

The role of personal development in the professionalization of the teaching career: perceptions of future teachers

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ABSTRACT : Personal development is an essential dimension of the professionalization of the teaching career, being increasingly highlighted in international educational documents and policies, such as LifeComp, UNESCO or OECD TALIS. These emphasize the importance of socio-emotional skills, self-regulation and self-knowledge in ensuring the efficiency of the teaching act and the quality of educational relationships. The present study investigates the perceptions of students enrolled in the psycho-pedagogical training program (DPPD) regarding the role of personal development in teaching activity, as well as the training needs in this area. The research was conducted on a sample of 422 participants and used a structured questionnaire, which assessed several dimensions: beliefs regarding the role of personal development, training needs, and anticipatory usefulness of a dedicated discipline and self-assessment of personal resources.

The results highlight a high level of consensus among participants on the importance of personal development for the efficiency of teaching activity, as well as the existence of significant training needs in the field of socio-emotional skills. At the same time, a discrepancy is noted between the perceived level of importance of these skills and the self-assessment of the ability to manage them. The study supports the need for the systematic integration of personal development into the initial training of teachers and highlights the relevance of introducing dedicated curricular approaches, such as the discipline "Management of personal development in an educational context".

KEY WORDS : personal development; teacher training; socio-emotional skills; self-regulation; future teachers

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Introduction

The personal development of teachers has become, in recent decades, a major area of interest in educational research, amid the increasing emphasis on the socio-emotional dimensions of the teaching-learning process. While traditionally teacher training has focused predominantly on cognitive and methodological skills, current trends highlight the need to integrate personal and relational skills into the professional profile of teachers (European Commission, 2020). International educational policy documents support this direction. The European LifeComp framework defines personal, social and learning-to-learn skills as essential for adapting to constantly changing educational and professional contexts (European Commission, 2020). Similarly, reports prepared by UNESCO and OECD emphasize the importance of socio-emotional skills, self-regulation and reflective capacity in the professional development of teachers and in creating a positive educational climate (OECD, 2019; UNESCO, 2021).

Personal development is a concept that designates a psychological reality and a field of psychological knowledge and intervention that has experienced remarkable evolution in recent decades, establishing itself as a permanent social and educational policy, which educational forums implement through specific projects to promote professional and social success and that of young people (Mitrofan and Nuță, 2011). Without having a singular, unanimously accepted definition, personal development designates a psychic dynamic that includes the idea of growth, becoming, empowerment, training.

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Two major forces in psychology in the 20th century founded the concept of personal development: humanistic psychology through C.G. Jung (precursor), C.R. Rogers, A.B. Maslow, V. Pavelcu, I. Holban, N. Mărgineanu and transpersonal psychology through S. Grof, R. Assagioli, J. Lili, I. Mânzat. As summarized by Caluschi (2015), personal development is a complex process called individuation by Jung or the process of becoming the self, in the understanding of Mânzat (2000), or the process of self-

fulfillment in the conception of Fromm, Erikson, Assagioli, etc.

Mitrofan (2008) states that the goal of personal development is: harmonization and unification of the Self, optimization and creative self-transformation, psycho-spiritual maturation of the person in his evolutionary dynamics. The indicators of its achievement are: expanded self-awareness, enhancement of one's own evolutionary capacities, resizing, integration and responsible and efficient redirection of one's own life scenario and of relational and collective evolutionary dynamics. Two more forces affirmed in psychology in the 20th century substantiated the conception of personal development: humanistic psychology through C.G. Jung (precursor), C.R. Rogers, Ab. Maslow, V. Pavelcu, I. Holban, N. Mărgineanu and transpersonal psychology through S. Grof, R. Assagioli, J. Lili, I. Mânzat. As Caluschi (2015) summarizes, personal development is a complex process called individuation by Jung or the process of becoming the self, in the understanding of Mânzat (2000), or the process of self-fulfillment in the conception of Fromm, Erikson, Assagioli, etc.

Personal development is accompanied by the management of the internal psychological meanings of this phenomenon for each individual, but, in general, it involves the acquisition of psychological properties and qualities, in a dynamic, creative and integrative process, which leads to self-regulation and personal restructuring (Pylypenko et al, 2022). Personal self-development is a conscious, autonomous approach, an activity that is oriented in the positive direction, suitable for the person, generating personal growth and self-efficacy. The teacher and psychologist who initiate personal development come to support the process of evolution of the human personality, focusing on the creation, maintenance and cultivation of healthy relational patterns with oneself, with others and with the world.

The personal development process can generate the following changes: the individual becomes less defensive, more realistic, socially mature, with positive self-esteem and creative behavior, capable of more efficient resolution of internal and interpersonal problems. In view of these acquisitions, motivation for positive change, self-expression through feeling and understanding of problems, development of congruence, self-disclosure and self-acceptance, openness to oneself and to the world are acted upon (Rogers, 2014). The feeling of self-efficacy and positive beliefs about oneself will direct people towards activating their own abilities necessary to achieve objectives and accomplish the proposed tasks. Self-efficacy (Cazacu and Boteanu, 2016) influences the creation of positive scenarios about the performance of activities, causal attributions – people with a high level of self-efficacy attribute failures to reduced efforts, while people with low self-efficacy claim that their failures are due to a lack of skills; Those who believe they are in control in threatening situations do not have thoughts that could disrupt their activities too much, while those who believe they are unable to control stressful situations are characterized by an increased level of anxiety, perceiving many aspects of the

environment as threatening and dangerous. The higher the level of self-efficacy, the greater the number of possible career orientation directions.

Sometimes defined as self-development, personal development refers to the study and practice of improving one's own life, career, education, relationships, health, productivity and spirituality, through one's own effort (Lozano et al, 2021). It is about the permanent effort of each person to become better, to surpass oneself, to improve oneself more and more. It is a continuous process of self-improvement, which lasts a lifetime. Thus, among the most general areas of personal development we can list: time management; setting goals; identifying values and beliefs; changing habits; motivation; improving self-knowledge; developing talents, etc. It is important to remember that this concept of personal development is not limited only to the individual level, but also includes activities for the development of others, as a teacher, guide, counselor, manager, coach or mentor. The goal of personal development programs is to increase the quality of life by optimizing different personal aspects. The following are aimed at: increasing the level of self-knowledge; crystallization of self-identity; development of one's own potential and skills; fulfillment of personal aspirations; optimization of social and professional integration; definition of values, priorities and lifestyle; acquisition of a broader vision of life, etc.

The means, techniques, methods used in personal development programs are of different types, taken from various orientations, bringing together both psychophysical and cognitive or behavioral techniques. Personal development programs are addressed to all people who want to optimize the quality of their personal life or are unfulfilled/dissatisfied with themselves or with a series of aspects of their own existence. In personal development programs, the relationship established between the psychologist and his client – individual or group – is one of collaboration, the psychologist playing the role of educator, facilitator, coach.

The literature highlights that the effectiveness of teaching is significantly influenced by factors such as self-awareness, emotion management, and the quality of interpersonal relationships. Models of emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995; Mayer et al., 2008) show that the skills of identifying and regulating emotions contribute to decision-making, conflict management, and building functional educational relationships. Self-determination theory also emphasizes the role of fundamental psychological needs – autonomy, competence, and relatedness – in motivating and engaging in professional activity (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

In an educational context, these dimensions are reflected in the teacher's ability to manage complex situations, to respond appropriately to student diversity and to support their socio-emotional development. Research shows that teachers who demonstrate a high level of socio-emotional competence contribute to increasing student engagement, reducing problem behaviours and improving academic performance (Jennings &

Greenberg, 2009). Understanding educators' emotional schemas is necessary to adequately understand and address educators' social and emotional competence development, psychological well-being and emotion socialization style with the aim of promoting student social and emotional competence (Jenning et al, 2024). However, the systematic integration of personal development into initial teacher training remains limited in many training programmes. Although the importance of these competences is recognised at a theoretical and normative level, there is a gap between the requirements of the professional profile of the teaching staff and the contents actually included in psycho-pedagogical training curricula. This discrepancy is often reflected in the level of preparation of future teachers in terms of managing emotions, communication, and self-reflection.

Based on these considerations, the present study aims to investigate the perceptions of students in the psychopedagogical training program (DPPD) on the role of personal development in teaching activity, as well as the training needs in this area. The research also aims to highlight how participants evaluate their own personal resources and to identify possible discrepancies between the importance attributed to personal development and the perceived level of individual competences. In this context, the study is guided by the following research questions: *To what extent do students in the psychopedagogical training program perceive personal development as relevant for teaching activity?; What are the training needs of students in the field of personal development and socio-emotional competences?; To what extent are there discrepancies between the importance attributed to personal development and the self-assessment of individual competences?*

The results obtained are relevant for the substantiation of some curricular development directions in the initial teacher training, including for the integration of subjects dedicated to personal development in the educational context.

Methodology

Participants

The study was conducted on a sample of 422 participants enrolled in the psychopedagogical training program (DPPD), coming from higher education institutions with different profiles (social sciences, exact sciences and technical). The sample included both students at different stages of initial training and students involved in postgraduate training programs (110 bachelor's, 148 master's, 164 postgraduate). Of these, 320 have definitely opted for a teaching career, 10 do not want a teaching career, but value their skills at work, and 92 cannot be sure. The participants come from various fields of undergraduate studies, which reflects the diversity of professional profiles specific to psychopedagogical training programs. This diversity allows for a relevant perspective on perceptions of personal development in relation to the teaching role. The results obtained

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Instruments

Data were collected through a structured questionnaire, developed for the purpose of this study, aiming to explore participants' perceptions of the role of personal development in teaching, as well as to identify training needs in this area.

The instrument included 24 items formulated as statements regarding different dimensions of personal development in an educational context, to which participants responded using a five-point Likert scale (1 = total disagreement; 5 = total agreement). The items were organized around six conceptual dimensions: *beliefs regarding the role of teacher personal development, training needs, anticipatory usefulness of a dedicated subject, self-assessment of personal resources, the teacher's role in student development, and the integration of personal development into the teaching role.*

To control the consistency of the responses, the questionnaire included both positively formulated items and inversely formulated items. The content validity of the instrument was ensured by referring to the specialized literature and relevant conceptual frameworks in the field of personal development and teacher training, the items being formulated in accordance with the theoretical dimensions analyzed.

Data collection was carried out online, by distributing the questionnaire to participants enrolled in the psychopedagogical training program. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed about the purpose of the research and the use of the data exclusively for academic purposes. The questionnaire was completed individually, without any time limit, and the responses were recorded anonymously. The collected data were exported and analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques. For each item and for each investigated dimension, mean values were calculated, in order to highlight the general trends of the responses and the level of agreement of the participants.

Ethical considerations

Participation in the study was voluntary and anonymous, with no data collected that would allow the identification of participants. Respondents were informed about the purpose of the research and the use of data exclusively for scientific purposes. By completing the questionnaire, participants expressed their informed consent to participate in the study. The research was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles of educational research and with the regulations on the protection of personal data.

Results

Data analysis revealed a high level of consensus among participants regarding the importance of personal development in teaching. The mean values obtained for most items are in the upper range of the scale, suggesting strong agreement with the statements regarding the role of personal and socio-emotional competencies in the teaching profession.

Beliefs regarding the role of personal development: data show that participants attribute an essential role to inner balance, emotional self-regulation and stress management in ensuring the efficiency of teaching activity.

Table 1 *Beliefs regarding the role of personal development*

Item	M
Inner balance influences the quality of the educational act.	4.46
Emotional self-regulation is essential for teaching activity.	4.63
Stress management influences the educational climate.	4.58
Personal development has little influence (reversed item).	2.24

The values indicate high agreement; the reversed item confirms the consistency of the responses.

Training needs in personal development: participants express a high level of agreement regarding the need to integrate personal development into psychopedagogical training programs.

Table 2 *Perceived training needs*

Item	M
Self-knowledge should be deepened	4.48
Stress management strategies	4.58
Developing socio-emotional skills	4.41
Curriculum integration	4.16

Anticipatory usefulness of a dedicated subject: the results indicate a positive perception of the usefulness of introducing a subject dedicated to personal development in teacher training.

Table 3 *Perceived usefulness of a personal development course*

Item	M
Useful for teaching preparation	4.32
Developing socio-emotional skills	4.32
Educational relations	4.38
Managing difficult situations	4.40

Self-assessment of personal resources: compared to the other dimensions, self-assessment of personal resources records slightly lower values, especially regarding managing emotions in tense situations.

Table 4 *Self-assessment of personal resources*

Item	M
Self-knowledge	4.12
Managing emotions	3.88
Personal reflection	4.31
Emotional control difficulties (reversed item)	2.69

The role of the teacher in student development: in the responses provided, there was a very high level of agreement regarding the teacher's responsibility in supporting the personal development of students.

Table 5 *Teacher's role in students' personal development*

Item	M
Support for self-knowledge	4.55
Socio-emotional skills	4.54
Organizing activities	4.50
Influence on motivation	4.62

Integrating personal development into the teaching role: the results confirm the perception of personal development as an integral part of the professional role of the teacher.

Table 6 *Integration of personal development in teaching role*

Item	M
Continuous development	4.45
Self-knowledge and educational relationship	4.41
Managing emotions	4.55
Efficiency of the teaching process	4.59

To summarize, the results highlight three main directions: a) participants attribute high importance to personal development in teaching; b) there are significant training needs in the field of socio-emotional skills; c) a discrepancy is observed between the perceived level of importance of these skills and the self-assessment of their ability to manage them.

Discussion

The results of the study highlight a high level of consensus among participants regarding the importance of personal development in the exercise of the teaching role. The high mean values recorded for the dimensions related to *emotional self-regulation, stress management and educational relationships* confirm that *future teachers* recognize the essential role of socio-emotional skills in the effectiveness of teaching activity. These results are in line with the specialized literature, which emphasizes that the personal skills of the teacher influence both the educational climate and the performance of students (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). The high level of training needs scores also indicates that participants not only recognize the importance of personal development, but also perceive gaps in their own training. This finding is relevant in the context where initial teacher education programs continue to place greater emphasis on cognitive and methodological competences, to the detriment of intra- and interpersonal dimensions. In this sense, the results support the need for an integrated approach to professional development, in line with recommendations formulated at European and international level (*European Commission, 2020; OECD, 2019*).

A particularly relevant result of the study is the discrepancy identified between the high level of importance attributed to personal development and the lower level of self-assessment of personal skills, especially in terms of managing emotions in stressful situations. This difference suggests the existence of a gap between the cognitive (awareness of importance) and practical (ability to apply) dimensions, an aspect also reported in other research in the field of teacher education. From the perspective of self-determination theory, this discrepancy may reflect an insufficiently satisfied need for competence, which may influence the level of confidence and perceived effectiveness in the professional role (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

At the same time, the results regarding the anticipatory usefulness of a subject dedicated to personal development highlight the openness of the participants towards the introduction of such contents in the psycho-pedagogical training curriculum. The high values associated with this dimension indicate that such a subject is perceived as relevant both for the development of socio-emotional skills and for the management of complex educational situations.

From this perspective, the introduction of the subject "*Management of personal*

development in an educational context" in the compulsory curriculum may represent an adequate response to the identified needs. Its structure, focused on self-knowledge, reflection and application in real educational situations, allows not only the development of individual skills, but also their transfer into practice. In addition, the approach based on reflection and experiential learning is consistent with contemporary models of teacher training, which value the development of professional identity and reflective skills.

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The results of the study have relevant implications for the curricular design in the field of initial teacher training. The systematic integration of personal development into training programs can contribute to the formation of more adaptable teachers, more aware of their own resources and better able to manage the complexity of the educational environment.

A possible limitation of the study is the self-reported nature of the data, which may influence the accuracy of the participants' assessments. Also, the analysis was conducted at a descriptive level, without exploring the relationships between variables. Future research may include in-depth analyses and comparative designs.

Conclusions

The study highlights the central role of personal development in the professionalization of the teaching career and confirms the existence of significant training needs in this area. The results indicate a high level of awareness of the importance of socio-emotional skills, but also the existence of a gap between this awareness and the perceived level of individual skills. These findings support the need to integrate personal development into the initial training of teachers, by introducing dedicated curricular approaches. In this sense, the discipline "*Management of personal development in an educational context*" can represent a relevant tool for developing the skills necessary for the effective exercise of the teaching role. The results of the study provide empirical support for rethinking the contents of initial teacher training, towards a more balanced approach between the cognitive and socio-emotional dimensions of teaching professionalization.

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