

CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL TRAINING OF STAFF FROM HIGHER ECONOMIC EDUCATION - DETERMINING FACTOR OF EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS

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Abstract

The changes produced in society and the forecast of their acceleration require the adaptation of educational systems to the new realities, including the training of professional skills. The present research traces continuous professional training, approached as a relevant opportunity for the professional development of teaching staff in higher economic education. For this purpose, a research based on the questionnaire was carried out in order to determine the need and the degree of efficiency of the continuous professional training of teaching staff in higher economic education in the Republic of Moldova and Romania. Our concerns in the article are how teachers in higher economic education are prepared to deal with this continuous process of change and what skills are required, as continuing professional development is essential. The contribution of this paper consists in validating the hypothesis of the importance of continuous professional training of teaching staff in higher economic education and formulating coherent proposals for improving the continuous professional training activity.

Keywords: *continuous professional training; higher economic education; didactic staff, educational success.*

JEL Classification: *I23; I25; M41; M42*

I. INTRODUCTION

Continuous professional training has become a priority of education systems globally. However, vocational training should be examined in the context of permanent education and lifelong education (European Education Area). The role of continuous training in the evolution of the educational system is considered a fundamental one, involving and engaging the responsibility, performances and skills of the teaching staff. Taking into account the changes at the global level, such as the globalization of education (Postan, 2022), innovations in education (Innovation in education), digital education (Digital Education Action Plan: 2021-2027), it is necessary that the activities of continuous professional training of teachers to be as flexible as possible, and teachers as open as possible to new challenges (Dragomir & Alexandrescu, 2017; Cosmulese, 2022). At the same time, the need for continuous professional training is a reality, which comes to personalize and develop skills as close as possible to the requirements of the market and society (Grosu et al., 2023). This action is imposed with a certain intensity and speed, regardless of our subjective desires.

Today, higher education is faced with a series of challenges and changes, which impose certain requirements on university teaching staff. The professional training of the teaching staff can be carried out taking into account the objectives resulting from the strategic higher education development directions in the country, the objectives set by each higher education institution and the development of each teaching staff, stated in close connection with the job description and the institution's objectives education etc (Dragomir et al., 2019). The objectives of the continuous training of teaching staff aim both at the improvement in the field of the educational system interconnected with the systems of society, and at the concrete change at the level of the teaching staff's personality, which takes shape in the acquisition of specific knowledge and behaviors. Therefore, the need for continuous professional training of teaching staff is considered "a way of professional development, but also an obligation" (Tudor et al., 2019; Cosmulese et al., 2019), and depends, to a large extent, on the attitude of the university management towards change and innovative ideas.

The orientation of the present study towards the problem of continuous pre-professional training makes it necessary to discuss not only the problem of training, but especially the problem of teacher training. In this context,

a new framework for the analysis of the training problem is outlined - the specifics of teaching in the current context. The importance and actuality of the research theme derives from the increasing emphasis, at the international level, of the in-depth preparation of specialized knowledge and the acquisition of new professional and digital skills (Dragomir, 2017).

The purpose of this research is to examine the attitude of teachers in higher economic education towards continuous professional training and determine their level of training, as well as their openness to this continuous process of change and what are the benefits that would ensure a high level of quality in education economic. For this purpose, a survey based on the questionnaire was carried out in order to determine the need and the degree of efficiency of the continuous professional training of teaching staff in higher economic education in the Republic of Moldova and Romania. The analysis of specialized literature demonstrates the low level of research in the perimeter of the theme "continuous professional training of teaching staff in higher economic education" at the national and international level.

The contribution of this paper consists in validating the hypothesis of the importance of continuous professional training of teaching staff in higher economic education as a determining factor of success and formulating coherent proposals for improving the continuous professional training activity.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The major transformations imposed on today's society are essentially aimed at the transition to a competitive production, based on knowledge and innovation, ensuring, in this context, the most important competence: the highly qualified human resource. Such a social role that belongs, as a priority, to higher education, involves the support and development of fundamental science research, the production, dissemination and use of new information, their transfer into innovative products for the knowledge economy. The knowledge economy, including the information economy, is one of complexity, integrativeness, reflexivity and interpretation. This new approach to the world allows us to understand the need for a paradigm shift in education as a consequence of social, economic, scientific, cultural and political changes. In this context, continuous professional training is inevitable.

The research demonstrates the existence of little research on continuing professional education and its impact on the quality of higher education.

The continuous training of teaching staff represented and represents "a solution adopted by the education systems after the reforms that took place after the 1960-1970s with the aim of completing and deepening in an organized and efficient framework the initial training" (Schipor, 2003). According to Andrițchi (2015), the continuous professional training of teaching staff must correspond to quality criteria such as: efficiency, effectiveness, relevance, sustainability and impact. Special attention is paid to "the development of the educational resource for the staff of a modern company and the consequent increase of its competitiveness through the intellectual capital audit" (Kopteva et al., 2020). Continuous professional training is ensured by "participation in professional training courses, together with severe documentation about new technologies" (Cristea, 2021). Knowing and implementing new technologies is a long-term effort that reaches equally to the organizational culture of both teachers and students.

The continuing professional training of teachers is carried out in order to develop professional skills, by improving teaching and learning methods, but also to adapt to the requirements of new generations of students. In essence, this involves activities carried out within the educational content for the adjustment/self-regulation of the educational process, along with the training and development of the skills required by the new technologies" (Tăușan, 2012; Kholiavko et al., 2021).

In this context, professional training aims to develop new skills, while professional development aims to improve existing skills, the latter being sometimes seen as a stage in professional training, that of the accumulation of professional knowledge additional to the basic training (Ticu, 2007).

One of the educational priorities in Europe is "to create a new model of a teacher who has an academic education, knows innovative methods, is able to perform functions and tasks efficiently and professionally, adequately, quickly and correctly respond to changes and innovations" (Stratan-Artyshkova et. al., 2022).

Another study (Pogolșa & Afanas, 2017) presents a comparative analysis of continuous professional training both at international level (Austria, Germany, Italy, Spain, Switzerland, France, Belgium, Romania, Slovak Republic, Latvia, Lithuania, Russian Federation, etc.), as well as at the national one (Republic of Moldova), setting up an overview of the general framework of continuous professional training, describing the legislative requirements in the field, the main institutions responsible for continuous professional training and the training offers.

In the opinion of Jinga (1981), a primary problem of the educational system in the field of teacher training is the gap between initial training and continuous training, since only through collaboration and correlation of training programs and continuous training programs could bring the necessary changes in continuous training programs for teaching staff.

In this context, ensuring the professionalism of the teaching staff is based on an integrated system of initial training, but also continuing professional training through the development of professional training programs. Therefore, continuous professional training is necessary to respond to the growing pace of change, as well as the new requirements of the labor market. The results of a study (ANOFM, 2022) suggest the idea that education and training policies should focus on skills development, considering the demand for skills on the domestic labor market. As a result, the continuous professional training in the teaching staff's career can respond to the continuous professional challenges they encounter, if they "possess a certain set of cognitive, interpersonal and intrapersonal skills and competencies such as: communication, critical thinking, collaboration, creativity and spirit innovative" (Cotruța, 2024). At the same time, innovations in education require teachers to develop technical skills and soft skills to succeed in the profession, because success in education based on artificial intelligence (Artificial Intelligence Act) requires both improvement and continuous training. To succeed in a changing labor market, training programs and soft skills development are essential.

In this area of ideas, continuous professional training in the activity of teaching staff aims to create the conditions for the development of their creative potential, in general, and the formation of ethical creativity, in particular. By updating their knowledge and improving their professional training in the field in which they teach, teachers can acquire advanced knowledge and modern methods necessary to carry out their work tasks. They develop their ability to deal with change and complex situations. By aligning with European norms, the European dimension of teaching staff training processes and the quality of continuous training is ensured. Continuing education allows teachers to develop their careers through evolutionary processes, and to improve their personal participation in their own professional development. Continuity is an integral quality and fundamental principle of university training, which is determined by the social and educational requirements for a contemporary teaching staff.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

As mentioned in the introduction, we chose a suitable theoretical-empirical methodology to achieve the proposed research goal. This methodology includes both empirical social statistical research and systematic bibliographic research. It was applied through a questionnaire given to a sample of 80 cadres didactic students from economic higher education institutions in Romania and the Republic of Moldova who participated in continuous professional training programs during the 2022–2023 academic year.

In order to obtain relevant results for research, the international database Web of Science was used, in order to assess the research level of "continuing professional training". Thus, 67 papers were found, of which only 20 papers reveal the continuous professional training of teachers (Figure 1). From the point of view of the type of works, the preponderance of scientific works is in the form of conference papers, namely 13 publications and 7 publications in the form of articles. These results indicate that the researched topic is current and in the early research phase, constituting a trend topic that can be discussed together with other researchers in such scientific research environments.



Figure 1. The scientific productivity of the "continuing professional training" concept

Source: Web of Science

Regarding the content of the scientific papers, the keywords used by the authors indicate the main research direction. The most relevant keywords used by the authors are: teacher education, interprofessional education, academic development, higher education, self-regulated learning.

The paper tries to illustrate the results collected from the opinions of 63 respondents-teachers from the Republic of Moldova and Romania, about the relevance of continuous training programs. In this sense, 15 questions were formulated, with several answer options. The design of the questionnaire and the formulation of the questions aimed at complying with the main objective of the paper regarding the continuous professional training of teaching staff in economic higher education in the Republic of Moldova and Romania in the current context. The questionnaire aimed at measuring the teachers' perceptions of continuous professional training in the field. Through a number of 15 questions with single, multiple and mixed answers, we have formulated reference points regarding the relevance of continuous professional training in the teaching career of higher economic education staff, in order to formulate coherent proposals for improving the continuous professional training activity.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Regarding the online questionnaire, as can be seen in Figure 2, it received 63 responses (28 from Romania and 35 from the Republic of Moldova) from 9 universities (4 from the Republic of Moldova and 5 from Romania).

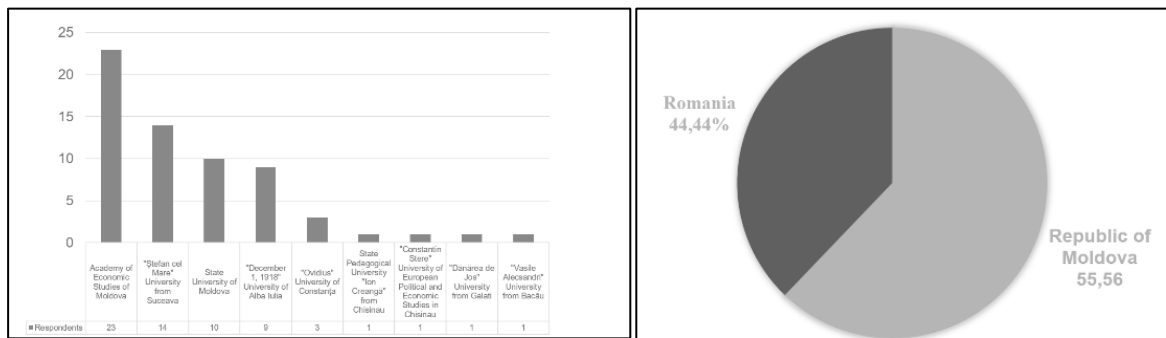


Figure 2. Country of residence and educational institution

Source: developed by the authors

At the level of the empirical data collected in this study, the respondents embrace the hypothesis of the importance of continuous professional training in the teaching career of higher economic education staff in a proportion of 87% (31+24). In the context of assuming the first hypothesis of importance, the following information regarding the teaching career can be extracted. Thus, from the total number of respondents, the most active have a working experience of over 21 years (30), followed by those with a working experience of 11 to 20 years (19). Results can be seen in Figure 3.

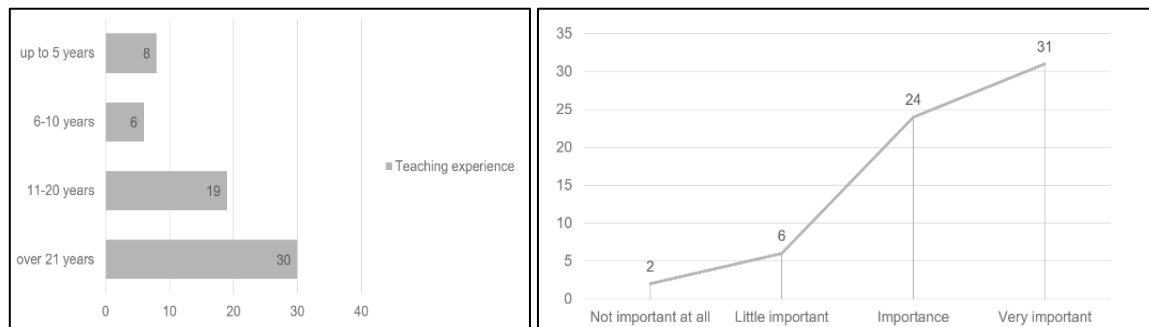


Figure 3. Teaching experience and respondents' opinion

Source: Developed by the authors

Therefore, from the total number of respondents, 10 are university professors, 37 respondents are university lecturers, 2 lecturers and 14 assistants (Figure 4).

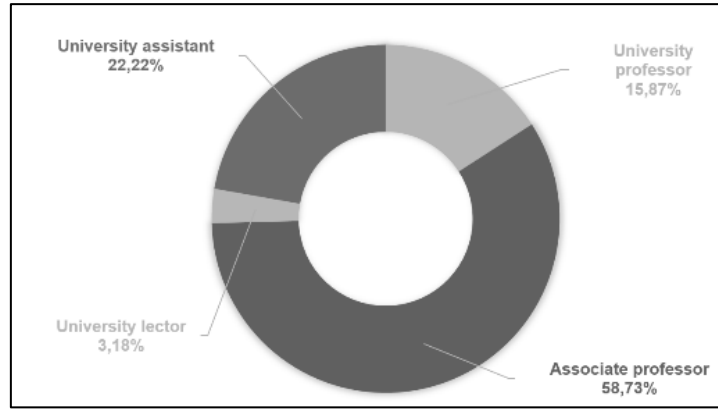


Figure 4. Didactic function

Source: Developed by the authors

Teaching staff consider that the most relevant forms of training, which ensure a high level of training and development of teaching staff in higher education, are: workshops (53.97%), trainings (49.21%) and examples of new practices (49.21%), and the skills pursued within them are diverse: teaching-learning-evaluation (65%), communication and networking (60%), digital (57%), research (43%), etc. (Figure 5).

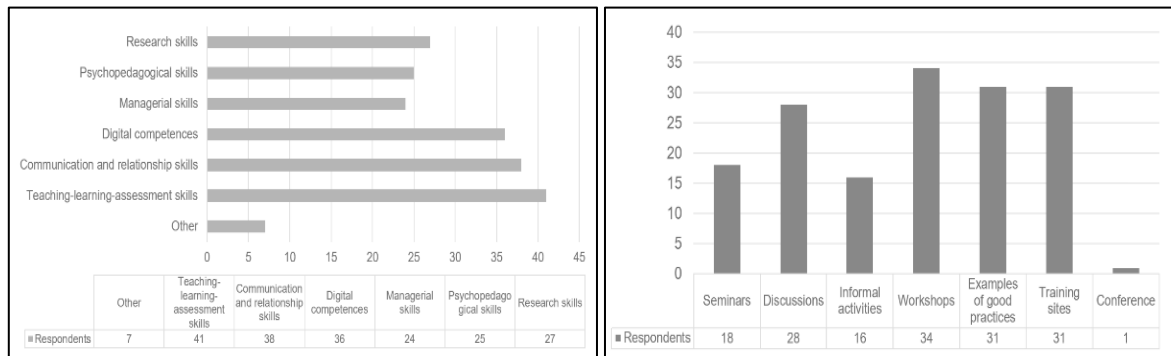


Figure 5. Forms of training and competences targeted

Source: Developed by the authors

The survey results demonstrate that the continuing education training was financed by the institution where the teachers work (46%), from their own account (44%) or free of charge (46%). Regarding the professional training format, the opinions are divided as follows: 39.68% opted for physical presence, 28.57% for online and 31.74% for the hybrid format (Figure 6).

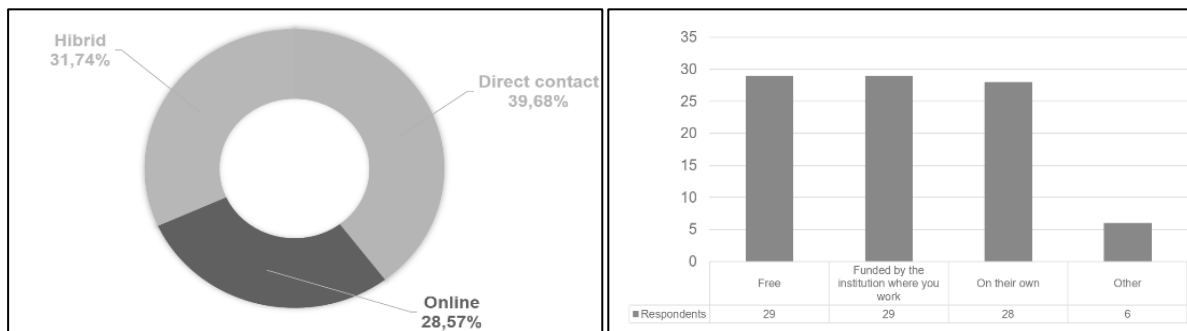


Figure 6. Funding and format of continuing training

Source: Developed by the authors

Teachers are of the opinion that continuous professional training in the teaching career is useful throughout the entire professional life to a great extent (50.79%) and appropriate (30.16%), and the skills acquired are used in the teaching activity in proportion to 51% (see Figure 7).

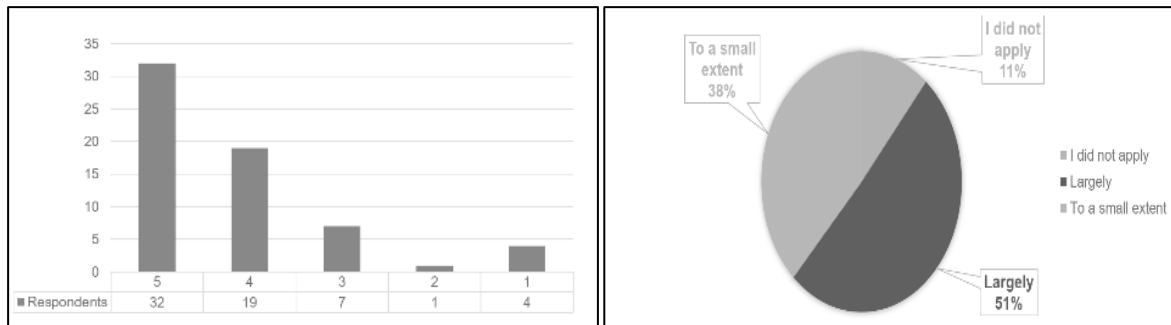


Figure 7. The usefulness of continuing professional training and practical application

Source: Developed by the authors

In the view of the respondents, the goal pursued by participating in the continuous professional training programs was: professional development itself (69.84%), acquiring new knowledge and didactic-scientific skills (58.73%), exchange of professional experience (39.68%) as can be seen in Figure 8.



Figure 8. The usefulness of continuing professional training and practical application

Source: Developed by the authors

Therefore, participation in continuing professional training programs ensures the following benefits: increases the level of professionalism (73.2%), constitutes a didactic support in the exercise of the profession (57.14%), increases the performance indicator (44.44%).

When asked if they participated in continuous training activities in the 2022-2023 academic year, only 38% of respondents said "Yes".

V. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, it is stated that the need for continuous professional training is dictated by the processes of globalization and technology, education based on artificial intelligence, as well as the demands of the labor market. Therefore, the continuous professional training of teaching staff comes to contribute to increasing the adaptability and mobility of the workforce in accordance with the qualification requirements of the universities. In this context, continuous professional training is essential in the teaching career of teaching staff and is a determining factor of educational success. The survey data demonstrate the importance of continuous professional training in the teaching career of higher economic education staff (87%). However, continuous professional training is a way of improvement and a fundamental principle of the development of the teaching staff, which is determined by the social and educational requirements for a contemporary teaching staff.

The current stage of continuous development and evolution requires permanent updating of knowledge and skills, new teaching methods and technologies, updates of curriculum content, and continuous training helps teachers to overcome these developments and update knowledge and skills. Thus, teachers can learn new teaching and assessment strategies, how to manage different types of students and how to create an effective learning environment, summing up a better quality of teaching and learning.

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