

Teachers' perspectives on developing their teaching career by attending non-formal training programmes

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Suggested Citation:

Blandul, V. (2022). Teachers' perspectives on developing their teaching career by attending non-formal training programmes. *Global Journal of Guidance and Counseling in Schools: Current Perspectives*, 12(1), 40-51. <https://doi.org/10.18844/gjgc.v12i1.5426>

Received from December 03, 2021; revised from February 22, 2022; accepted from April 26, 2022.

Selection and peer review under responsibility of Prof. Dr. Kobus Maree, University of Pretoria South Africa.

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Abstract

There are many opportunities for professors to attend different training programmes. Some of them could be included in formal education and some of them in non-formal education. Therefore, in the present paper, we analyse the impact of the aforementioned non-formal continuous training programme on teachers' evolution and what is their personality profile which can motivate them to be involved in this activity. In this sense, we conducted a longitudinal case study on an NGO in Romania which provides continuous training programmes. The results proved that those professors who are interested in this method of professional development are strongly and intrinsically motivated in didactic careers and are ready to sacrifice a lot of personal energy and resources to improve their professional and personal skills necessary in their work with students.

Keywords: Teaching career, continuous professional training, personal and professional development, socio-professional profile, teachers personality;

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Introduction

Contemporary society has an evolution that could be represented graphically in the form of an exponential curve. The areas where progress has been most visible are economic, social, cultural and political, as well as vocational. Thus, for many people, building a successful professional career has been a goal that has subordinated all other aspects of life. For a long time, it was considered that a career is defined only for people who hold a high managerial position and who, in the case of the authority with which it is invested, can make decisions about the path to follow in the organisation he leads. Contemporary reality is much more complex, and recent approaches accredit the idea that a successful career includes all professions, trades, occupations, family, social or professional roles, ways of spending time, hobbies and life experiences. In other words, the concept of 'career' has a much wider scope, including, on the one hand, aspects related to the exercise of a profession and, on the other hand, elements belonging to the private life of the individual, but which, often, intertwine with the chosen profession (Karahoca & Uzunboylu, 2014).

On the other hand, the term may also have a narrower interpretation, referring to a certain succession of professions, occupations, statuses and roles that a person holds in relation to his profession, including both pre-vocational functions (those of students who are preparing for a certain profession), as well as the post-vocational ones (those retired with the status of collaborator or mentor for a certain organisation). From the definition proposed by Marinescu (2018), we can identify three moments that shape a person's professional career: The *pre-vocational stage* (where the individual, based on the counselling he receives, makes a decision on choosing a school and professional route and prepares in this direction); the *vocational stage* (where the person works in the chosen field, carrying out several related trades and occupying various related functions); and the *post-vocational stage* (where the individual retires from an active professional life, being able to remain associated, as a consultant or volunteer in the field, with the organisation in which he worked or for other structures with a relatively similar profile). Therefore, the 'key' factor that defines a professional career is given by maintaining a relatively stable field of activity, the variety of occupations performed within it or the positions and functions held being determined by different professional, personal, family and social influences.

The problem of conceptual delimitations related to the teaching career is very complex. In reality, the terms most frequently used and entered, somewhat in common parlance, seem to be the most difficult to define. One such example is the concept of 'teacher', designating, in the opinion of the general public, that person in the department who designs and conducts different types of lessons for his students. According to the specialised literature (Stănescu, 2000), the teacher is the person who, based on his/her specialised, methodical and psycho-pedagogical training, is able and validated by a certificate of teaching competence to carry out specific activities in an educational unit in the benefit of his students. Therefore, in order to become a teacher, it is important that the person in question fulfils several simultaneous conditions: To be a graduate of a bachelor's or master's programme in a certain field; to be a graduate of a training programme in psycho-pedagogy and methodology, respectively; to be employed in a school unit either as a holder (based on the promotion of a competition) or as a substitute. But the way from the simple exercise for a shorter or longer period of time of the teaching profession to the construction of a successful career in

education is long, and it involves going through similar sequences as in the case of other types of professional careers.

In a relatively simple sense, the teaching career can be seen as a succession of events of a professional and personal nature that allows the individual to successfully perform the tasks specific to the teaching profession. This will include the statutes that a teacher has within a school over time, the responsibilities arising from these positions and the teaching and managerial skills necessary to exercise them effectively. Analysing this perspective, we will notice that at least two interrelated aspects emerge from it. First of all, it would be about the positions and roles that a teacher has within the school – carrying out the actual teaching activities (designing lessons, teaching, learning and evaluating students' school progress), implementing and coordinating extracurricular activities specific to non-formal education, management of methodical activities and curricular design at the level of various specialised commissions within the school, implementation of educational management activities at the level of specialised commission, educational unit, coordinating institution in education and so on. On the other hand, a teacher is also a social actor, having the opportunity to be actively involved in the life of the community and to become its moral and professional landmark. In addition, the teaching career requires a much more consistent training and continuous professional development compared to the other fields of activity (Blândul, 2014).

As already mentioned, the teaching profession – more than any other one – requires a dynamic and open approach, where initial training must be followed by placement, internship, continuous training, research into psycho-pedagogy and so on. Therefore, continuous training plays a very important role in the personal and professional development of the teaching staff, giving them the opportunity to acquire novelties in specialty, psycho-pedagogy and methodology, and also to build complex and creative personalities. The main ways in which this continuous training could be achieved would be:

- *obtaining the completed didactic degree in the education system* – this is done after 1–2 years of internship and has the role of certifying the qualification of the person on the teaching position he/she occupies in school;
- *obtaining the second didactic degree in the education system* – this can be done 3–4 years after the person has completed the educational process and has the role to consolidate the psycho-pedagogical and methodical skills acquired up to that level;
- *obtaining the first didactic degree in the educational system* – this can be accomplished for another 3–4 years from the promotion of the previous didactic degree and represents the highest form of training of the teaching staff in the Romanian pre-university education;
- *accredited programmes of continuous training and professional development* – this can be done on different topics of specialty, psycho-pedagogy and methodology, which, within a maximum of 5 years, must give the individual a total of 90 transferable professional credits.

Along with these, there are many other forms of continuing vocational training (such as master's, doctorate and so on) that can give the individual a higher level of training for the teaching career. Regardless of the chosen form, it is very important for a teacher to always improve, thus having the opportunity to develop his didactic and specialty skills and to avoid routine in his every day. In this context, Neacșu (2013) points out the importance of introducing professional mentoring in Romania in order to increase the quality of teacher training at the beginning of their profession. The author

emphasises the importance of the models of good practice offered by mentors for professional insertion to beginner teachers, directly at work, in school and their takeover of desirable professional behaviours through inter-assistance, professional dialogues, individual counselling, assessment and self-assessment of professional skills.

2. Methodology of the research

2.1. Objectives

Non-formal education – as an integral part of education as a whole – plays a very important role in the professional training and personal development of all people, regardless of the age or stage of life they are going through. To meet this need, the Association for Education and Training – ‘TopFormalis’ Oradea – proposed to organise a monthly series of extracurricular activities addressed to pupils, students and teachers, who would allow them to develop their psycho-pedagogical and specialised training, for achieving success in life and teaching career. Therefore, the aim of this research is to analyse the impact of continuous training through non-formal strategies promoted by ‘TopFormalis’ Oradea – a case study that we hope represents a good practice model for Romania in continuous teacher training. The objectives of the research are as follows: (1) to identify the main socio-professional profile of those professors who decided to attend the continuous teacher training proposed by ‘TopFormalis’ Oradea, Romania; and (2) to analyse the status and role of non-formal education used in the continuous teacher training in Romania. We consider that such objectives could cover the research problem and offer interested persons an integral view on the topic of discussion.

2.2. Sample of the research

The sample of our research comprised 1,764 professors who attended the extracurricular activities proposed by ‘TopFormalis’ Oradea, Romania, in the programme of continuous training using non-formal strategies ($n = 1,764$). The number of teachers comes from those who attended every fourth edition of the programme since 2016: First edition – 423 participants (24%); second edition – 455 participants (26%); third edition – 437 participants (25.2%); and fourth edition – 431 participants (24.8%). The other characteristics of the sample will be analysed below.

2.3. Instrument and procedure

Specifically, we organised some workshops, debates, round tables, games and contests, book launches, exhibitions, showings and meetings with personalities from different fields of interests. These activities were grouped in the project called ‘TopFormalis Friends Club’. The philosophy of these activities was to have a useful exchange of experiences among professors teaching different subjects and students in different school, so the specialists with outstanding scientific results in their areas of competence have the opportunity to make themselves known to other colleagues or students concerned about their research theme. Therefore, the aim of this project was to develop/increase the professional level of teachers involved in these extracurricular activities, leading them to know the national and international scientific and cultural values. The subjects of those eight activities of the continuing vocational development programme covered a very generous

theme in the non-formal education spectrum, including elements in the field of health, social and emotional, financial education, new dimensions in modern didactics, the importance of new technologies in the training process, school and social inclusion of people in need and so on. We believe it is very important for a teacher to overcome the limits imposed by his specialty and to give pupils an integrative perspective on reality, supporting them to successfully meet the challenges of the contemporary world and to effectively integrate into the community to which they belong.

3. Results

In this section, we propose to build a possible socio-professional profile of teachers interested in improving their personal and professional competences by non-formal education, taking into account several indicators such as gender, background, school cycle, curricular area where they teach, chronological age, the obtained didactic degree and the motivation to participate in such activities. The obtained results from the statistical processing of the data collected in the subscription forms to the activities shown in the Figures 1–6 and Tables 1–6.

Table 1. Gender of the participants

	First edition (2016 / 2017)	Second edition (2017 / 2018)	Third edition (2018 / 2019)	Fourth edition (2019 / 2020)
Female	91%	89%	88%	90%
Male	9%	11%	12%	10%

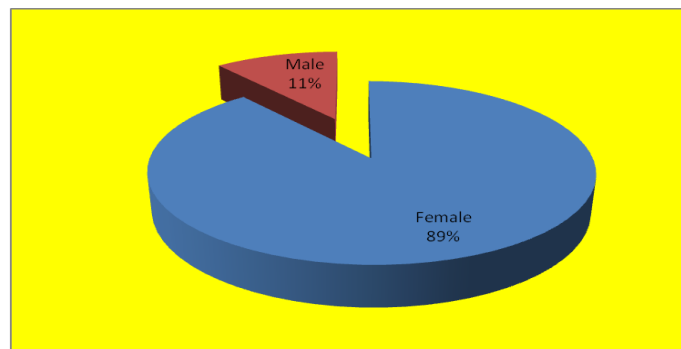


Figure 1. General perspective regarding the gender of the participants

Table 2. Background of the participants

	First edition (2016 / 2017)	Second edition (2017 / 2018)	Third edition (2018 / 2019)	Fourth edition (2019 / 2020)
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Urban	87%	91%	91%	74%
Rural	13%	9%	9%	26%

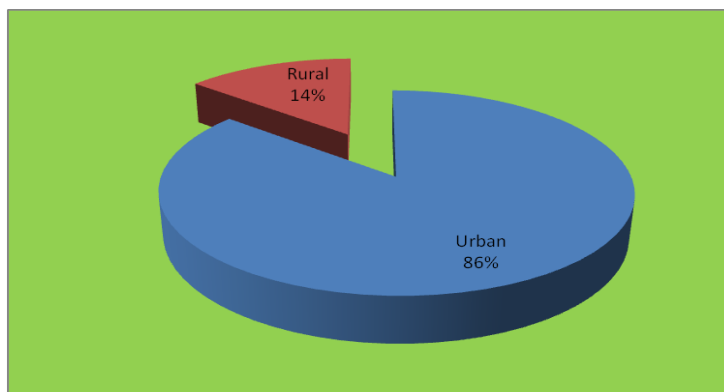


Figure 2. General perspective regarding the background of the participants

Table 3. Level of learning system where the participants are teaching

	First edition (2016 / 2017)	Second edition (2017 / 2018)	Third edition (2018 / 2019)	Fourth edition (2019 / 2020)
Pre-school	6%	6%	7%	9%
Primary school	18%	18%	19%	31%
Secondary school	37%	36%	36%	29%
Upper secondary education	36%	38%	36%	28%
High school	2%	2%	1%	2%
Academic	1%	-	-	1%

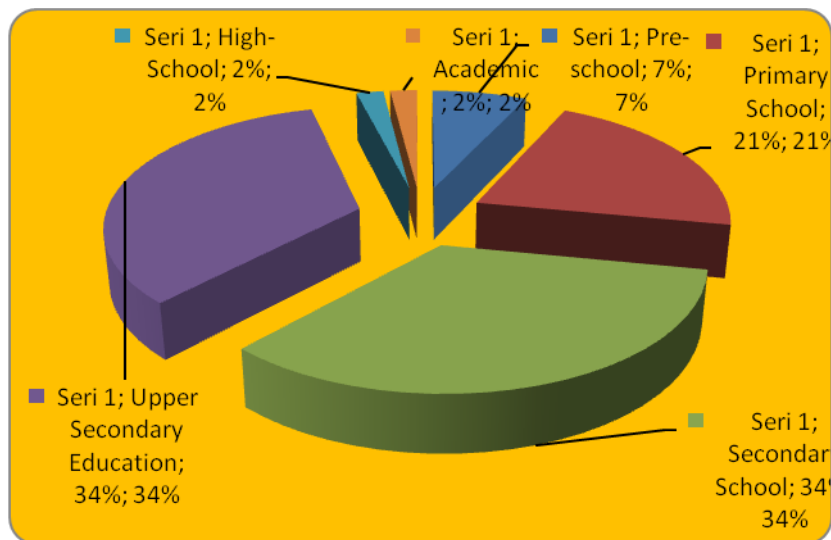


Figure 3. General perspective regarding the level of learning system where the participants are teaching

Table 4. Didactic degree obtained by the participants

	First edition (2016 / 2017)	Second edition (2017 / 2018)	Third edition (2018 / 2019)	Fourth edition (2019 / 2020)
Debutant	8%	6%	6%	6%
Definitive	16%	16%	19%	8%
Second didactic degree	18%	17%	21%	20%
First didactic degree	52%	60%	53%	57%
PhD	6%	1%	1%	9%

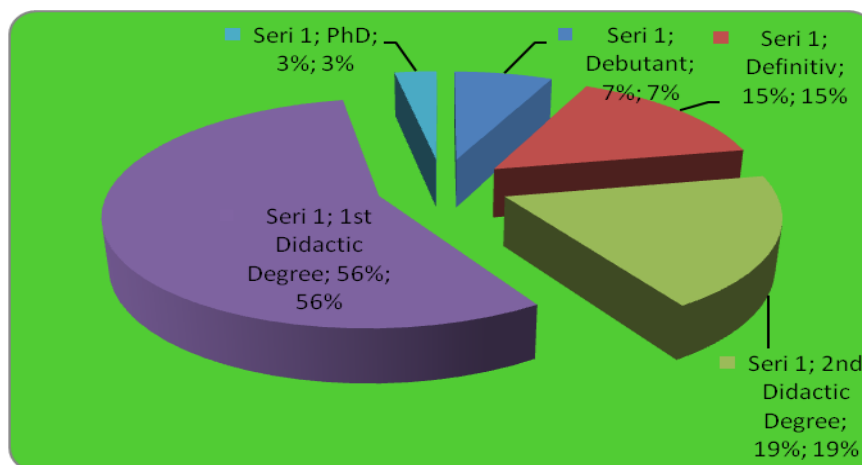


Figure 4. General perspective regarding the didactic degree obtained by the participants

Table 5. Topics taught by the participants

	First edition (2016 / 2017)	Second edition (2017 / 2018)	Third edition (2018 / 2019)	Fourth edition (2019 / 2020)
Language	26%	24%	27%	21%
Mathematics and Science	15%	12%	13%	7%
Humanistic	7%	6%	7%	5%
Arts	4%	5%	4%	4%
Sports	3%	3%	4%	3%
Technology	7%	8%	8%	8%
Counselling	9%	8%	9%	4%
Pre-school topics	7%	7%	7%	11%
Primary school topics	14%	15%	15%	31%
Others	8%	12%	6%	6%

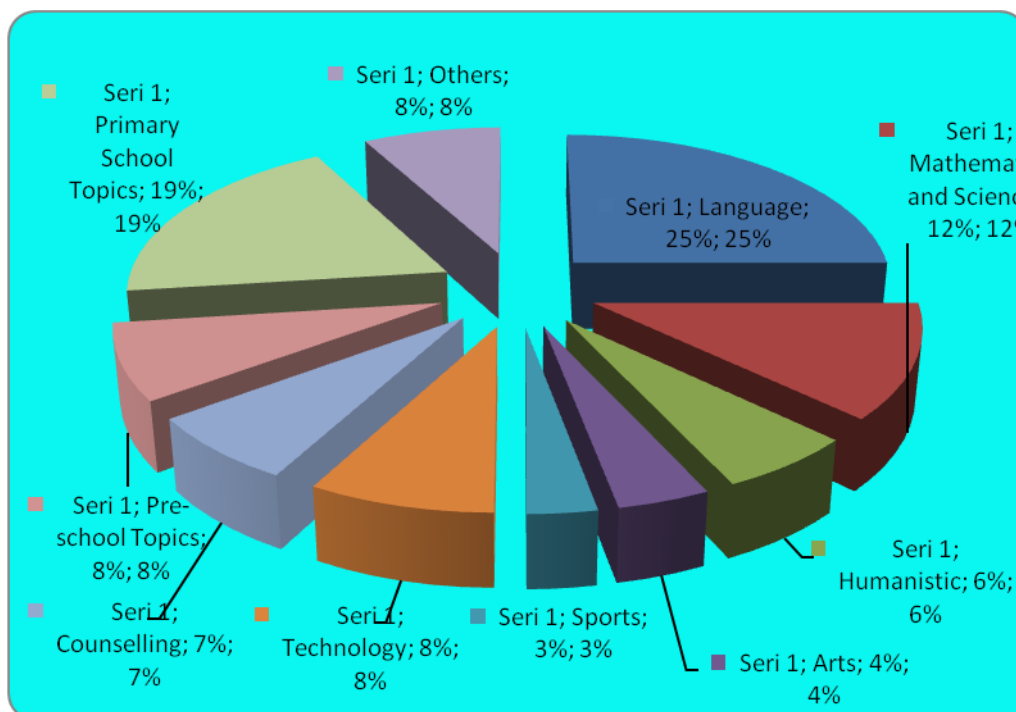


Figure 5. General perspective regarding the topics taught by the participants

Table 6. The chronological age of the participants

	First edition (2016 / 2017)	Second edition (2017 / 2018)	Third edition (2018 / 2019)	Fourth edition (2019 / 2020)
<25 years old	5%	2%	3%	6%
26–35 years old	22%	21%	22%	19%
36–45 years old	41%	46%	45%	45%
46–55 years old	25%	24%	25%	23%
>56 years old	7%	7%	5%	7%

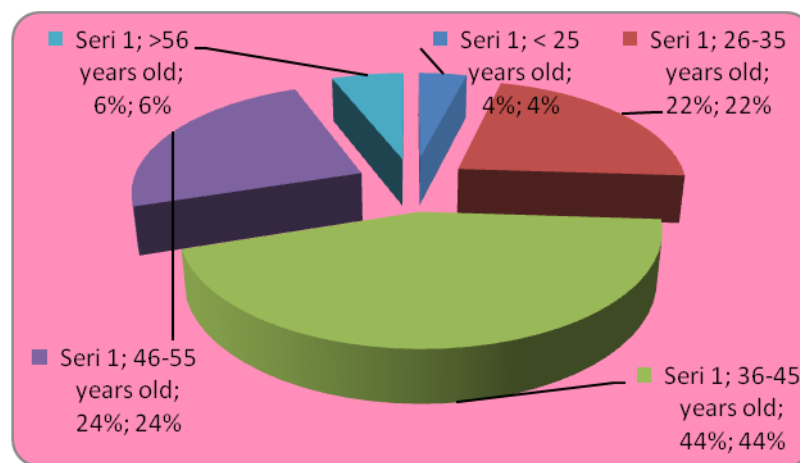


Figure 6. General perspective regarding the chronological age of the participants

From Figures 1–6 and Tables 1–6, we can observe some interesting information on the socio-professional structure of the beneficiaries of this project. First of all, it can be seen that most of the participants in the continuous training activities were female, which correlates with the significantly higher percentage of women teaching in the Romanian education system. The majority of teachers came from urban areas; this aspect is explained by the fact that all project activities were held in Oradea (city) during the week (Tuesday afternoon), which has not allowed many colleagues from villages to be present. Most professors teach upper secondary and lower secondary classes. More than half of the participants have chronological age between 36 and 45 years and obtained the first didactic degree in the Romanian education system, which demonstrates that they have sufficient didactic experience. Most of the teachers participating in project activities teach school subjects included in the curricular area, i.e., ‘Language and Communication’ and ‘Mathematics and Science’, and are obviously subject to preschool or primary education. Finally, participants’ motivation is extremely diverse and include the need for professional training and personal development, passion theme, timeliness and relevance grounds, wishes to share ideas and values with colleagues, need to get a certificate of participation in a continuous training activity, pleased to participate in such activities organised in a non-formal context and so on. All of this builds the personality profile of a

teacher intrinsically, motivates the teaching career and creates the premises for the increase in the quality in education.

4. Discussion

The first important aspect that can be discussed refers to the reasons for which the teachers interested in participating in the training and continuous development programmes belong to the mentioned socio-professional profile. In summary, these are teachers who are chronologically aged between 36 and 45 years; have obtained the first teaching degree – the highest form of training in the Romanian education system; and teach predominantly humanities in primary and high school. In order to have a possible explanation of such a phenomenon, we should analyse the Romanian legislation in the field of continuous professional training of teachers. This stipulates that, every 5 years, teachers should attend a series of courses after which they will accumulate a total of 90 transferable professional credits. These can also be obtained through workshops, conferences, symposia and other profile courses; the total number of hours of continuous training will be transformed into transferable professional credits. Most young teachers accumulate these credits by attending bachelor's, master's or doctoral programmes or by obtaining teaching degrees in the education system. On the other hand, teachers who are approaching retirement age no longer feel so strongly the need for training in the specialty or in psycho-pedagogy and methodology, which is why we meet them less in such training programmes. The most active category is teachers with a chronological age between 35 and 55 years, who have obtained the first didactic degree in the education system, but who feel the need for continuous professional training for both their own development and obtaining the certificates with a number of transferable credits (Bradea, 2017). The explanation for why most participants teach socio-humanities in high school or are teachers for primary education could be given by the specifics of the educational offer of the 'TopFormalis' association, containing topics such as all about parenting, health education, personal development through psychodrama, the use of non-formal strategies in teaching/learning/assessment, the importance of ICT (Information of Computer Technologies) in the instructive educational process and so on. All these elements explain why many teachers are interested in participating in such continuing education programmes for which they are willing to allocate significant material, time and energy resources at least once a month.

The second aspect discussed concerns the optimal strategies through which continuous professional training can be achieved. We should be reminded that the most important providers of such training programmes are the universities, the Houses of the Didactic Staff in each county, the non-governmental organisations, the profile companies and so on (Pânișoară, 2017). Most often, the institutions subordinated to the Romanian Ministry of Education offer training courses that address specialised, psycho-pedagogy and methodology topics, conducted in formal classrooms, respecting a rigorously developed agenda that ends by obtaining certificates of competence. On the contrary, independent providers of continuing vocational training can propose a much wider range of topics, including aspects related to the training of transversal skills, and the spaces in which such courses are held are, most often, unconventional ones. Unfortunately, such providers of non-formal programmes may not always issue officially recognised competency certificates (Blândul, 2015). However, many teachers attend such courses due to their easier nature, adapted to their real professional and personal development needs. Laurian-Fitzgerald, Fitzgerald, Popa, and Bochis (2018) consider that in

adult education, a relevant aspect that trainers must take into account is the fact that they must know their training needs and understand them in order to better help them in the instructional–educational process. In addition, for the persons who were investigated, the value of the diploma obtained seems to matter less than receiving the studied informational content. The quality of the information or course materials offered and also the face-to-face meetings with the teachers on the weekend were two essential components, identified by Popa and Bochis (2013), as related to the level of satisfaction of academic instruction in continuous training of teachers. This can explain why the courses offered by the 'TopFormalis' association had a participation of over 430 teachers each school year, on average; their motivation was to develop their psycho-pedagogical and methodical skills, and also those transferable and only then obtaining a diploma for participation in the activity. The predominantly intrinsic motivation of most teachers makes us happy and gives us hope for increasing the quality of education in Oradea and, why not, in Romania.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the teaching profession – more than any other one – requires a dynamic and open approach, where initial training must be followed by placement, internship, continuing education, research in psycho-pedagogy and so on (Guțu & Vicol, 2014). Therefore, continuous training plays a very important role in the personal and professional development of teachers, giving them the opportunity to acquire innovations in the field of psycho-pedagogy and methodology, but also to build a complex and creative personality. In such circumstances, the teaching profession remains one of the noblest trades, as the future of many generations depends on its way of exercising. Therefore, it is very important that from the beginning an adequate selection of those who want to work in education is made: they benefit from an initial and continuous training carefully carried out; their evolution in education is constantly monitored; and those valuable opportunities should advance. In this way, increasing the quality of education will mean increasing the quality of social life of the whole community, and the beneficial effects will be seen in the long term.

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