories of pedagogical competencies for mother-tongue teachers' education are appreciated by teachers.

Method

Variables

The main concept of pedagogical standards was developed according to six main categories: (1) the functionality of the educational process; (2) the design of the curriculum; (3) the finalities of education; (4)teaching strategies; (5) the teaching activity design; (6) and assessment strategies. In identifying teachers' opinions, *the dependent variable* used is the appreciation of pedagogical competences; and in order to establish this variable, the participants were asked to evaluate each category according to its importance.

Participants

Thirty-eight (38) teachers with expertise in the domain of language education participated in this study. The teachers who completed the questionnaire are from seven universities located in Romania. The participants were selected so that a representative number of teachers in the field of language education from Romanian higher education might be ensured: 8 teachers from 2 large universities (University of București, "Al. I. Cuza" University of Iași), 12 teachers from 3 medium-sized universities ("Lucian Blaga" University of Sibiu, "Aurel Vlaicu" University of Arad, University of Oradea), and 18 teachers from 2 small universities ("1 Decembrie 1918" University of Alba Iulia, "Vasile Alecsandri" University of Bacău). Of those teachers selected, whereas only four held a PhD in the sciences of education, all had, at the time the study was conducted, at least 10 years of experience in higher education as teachers of disciplines related to training mother-tongue teachers.

Data Collection

The questionnaire for identifying the perception of higher-education teachers upon the model based on developing pedagogic competences was the main instrument used to identify the representations of teachers in the domain of language education regarding the various categories of pedagogical standards for mother-tongue teachers. The questionnaire used to identify teachers' perceptions of language education toward the manner in which professional standards are developed is structured on several dimensions:

· the appreciation of the manner of developing syllabi according to professional standards, the proposed level of educational policy (items 1 and 2);

· the appreciation of the manner used to develop syllabi according to a grid of professional standards (items 3 and 4);

· the identification of relevant categories of pedagogical standards for Mother-tongue teachers (item 5);

· the importance given to specific standards to be developed predominantly through an initial training program for Mother-tongue teachers (item 6); and

· assessing the need for a profile of Mother-tongue teachers (items 7 and 8).

In this study, the results obtained for item 6 have been presented; item 6 being that which measures the level of appreciation of the importance given to pedagogical competencies that are to be developed predominantly for pre-service Mother-tongue teachers.

In order to ensure the content validity of the instrument, the questionnaire for identifying higher-education teachers' perceptions toward the model based on developing pedagogic competency was analyzed by a group of 10 teachers with expertise in Education Sciences.

Procedure

The application of the questionnaires used to identify the perceptions of language education teachers was conducted between November 2011 and February 2012. The teachers who participated in this study were contacted via the e-mail addresses listed on their universities' websites. They were sent an invitation to participate in this study along with the research project's objectives. Those who responded in the affirmative were sent an electronic version of the questionnaire. The actual application of questionnaires consisted of filling in fields for each dimension. We also tried to eliminate the tendency of façade by emphasizing that there are no correct or wrong answers, only personal answers.

Results

The first hypothesis was confirmed because 36 of the total 38 teachers displayed an openness toward the newly proposed model based on developing pedagogic competencies in mother-tongue teachers from the initial training program. Two teachers disagreed with the model.

The second hypothesis was also confirmed because certain categories of pedagogical competencies for mother-tongue education were appreciated by teachers. The research results were interpreted using the descriptive techniques detailed in the SPSS program; that is, by calculating the statistical mean for each category of pedagogic competence. An analysis of the means indicated the importance of each category of standards in the perception of the teachers. The constituent elements regarding the professional standards for mother-tongue teachers were appreciated in a different manner by teachers (Table 5). In terms of the importance of being competent in assuring the *functionality of the educational process*, teachers considered

that the most important pedagogical component is "using classroom and extra-classroom learning experiences and activities to practice using the first language and culture in real-world situations" (4.83). Regarding the *ability to design curriculum*, the most appreciated pedagogical component by language education teachers was "integrating the specific knowledge, capacities, abilities, attitudes, values, and behaviours made use of in first language acquisition" (4.31). In terms of the importance of being capable to establish the *finalities of education*, the most important pedagogical component in the perception of teachers was "formulating concrete objectives for a Language and Literature lesson taught in one's Mother-tongue" (4.88). In terms of the importance of being competent in the *use of specific teaching strategies*, the most appreciated pedagogical component by language education teachers was "using specific methods of teaching and learning of one's first language" (4.57). Regarding the importance of teachers' ability to *design a teaching activity*, the most important pedagogical component in the perception of teachers was "designing a plan for different types of lessons of first language learning" (4.59). Relating to the importance given to being competent in the *use of specific assessment strategies*, teachers considered that the most important pedagogical component was "using specific methods of knowledge assessment to gauge the capacities of students in first language acquisition" (4.22).

The research results have implications on the training of mother-tongue teachers, especially for pedagogy courses and didactics. Adopting the new model based on developing pedagogic competencies contributes to improving the initial training of future teachers over the long term as well as facilitating their integration in the teaching career. Similar to other models developed to train mother-tongue teachers (Starc, 2004), the new frame of pedagogic competencies becomes a working instrument for trainers and students. The results of this study confirm the need for elaborating a profile of mother-tongue teachers (Delnoy et al., 1988). Building the models based on elaborating the professional standards implies a constant updating of this profile: one that is in close connection with the current state of the art in this domain, the existing studies, and the particularities of the initial training programs for teachers.

Table 5.

Romanian Teachers' Perceptions Regarding the Categories of Professional Standards for Mother-tongue Teachers

Categories	Pedagogical components	Mean
1. Competence to assure the functionality of the educational process	1.1. using classroom and extra-classroom learning experiences and activities to practice using the first language and culture in real-world situations	4.83
	1.2. developing the intellectual, moral, aesthetic, physical, and technological components of education into first language instruction	3.22
	1.3. facilitating the compliance of the didactic principles into first language instruction	2.77
2. Ability to design of the curriculum	2.1. the application of types of curriculum developed at the national level into first language instruction	2.62
	2.2. selecting relevant curricular documents for first language instruction	3.79
	2.3. integrating the specific knowledge, capacities, abilities, attitudes, values, and behaviors for first language acquisition	4.31
3. Capacity to establish the finalities of education	3.1. selecting general and specific competences from the syllabi	2.45
	3.2. formulating concrete objectives for a Language and Literature lesson in one's Mother-tongue	4.88
4. Competence to use the specific teaching strategies	4.1. using specific methods of teaching and learning of the first language	4.57
	4.2. integrating specific didactic instruments to enable students to use the first language in real-world contexts	3.90
	4.3. combining class teaching, pair practice, and individual learning in mother-tongue teaching	3.12
5. Ability to design the teaching activity	5.1. elaborating the annual and semester design for Language and Literature in the Mother-tongue	3.23
	5.2. designing a plan for different types of lessons of first language learning	4.59
	5.3. creating opportunities to use the first language beyond the school setting	3.87
6. Competence to use the specific assessment strategies	6.1. constructing initial, formative, and final instruments to evaluate the level of first language learning in students	2.07
	6.2. using specific methods of knowledge assessment to gauge capacities of students in first language acquisition	4.22
	6.3. integrating specific methods of assessment of attitudes, values and behaviors for first language acquisition by students	3.95

Discussion and Conclusion

The results obtained after interpreting the results of the research, while giving specific reference to categories of professional standards for mother-tongue teachers, indicate the fact that language education teachers indicated through their choices a greater necessity of certain pedagogical competences over others. According to the assessment of the expert-respondents, the three most important subcategories are as follows: using classroom and extra-classroom learning experiences and activities to practice using the first language and culture in real-world situations, designing a plan for different types of lessons of first language learning, and using specific methods of teaching and learning of the first language. The results of our research have contributed to the delineation of the categories relevant to facilitate the creation of professional standards for mother-tongue teachers as well as the development and validation of an operational model regarding these competences. Investigating the perceptions that teachers of Language Didactics hold regarding various categories of professional standards is an important stage in initiating and implementing changes in both educational policies as well as in educational practice.

For language teachers in general, there is a need for some type of secondary education training before one may begin his/her initial programs. One cannot assume, based solely on the results of degree examinations, that a candidate has acquired a sufficient level of competence in a language to teach it, or even the awareness of language as a system. A high level of linguistic and pedagogical competence will naturally be a *sine qua non* for any future program of mother-tongue teacher education. Programs need to be developed for first language teachers who have a content subject in their degree, to enable them to explore the ways in which methodologies from both subject areas can be combined for first language teachers. Student-teachers will need to be taught how to source material in their content subject area in the target language, how to use pedagogical and other texts as sources of linguistic input and for creating meaning, and how to adjust their classroom discourse in the target language to match that of the classroom in the first language.

Professional standards represent a fundamental component of the system of training mother-tongue teachers because they ensure the quality of teaching in terms of educational politics and central strategy.

Developing a system of professional standards for mother-tongue teachers contributes to creating a powerful and receptive teaching body in which excellent teachers are able to 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 in order to implement this new concept of mother-tongue teaching. These teachers need to have both proven high-level language competencies and solid methodological-didactic competencies. Ingram (2007) considers that standards also exert a substantial effect on the development of pre-service and ongoing language teacher education programs.

The product of this study's effort of identifying, defining, and describing the pedagogical standards for language teachers represents a challenge and a positive experience of covering the path of professional development. The openness of higher-education teachers toward the training of future mother-tongue teachers based on the model of pedagogic competencies represents a significant result of the research, having a positive impact on the initial training programs in terms of elaborating the courses of mother-tongue didactics.

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 model proposed for the development of professional standards 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 does our understanding of the attributes required of a language teacher. Hence language teacher standards should also evolve with corollary implications for pre-service and ongoing language teacher education.

Acknowledgements

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