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Primary school education in Romania. Primary school system and training of primary school teachers

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ROMANIA

Robert Pfützner and Liana Regina Iunesch

Primary School Education in Romania: Primary School System and Training of Primary School Teachers

Abstract

The article delineates and critically analyses the organisational framework of the Romanian primary education system and the training of primary school teachers. It provides a comprehensive overview of the contemporary state of primary schools and teacher training, while also presenting their historical background and development. This serves to contextualize the current structures and challenges, facilitating a nuanced understanding of the educational landscape. Notably, the article emphasizes the inclusion of linguistic minorities and the post-communist social formation within which the education system operates, highlighting their significance as distinctive characteristics in Europe. The article concludes with an outline of the structural reforms currently being implemented in the education system and primary school teacher training.

Keywords: Romania, Primary School, Teacher Training, Curriculum, Education System

1 Introduction

In the international discourse on primary school education, Romania's primary school system has received only limited attention. Contemporary empirical and historical studies of Romania's educational landscape have remained largely unrecognised, with notable exceptions primarily in the context of OECD policies and EU accession-related research. However, even these studies often adopt only a general approach, focusing on the educational system as a whole rather than addressing the specific characteristics and challenges

of Romanian primary education. The lack of research on primary schools in Romania is stark when compared to the well-established research traditions on the topic in other European countries like France, Great Britain and Italy. For this reason, this article will refer mainly to primary sources, and only on occasion to research literature, where it is available.

The Romanian education system is facing considerable challenges at present, as evidenced by the results of the latest PISA studies (OECD, 2024). Nevertheless, there are distinctive structural features in Romania's education system that warrant closer scrutiny, both in terms of their singularity within the European context and their historical evolution. This article will explore the aspects of the Romanian system that remain unaddressed by prior research, with a particular focus on primary education. While the first part contains a comprehensive examination of the legal, organisational and statistical features of the Romanian primary school system, the second part will deal with the training of primary school teachers, which is currently undergoing a far-reaching reform. Our intention is that these analyses will contribute to a more nuanced understanding of Romanian primary education and its place within the broader context of educational debates in Europe.

2 Primary School Education

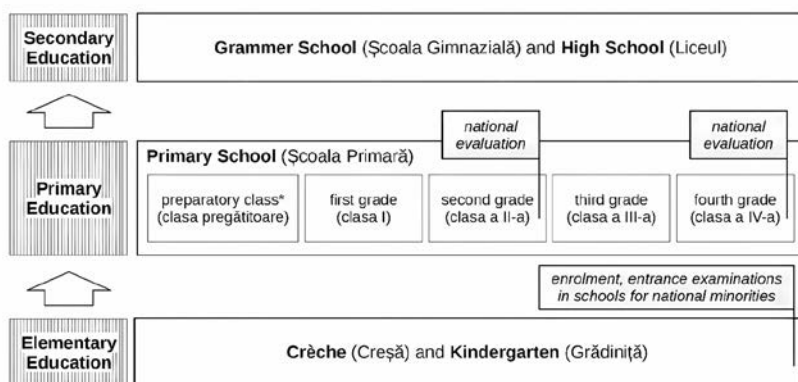
2.1 Primary School Education in the Context of the Romanian Educational System

The Romanian education system is characterised by a high degree of centralisation, with all educational institutions operating under the jurisdiction of the National Ministry of Education in Bucharest. This centralisation is reflected in the school curricula, which are uniform throughout the country. Key decisions are made, and educational policy is formulated, at the national level, with subsequent implementation at both district (Romanian: *judet*) and local levels. Despite the lack of regional autonomy in education, the 18 constitutionally recognised minority groups¹ are entitled to receive instruction in their native languages, from kindergarten through to university, within the framework of nationally uniform requirements (Constituția României 2003, Art. 6; 32(3)). These requirements were codified in the Law on National Education (Legea educației naționale no. 1/2011) from 2011, until it was replaced by two new laws covering pre-university and university education in 2023 (Legea

1 These are Armenians, Bulgarians, Czechs, Croats, Jews, Germans, Greeks, Italians, Macedonians, Hungarians, Poles, Roma, Ruso-Lipovans, Slovaks, Serbs, Turks, Tatars, and Ukrainians.

învăţământului preuniversitar no. 198/2023 and Legea învăţământului universitar no. 199/2023). At the time of writing (summer 2025), several specific provisions for implementing the 2023 laws are still under development. As a result, the education system is currently in an interim phase, in which provisions from both the 2011 and 2023 laws are in effect.

The Romanian education system encompasses a variety of institutions, including the public, private, and confessional, which are accessible to children from the age of one. The basic structure of the pre-university education system can be seen in figure 1. Early childhood education (*educaţie timpurie*) includes nurseries (*creşă*) for children aged one to three years old and kindergartens (*grădiniţă*) for children aged three to six years old. Subsequently, children receive a compulsory primary education (*învăţământul primar/şcoala primară*) from the age of six or seven onwards. This is comprised of a preparatory class and grades 1 through to 4. Then, all children progress to middle school (*învăţământul gimnazial/şcoala gimnazială*) from grade 5 onwards, and from grade 8 to high school (*învăţământul liceal/liceu*). Upon completion of grade 12, students who pass the national Baccalaureate examination (*bacalaureat*) are eligible to pursue university studies or enter full-time or dual vocational training programmes.



* until 2012 optional and part of kindergarten, since then compulsory and located at primary schools

Figure 1: Primary Education in the Romanian School System (own illustration)

2.2 Historical Aspects

2.2.1 The Foundation of Primary Education in Romania

The modern state of Romania was built after the First World War, when Transylvania, which had previously been part of Hungary, became incorporated within the Kingdom of Romania. This state was formed in 1861 from the previously autonomous Romanian principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia. Until 1829, the school system in both principalities had developed under ecclesiastical sovereignty and was largely dependent on the princes' endowments. In 1829, the *Regulamentul Organic* determined that schools were secular and thus under state control. Compulsory education was introduced in Moldavia in 1850. A short time later, state councils were established in both principalities to control the school system. From the mid-19th century, the Romanian education system expanded, especially after the unification of the principalities in 1861 under the rule of Alexandru Ioan Cuza (the first law on primary education was declared in 1864) and the proclamation of the Kingdom of Romania in 1881 (Murgescu, 1999).

In Transylvania, which until 1919 was part of the Kingdom of Hungary, the developmental patterns were different. The introduction of compulsory education in 1868 resulted in a significant expansion of both Hungarian and Romanian primary schools. This had a less pronounced effect on the Transylvanian Saxons in the region, since they already had an established school system.² At least 80 % of Saxon children were enrolled in this system around 1869, in comparison to less than 50 % of Hungarian children and only between 28 and 33 % of Romanian children (Köpeczi, 1989, p. 584-585).

After the First World War, Transylvania was united with the Kingdom of Romania. Since then, a unified political system has prevailed in the three historical regions of Wallachia, Moldavia, and Transylvania. The first all-Romanian constitution of 1923 established compulsory and free education for seven years (Constituția României, 1923, Art. 24).

The interwar period was characterised by intense debates concerning the standardisation of the school system (Mitru, 2021), which frequently encountered resistance, particularly from the largest minority groups, namely the Hungarians and the German-speaking minority in the country. Although there were political fluctuations, the policy of this period can be summarised by the motto of the Minister of Education, Constantin I. Angelescu: "*Școală cât mai multă! Școală cât mai bună! Școală cât mai românească!*" – "More schools! Better schools! More Romanian schools!" (Mănescu, 2022).

2 There is a large body of research literature on the education system of the Transylvanian Saxons (for an overview, see König, 2005, and; Weber, 2022).

After the Second World War, however, the process of nationalising the education system was temporarily halted by the Sovietisation of Romania and its school system.

2.2.2 Development under Communist Dictatorship

The establishment of the initially Soviet-oriented and then national communist dictatorship in Romania constituted a pivotal moment in the country's history and exerted a profound influence on the primary education system. Even prior to this, primary schools had been influenced by authoritarian principles under both the royal dictatorship (1938-1940) and the pro-fascist military regime of Marshal Antonescu (1940-1944). It was, therefore, to be anticipated that the continuation of authoritarian structures in schools, albeit framed by a new – Soviet – ideological agenda, would occur.

In the post-war period, the Romanian education system underwent a process of Sovietisation, which resulted in the reduction of compulsory schooling to a mere four years. This effectively limited mandatory education to the primary level. The introduction of Russian as a required subject served further to underscore an alignment with the Soviet ideological framework (Marin, 2018, p. 16). This phase persisted until the implementation of the 1964 educational reform, which reoriented the system towards a distinctly Romanian nationalism. Over time, the duration of compulsory education was extended to ten years, reflecting the state's broader national objectives and placing a stronger emphasis on Romanian cultural identity within the educational framework. This aim is clearly articulated in the Law on Education and Schooling of 1978 (*Legea educației și învățământului* no. 28/1978), which emphasises the role of education in promoting socialist ideals and national unity:

„Education at all levels has the duty to ensure, alongside thorough professional, scientific, and cultural training for all young people, their communist, revolutionary education, forming them as new people, fully developed, conscious and devoted builders of socialism and communism. Each educational unit must be a strong centre for the socialist and communist education of children and young people.” (*Legea educației și învățământului* no. 28/1978, Art. 155)³

Along with schools, state education was organised in children's and youth organisations, of which even primary school pupils were obliged to become members. For children aged between four and seven, these were the Falcons of the Fatherland (*Șoimii Patriei*), and from the age of eight, the Pioneer Organisation (*Organizația Pionierilor*). The educational objectives, including the personality cult of the communist leader and his wife, were clearly defined even in the case of Falcons, as we see in the following document:

3 All translations from Romanian in this article are by the authors, unless otherwise indicated.

„Knowing the PCR [Romanian Communist Party] flag, recognizing the portraits of comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu and comrade Elena Ceaușescu, informing children about the high positions they hold in the party and state, presenting significant aspects of their childhood and adolescence, key moments from their revolutionary activity in the past and recent decades, emphasising the decisive role of comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu and comrade Elena Ceaușescu in ensuring all conditions for the growth and education of children, as well as for the socio-economic development of our homeland.” (Boda, 2015, p. 144)

A distinctive feature of the communist education system in Romania was the provision of bilingual instruction for national minorities, defined as co-resident nationalities with the right to use their languages in culture and school.⁴

2.2.3 Developments and Reforms after 1989

Two main developments were observed in the period following 1989. Firstly, there was a notable decline in the number of pupils. Secondly, there were numerous attempts to reform the education system. Diagram 1 shows the serious decline in pupil numbers in primary education since the 1990s. This is due to both the high migration of people from Romania to other countries⁵ and the associated drop in the birth rate (INS, 2023).

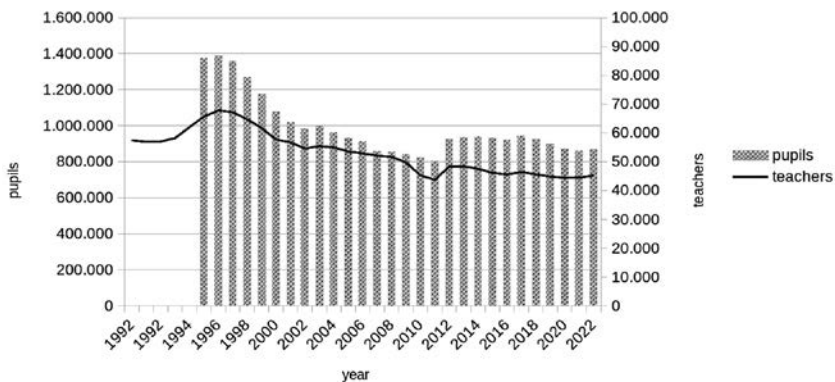


Figure 2: Pupils and Teachers in Primary Schools (Data Source: INS, 2024)

The collapse of communism in Romania gave rise to a renewed sense of optimism and drive for reforms within the education system in the 1990s. One of

⁴ An instructive discussion on this can be found in Rudolf, 2024.

⁵ This is also connected to educational issues that concern primary schools, as a considerable number of children are being brought up in the country without their parents (INS, 2018).

the primary objectives of the reform initiatives, which has been consistently articulated at the political level but is still yet to be effectively implemented, was the decentralisation and diversification of the Romanian education system.

The initial legislation of the post-communist period signalled a notable shift in the direction of education policy:

„(1) Education seeks to achieve the educational ideal, based on humanistic traditions, the values of democracy, and the aspirations of Romanian society, and contributes to the preservation of national identity.

(2) The educational ideal of the Romanian school consists in the free, integral, and harmonious development of human individuality, in the formation of an autonomous and creative personality.” (Legea învățământului no. 84/1995, Art. 3)

The desire for reform was exemplified by the National Institute for Educational Sciences (*Institutul de Științe ale Educației*) in the early 1990s. This institute was commissioned by the ministry to investigate pedagogical concepts that had been established beyond the Iron Curtain and to ascertain their applicability in the Romanian context (Herseni, 1992). These research and transfer activities resulted in the cautious introduction into primary schools of pedagogical concepts such as Montessori, Waldorf, and Jenaplan education, as well as the establishment of the step-by-step concept (Cuciureanu, 2011; Petrescu & Răfăla, 2019).

Following Romania’s accession to the European Union in 2007, further reform processes were initiated. Overall, it can be observed that attempts to reform the Romanian education system have, thus far, largely failed to meet the expectations of the 1990s. This is due not least to the frequent changes of education minister, with each incumbent attempting to implement a new approach to reform, which the subsequent minister would then block (Cuciureanu & Pfützner, 2024, p. 462).

2.3 Curricula and Legislation

2.3.1 Legislation

The current legal basis for the organisation of primary schools in Romania is the Law on Pre-university Education (*Legea învățământului preuniversitar no. 198/2023*) adopted in September 2023. This was the result of a long political and legislative process, the ‘Educated Romania’ reform project (*România Educată*) initiated by the State President, Klaus Iohannis, in 2016. To date (as of 2025), as stated earlier, not all of the provisions of this law have been enacted. Education, therefore, is still partly characterised by the regulations stipulated in the Law of National Education of 2011 (*Legea educației naționale no. 1/2011*).

The fundamental principles are based on the provision of free primary education in all state schools. Furthermore, the legislation permits the operation of private and church-run educational institutions, which are evaluated and accredited by the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-university Education (ARACIP, *Agenția Română de Asigurare a Calității în Învățământul Preuniversitar*). Private and church-run educational establishments are permitted to charge tuition fees, but if they are accredited, they also receive partial state funding.

In accordance with the 2011 legislation, the financing of education, at all levels of the system, should be sourced from state funds amounting to 6 % of GDP. The revised legislation of 2023 proposes an increase in this figure to 15 % (Legea învățământului preuniversitar no 198/2023, Art. 134). Nevertheless, the actual funding has consistently fallen far below the prescribed level (Ministerul Educației, 2023a). In 2024, it comprised only 2.7 % of GDP (OECD, 2023, p. 5). In accordance with the legal regulations, the minimum pupil-teacher ratio for primary schools is 12:1, with a maximum of 25:1. The Ministry of Education may grant exceptions in cases of special circumstances.

The provisions for implementing the statutory regulations are typically issued by way of ministerial decree (*Ordin de Ministru*), government decree (*Hotărârea Guvernului*), or emergency decree (*Ordonanță de urgență*). The National Centre for Policy and Evaluation in Education (CNPEE, *Centrul Național de Politici și Evaluare în Educație*) plays a pivotal role in devising the operational framework for schools. In this institution, the political and legal requirements are implemented in a professional manner, as exemplified by the development of curricula, the examination of textbooks, and the production of guidelines for evaluations both for individual schools and at the national level.

2.3.2 Curricula, Textbooks, and Evaluations

In keeping with Romania's centralised political structure, decisions on curricula are made in Bucharest. The curricula are developed by the CNPEE with the involvement of relevant stakeholders. They are then issued by the Ministry of Education as a ministerial decree and appear in the official law gazette (*Monitorul oficial*).⁶ The curriculum for primary schools comprises 19 to 21 hours of teaching, and between nine (preparatory class and 1st class) and twelve subjects (4th class). The exact structure can be found in table 1. In addition to this timetable, one hour per week can be added by the individual school as a supplemental educational offer (OMEN 3371). For schools in the minority languages, there is a slightly modified curriculum in which less Romanian is taught, but additional

6 An overview of all primary school curricula can be found at https://rocnee.eu/images/rocnee/fisiere/programe_scolare/Inv%20primar/Inv_primar_special_OME%203702_2021.pdf

lessons are given in the mother tongue. As a result, children at schools in the minority languages have 3 to 4 hours of extra lessons per week.

Table 1: Teaching Hours Per Week According to the National Curriculum for Primary Schools

Subject / grade	Preparatory class	Class 1	Class 2	Class 3	Class 4
Romanian language and literature	5	7	6	5	5
Modern language	1	1	1	2	2
Mathematics	3	3	4	4	4
Science	1	1	1	1	1
History	-	-	-	-	1
Geography	-	-	-	-	1
Civic education	-	-	-	1	1
Religion	1	1	1	1	1
Sport	2	2	2	2	2
Play and movement	-	-	-	1	1
Music and movement	2	2	2	1	1
Visual arts and practical abilities	2	2	2	2	1
Personal development	2	1	1	-	-
Σ	19	20	20	20	21

The CNPEE is also tasked with licensing the textbooks utilized in primary schools. Such materials must be created in accordance with the specifications set forth in the curriculum. Despite the existence of multiple publishing houses, the textbooks exhibit only minor discrepancies from one another, largely due to the rigorous content requirements. The CNPEE publishes an annual list of textbooks that have been approved for use in the classroom.⁷ These are provided to students by primary schools free of charge, either on loan for the duration of the academic year or as their own copy. Teachers are not allowed to use textbooks that have not been approved by the CNPEE. However, the minorities are allowed to develop their own textbooks for mother-tongue classes and for the lessons in music and movement (which must also be ap-

⁷ A list of books can be found at https://rocnee.eu/images/rocnee/fisiere/manuale/2024-2025/14.10.2024_Catalog_manuale_scolare_invatamant_preuniversitar_2024_2025_clasele_I-VIII.pdf

proved by the CNPEE); for the other subjects, they use translations that have been state funded and accredited for Romanian schools.⁸

Two levels of evaluation and performance assessment are conducted in primary schools. Teachers are required to monitor pupils' academic progress throughout the school year using a range of assessments. Teachers are also required to provide additional educational support where necessary. Conversely, national comparative tests are set in the second and fourth class, which are to be implemented in all schools. The CNPEE is responsible for the development of these comparative tests.

The subjects of the national comparative tests are Romanian and Mathematics. Pupils at schools where a minority language is taught are evaluated in their mother tongue. In accordance with the provisions of the new law (*Legea învățământului preuniversitar no. 198/2023*, Art. 69(1)), regulations for standardised competence-oriented evaluations, at the end of the preparatory class and the end of the first class, were issued by ministerial decree in September 2024 (OME 6583). The structure of the evaluations is based on those of the pre-school sector (Ministerul Educației, 2019) and covers the areas of physical development, socio-emotional development, cognition, language and communication, and learning skills and attitudes. These evaluations are to be implemented for the first time at the end of the 2024/25 school year (*Legea învățământului preuniversitar no. 198/2023*, Art. 248(9)) and are intended to

„identify possible learning difficulties and take the necessary remedial action to assess the individual potential of each student, so they can successfully meet the requirements of the school type” (OMEN 6583, p. 7).

To do this, 48 competency-based subcategories will be tested and evaluated. The results are to be treated confidentially and shared with the parents. No grades are to be given; rather, just three strengths of the child are to be identified, along with three areas in which they still need support. The extent to which this new pedagogical diagnostic tool will improve children's learning at school is a question for future research.

From class 2 onwards, grades are also given for tests and exams as well as at the end of the school year. These range across four levels: very good (*foarte bine*), good (*bine*), satisfactory (*suficient*), and unsatisfactory (*insuficient*).

2.4 Teachers

As in other primary education systems in Europe, female teachers dominate the profession in Romania. They make up 93.2 % of primary school teachers (Ministerul Educației, 2023b, p. 45). The proportion is very high in the edu-

⁸ Minority schools will be examined in more detail in 2.5.1.

cation system, even higher at the elementary level (*grădinița*), and decreases successively in the higher education sector.

The teaching profession is perceived as unattractively low-paid and undervalued, particularly in comparison to the period preceding 1989. Despite the notable increase in salaries following the major nationwide strike in the summer of 2023 (Negreanu, 2023), these remain uncompetitive in relation to other sectors with similar qualifications and responsibilities.

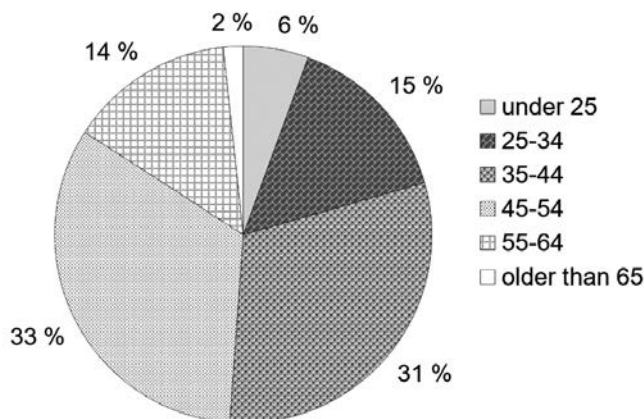


Figure 3: Age Structure of Primary School Teachers (Data Source: Ministerul Educației, 2023b)

Almost all primary school teachers are fully qualified (98,4 %) (Ministerul Educației, 2023b, p. 43). The qualification of teachers has been the subject of numerous political and scientific projects in recent years, which will be discussed more specifically in the second part of the article. Nearly all teachers work full-time (99.1 %), which includes between 16 and 18 hours of instruction per week (Ministerul Educației, 2023b, p. 44). On average, one teacher is responsible for 18 children, comprised from averages of 1 for 20 in the city, and 1 for 17 in the village (Ministerul Educației, 2023b, p. 50). According to the 2023 legislation, when they have worked in the profession for more than 15 years, teachers can opt to reduce their teaching load by two hours per week. This will have a considerable impact on a substantial number of teachers, given that nearly half of all primary school teachers are over the age of 45 (see figure 3), and thus typically have well over 15 years of professional experience.

2.5 Primary Education for Minorities and Alternative and Private Primary Education

2.5.1 Primary Schools for Minorities

As mentioned above, all members of recognised minorities have the right to be educated in their mother tongue. It is the responsibility of the state to guarantee this right by ensuring that minority-language schools are established in regions where there is a demand from parents for them. However, these schools are also open to children who do not speak that language as their mother tongue. For example, the schools in the language of the German minority are also attended by numerous pupils whose mother tongue is not German but Romanian. In addition to the schools in the language of a minority, schools in an international language (like English, French or Spanish) have also been permitted since the 1990s.

The current number of pupils attending schools where the language of instruction is not Romanian can be found in table 2. For comparison, the number of pupils attending schools where the language of instruction is Romanian is also listed. However, the figures do not refer exclusively to primary schools, but combine primary schools and middle schools; unfortunately, separate data are not available.

Table 2: Number of Pupils at Schools with Mother-tongue Teaching (Source: INS, 2024)

Language of instruction	Pupils
Romanian	1.483.329
Hungarian	84.910
German	14.337
English	5.320
French	757
Romanes	371
Slovak	281
Ukrainian	231
Serbian	118
Croatian	72
Armenian	41
Czech	12

It is evident that educational institutions offering instruction in languages spoken by minority groups or modern foreign languages have a markedly differ-

ent reach. The number of Hungarian-language schools is roughly proportional to the size of the Hungarian minority.⁹ The second largest minority, the Roma, have relatively few mother-tongue schools,¹⁰ while the number of pupils at German-language schools is significantly higher than the ratio of the number of members of the minority to the total population. This imbalance can be attributed to the appeal of these educational institutions to the Romanian population. A proficiency in German, for instance, provides advantageous access to regional and European labour markets. However, educational and cultural considerations also influence parental decisions (Zoppelt et al., 2015).¹¹

2.5.2 Alternative Education

As a result of the reform efforts of the 1990s described above, a number of alternative education models (*alternativă educațională*) have been established in Romania. By ministerial decree (ORDIN 5571), six pedagogical reform models are recognised in Romania and have become established in varying degrees: Freinet, Montessori, Waldorf, Jenaplan, curative education, and Step by Step. The two most recent systematic studies on the dissemination and acceptance of progressive schools on a national level date from 2003 and 2011, respectively (Felea, 2003; Cuciureanu, 2011). Unfortunately, current figures are not available and can only be approximated from the self-reported data of lobby groups for these educational systems. Step by Step is represented in almost all parts of the country, with 175 schools. According to them, a total of 19,486 students were taught in the 2021/22 school year. This pedagogical model is offered in private schools, but also in the form of public-private partnerships in state schools (Centrul Step by Step, 2023).

There are now Montessori primary schools and kindergartens in almost all of the country's larger cities. Waldorf education and the Freinet model have also been implemented in some primary schools. In the 1990s and early 2000s, there were intensive efforts to implement the Jenaplan pedagogy in Romania. So far, however, this approach has only been implemented in the pre-school sector (Cuciureanu & Pfützner, 2024).

2.5.3 Private and International Schools

9 For a comprehensive overview of Hungarian as a language of instruction in Romania, see Visser and Papp (2019).

10 The low number of schools is indicative of the pervasive disadvantages experienced by Roma within Romanian society and the education system. Despite the implementation of government-sponsored and NGO-organised support programmes (Roma Education Fund, 2007), there has been only minimal progress in addressing the deprivation experienced by Roma communities (United States Department of State, 2024, p. 30-34).

11 A comprehensive overview of German as a language of instruction in Romania can be found in Iunesch & Pfützner (2025).

In recent years, the number of pupils attending private schools in Romania has increased massively, as shown in figure 4.

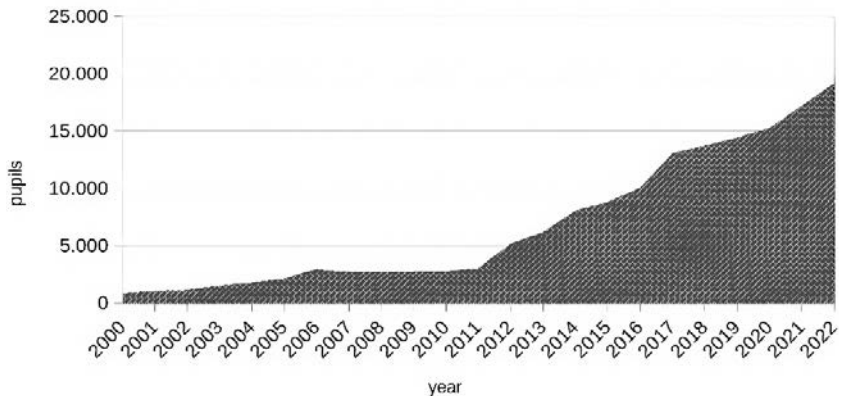


Figure 4: Number of Pupils at Private Schools (INS, 2024)

The increased attractiveness of private schools is partly due to criticism of the material resources of state schools, but also of the quality of teaching. However, the growth in demand has also been made possible by the development of a financially strong middle and upper class, particularly in the big cities.

A special type of private primary school is that of schools which follow the curriculum of another country. In 2025, there are 32 privately-run primary schools of this kind in Romania. However, these are not distributed across the entire country; rather, they were concentrated in the region of the capital city: 23 were in Bucharest or its suburbs, with only two each in Cluj-Napoca and Ploiești, and one each in Timișoara, Sibiu, Craiova, Oradea, and Iași. Fifteen of these schools are following a British curriculum, five a US curriculum, two the curriculum according the international baccalaureate, and two a German curriculum, with the rest following Italian, Greek, French, Palestinian, Iraqi, Libyan and Syrian curricula (ARACIP, 2024).

As in other countries, there is now a noticeable lobby for homeschooling in Romania. However, there are no official figures on this phenomenon. According to the Ministry of Education, this is because homeschooling is not legally permitted, though there are health-related exceptions. However, the phenomenon is known by the authorities, as evinced by regular public warnings that point out the illegality of homeschooling (Gîndu, 2024). Nevertheless, there has been some sporadic research on homeschooling (Savu, 2024).

2.6 Special Education

Primary Schools with a specific educational profile are available for children with special educational needs. The history of these schools can be traced back to the communist era, when children with special needs were typically educated in segregated settings.¹² According to the Ministry of Education, approximately 50 % of children with special educational needs are currently being educated in the regular school system (Ministerul Educației, 2024c).¹³ This is evidenced by the decrease in the number of these schools. In 1990, 136 special schools were still operational within the primary and grammar school sector (unfortunately, discrete statistics are not available), yet by 2023, that number had decreased to only 97 (INS, 2024).

2.7 Current Challenges and Developments

The primary challenge to the Romanian educational system remains the persistently low performance, which is evident not only in the high failure rates at the end of secondary school (*bacalaureat*) and the low enrolment rates in higher education (UNESCO, 2022, p. 4; Hâj & Țucă, 2022), but also in the declining PISA results (OECD, 2024). Many of the underlying foundations of this unsatisfactory performance are, among other factors, established as early as primary school. To address this issue, the preschool class, which had previously been part of kindergarten and taught by kindergarten educators, was transferred to primary school in 2012, placing it under the responsibility of teachers. In particular, the last decade has seen efforts to improve teacher training, especially in terms of professional development and support during the early career stages (more on this in the following chapter). In addition to quality issues, the disparity between urban and rural (primary) schools in terms of resources and instructional quality remains a long-standing problem. Closely related to this is the declining school attendance rate, especially in rural areas (see table 3).

Table 3: Percentage of Children Attending School Among Registered Children (Ministerul Educației, 2023b, p. 18)

	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Urban	97,4	96,5	95,3	99,2	100,1	99,1	96,7	95,6	95,6
Rural areas	80,3	78,9	78,0	80,5	80,9	80,9	81,5	77,2	73,0

12 The situation of children with disabilities in Romania prior to 1990 was characterised not only by serious violations of their human rights in schools, but also in general (Ives, Runceanu, & Cheney, 2007).

13 In recent years, research and training efforts in the field of inclusive education have also increased (e.g., see Mag, 2023).

The school attendance rates for boys are higher than for girls (Ministerul Educației, 2023b, p. 18), which can be attributed to the perpetuation of traditional gender roles and the prevalence of early pregnancies in rural areas (Robayo-Abril et. al., 2023; Robayo-Abril & Rude, 2023). To address this issue, the state has implemented various initiatives, including the ‘Second Chance Programme’ (*Programul A doua șansă*) (OME 3062), the ‘Warm Meal Programme’ (*Programul Masă caldă*) (Ministerul Educației, 2023b, p. 89; Ministerul Educației, 2024d), scholarship programmes (ORDIN 5513), and other measures.

3 Primary School Teacher Training

3.1 Historical Background

To gain a deeper understanding of the initial training of primary school teachers as it currently stands, it is essential to provide a brief historical analysis of the development of teacher education, beginning with the educational reforms of 1948. The Decree No. 175/1948 established the initial training of elementary and primary school teachers in secondary education (*Învățământ mediu*) at so-called ‘pedagogical schools’ (*Școli pedagogice*). The Ministry of Public Education (*Ministerul Învățământului Public*) became responsible at this time for establishing the curricula for teacher training (Decree No. 175/1948, Art. XV). Since 1948, teacher education has remained a centralized training system in which the organisational form, regulations, and even the curriculum for all institutions involved in teacher training in Romania have been uniformly specified by the Ministry of Education.

The pedagogical schools established in 1948 evolved into Pedagogical Lyceums (*Liceu pedagogic*), high schools with a professional profile in education. In addition to their studies in other subjects, pupils at these schools also received a comprehensive training in education. The curriculum included courses in pedagogy, psychology, children’s literature, and didactics, as well as teaching practicums. A graduate of a Pedagogical Lyceum was qualified to teach in kindergartens and primary schools at the age of 18, after successfully completing their final examination. Despite multiple curricular revisions, this form of initial primary school teacher training remained in place as a pre-university initial teacher education programme until 2023.

Following the initial attempt in 1995 to elevate teacher training to the tertiary level (*Legea învățământului no. 84/1995*), an alternative educational pathway was devised. This involved the establishment of pedagogical colleges (*Colegiu pedagogic*), which had a relatively short lifespan, and bachelor’s degree programmes with a dual qualification for elementary and primary education (*Pedagogia învățământului primar și preșcolar*). These have since evolved into the principal pathway to the teaching profession.

With some exceptions, the teachers currently employed in the primary school system have received their basic training and qualifications at Pedagogical Lyceums. Therefore, a realistic presentation of initial teacher education for the primary level should include vocational pre-university school training. However, this training pathway has been largely ignored in the research literature.

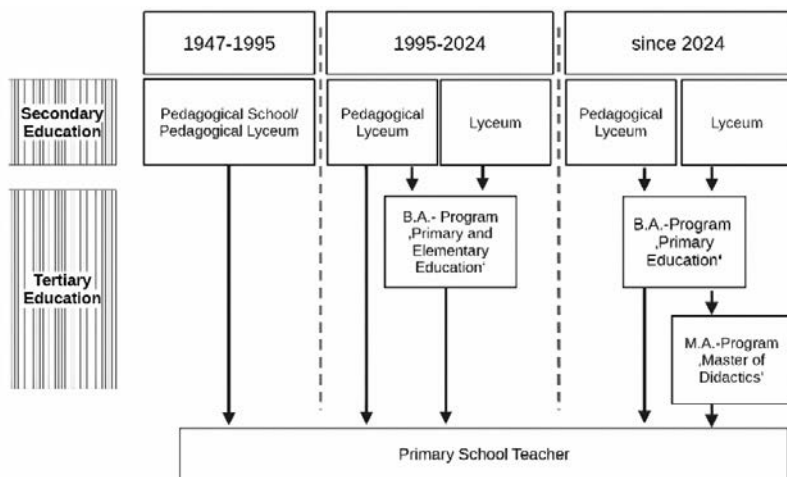


Figure 5: Structure of Primary School Teacher Training between 1947 and Today (own illustration)

3.2 Primary Teacher Training at Pedagogical High Schools

To date, there are still 29 pedagogical lyceums remaining in Romania,¹⁴ with at least five lyceums that teach also in Hungarian, and one teaching in German (Ministerul Educației și Cercetării Științifice, 2024). The entry requirements, curricula, and final examinations for initial teacher education at lyceums are set out in binding ministerial decrees; admission is by aptitude test in 'language and communication', 'music', 'drawing', and 'sport'. To avoid being transferred, pupils at Pedagogical Lyceums are required to achieve a minimum grade of 6¹⁵ in the subject 'language and communication' as well as the pedagogical subjects, along with a minimum grade of 8 in 'behaviour'. The curriculum is comprised of the disciplines shown in table 4. In addition to these lessons in education, students attend classes according to the general education curriculum for secondary schools.

¹⁴ Their legitimacy, however, is regularly under discussion (e.g. Ofițeru, 2023).

¹⁵ In the Romanian educational system after primary school, students are assigned a grade on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 representing the highest level of achievement and 1 representing the lowest. A grade of 4 or below signifies that the examination has been unsuccessful.

Table 4: Comparison of Teacher Training Curricula¹⁶

Pedagogical Lyceum		B.A.-Program Pre- and Primary School Education		B.A.-Program Primary School Education	
Designation	hours/ week	Designation	hours/ week	Designation	hours/ week
A Pedagogy and Psychology					
Introduction to Pedagogy and Curriculum Theory	2	Fundamentals of Pedagogy	4		
		History of Pedagogy	4		
		Curriculum Theory and Methodology	4	Curriculum Theory and Methodology	4
		Early Childhood Education	3		
		Primary School Education	3	Pedagogy: Theories and Practices in Pri- mary Education	4
		Theory and Methodo- logy of Instruction	4	Design and Practice of Instruction	4
Theory and Practice of Evaluation	1	Theory and Methodo- logy of Evaluation	4	Design and Practice of Evaluation	4
		Methodology of Educational Research	4	Methodology of Edu- cational Research	4
Psychology	2	Fundamentals of Psychology	4		
Developmental Psychology	1	Developmental Psychology	4	Developmental Psy- chology	4
Psychology of Education	1	Psychology of Education	3	Psychology of Edu- cation	4
				Neuroscience of Education	4
				Sociology of Education	4
Class Management	1	Classroom Management	3	Classroom Manage- ment and Develop- ment of Socio- Emotional Skill	4
		Management of Emotions in Schools	2		

¹⁶ The table does not represent the full range of subjects offered within the degree programmes or at the lyceum. Rather, they present a selection of subjects and the corresponding number of hours per week that can be allocated to the three areas of pedagogy and psychology, didactics and practical training. Complementary subjects were not taken into account.

Pedagogical Lyceum		B.A.-Program Pre- and Primary School Education		B.A.-Program Primary School Education	
Designation	hours/ week	Designation	hours/ week	Designation	hours/ week
Special Education	1	Basics of Special Education	4	Inclusion of Children with Special Needs	4
		Pedagogy of Inclusion for Children with Special Needs	3		
Communication Techniques	1				
		Psycho-Pedagogy of Play	4		
				Digital Pedagogy. Virtual Learning Environments	3
	Σ 10		Σ 53		Σ 47
B Specialised Didactics					
Romanian Language Didactics	1			Literacy Development in the Area of Fundamental Acquisitions	3
		Didactics of Language and Communication	3		
		Didactics of Romanian Language and Literature	3	Didactics of Romanian Language and Literature	4
				Romanian Language - Primary Education	4
				Children's Literature	3
Didactics of Math	1	Didactics of Maths	3	Didactics of Maths	4
				Mathematics in Primary Education	4
Didactics of Natural Sciences	1	Sciences and Didactics of Sciences	3	Sciences and Didactics of Sciences	3
		Didactics of Technological Education	3		
Didactics of History and Geography	1	Geography and Didactics of Geography	3	Geography and Didactics of Geography	3
		History and Didactics of History	3	Didactics of History and Civic Education	4

Pedagogical Lyceum		B.A.-Program Pre- and Primary School Education		B.A.-Program Primary School Education	
Designation	hours/ week	Designation	hours/ week	Designation	hours/ week
		Didactics of Man and Society	3		
Didactics of Music and Art	1	Music and Didactics of Music	3	Music and Didactics of Music	2
		Arts and Didactics of Arts	3	Didactics of Visual Arts and Crafts	3
Didactics of Physical Education	1	Didactics of Physical Education and Sports	3		
	Σ 6		Σ 36		Σ 37
C Internships and practicums					
Primary school practicum	14	Primary school practicum	24	Primary school practicum	52
	Σ 30		Σ 113		Σ 136

There are 30 hours per week of classes for all four years of the programme. In each of the 36 weeks comprising the academic year, the pupils receive approximately nine additional lessons in teacher training on top of the regular number of lessons that one would receive at a normal high school. It is evident that there is an imbalance in the distribution of time dedicated to theoretical subjects, didactics, and practicum. The teaching practicum is accorded the greatest amount of time. In the case of minority language institutions, the requisite hours for the language and literature of the minority, as well as for the methodology of teaching that language, are combined into the same number of hours as the subjects pertaining to Romanian at Romanian language schools (Legea învățământului preuniversitar no. 198/2023, Art. 6(2)). The initial teacher education programme at Pedagogical Lyceums comprises 360 hours of pedagogy and psychology, 216 hours of didactics, 504 hours of teaching practicums, including practicums of one week per year, and 252 hours of music and art, amounting to a total of 1,332 hours in addition to the high school curriculum.

3.3 Primary Teacher Training at the University

Since the early 2000s, initial primary school teacher training, in addition to the Pedagogical Lyceums, has also taken place at universities. These programmes are offered uniformly throughout the country under the name of 'Primary and Pre-school Education' (*Pedagogia învățământului primar și*

preșcolar). A graduate of a lyceum who has successfully completed the baccalaureate examination may enrol in and pursue an initial teacher training programme at the university. Admission is granted on the basis of an aptitude test in 'language and communication', 'music', 'drawing', and 'sport', which is not required of Pedagogical Lyceum graduates, as well as a written entrance examination, which all candidates must pass.

The curricula differ due to the autonomy of the universities, yet they are comparable in their fundamental characteristics because the framework given by the Ministry of Education and the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (*Agenția Română de Asigurare a Calității în Învățământul Superior*, ARACIS) is relatively strict and permits only minor individual adaptations (ARACIS, 2016, pp. 65-66).¹⁷ For the sake of comparability with the other training options, the subject areas and number of hours per week for the individual subjects are presented also in table 4. The information presented in this table is based on the curriculum currently in use at the Faculty of Education of the University of Bucharest (Universitatea din București, 2024).

It is evident that the fundamental subjects, didactics, and teaching practicums are less balanced than in the framework plan for vocational Pedagogical Lyceums. Furthermore, the pedagogical education is conducted over a slightly longer period of time. A total of 742 hours has been allocated to subjects in the field of education and psychology, 504 hours to the didactics of various primary school subjects, and 336 hours to the teaching practicum. In the case of 'music', 'arts and didactics of arts', a total of 84 hours has been allocated for both the subject and didactics. It should be noted that the university does not offer any stand-alone courses in 'music' or 'art' as a compulsory subject.

The degree programme in primary and pre-school education comprises a total of 1,582 teaching hours in the aforementioned areas. At the university, the workload is quantified in credits; however, the number of hours per week was used for the comparison, so it might be comparable with the vocational Pedagogical Lyceum. The teaching practicum at the Pedagogical Lyceum is considerably more extensive in hours than that of the university. Furthermore, the university curriculum dedicates approximately twice as much time to the scientific foundations of pedagogy and psychology than the Pedagogical Lyceum curriculum. The time dedicated to 'music' and 'art' at Pedagogical Lyceums is approximately three times that spent on these subjects at the university level.

Until 2011, graduates of the lyceum were eligible for employment as qualified teachers in the state school system, provided they had passed the teacher

17 A detailed discussion of the curricula for these courses can be found in Iunesch and Pfützner (2022).

tenure exam (*Titularizare*). Subsequently, enrolment in and completion of a bachelor's programme resulted in the conferral of the title 'teacher for primary and pre-school education', accompanied by a modest increase in remuneration until the summer of 2024. The 2011 Law on National Education (*Legea educației naționale no. 1/2011*) introduced a supervised year of practice and a subsequently successful completion of the permanent teacher certification (*Definitivat*) as a condition for permanent employment.

3.4 Current Reform of Primary School Teacher Training

3.4.1 Curricular Changes

The recently enacted laws on education from 2023 streamlined the previously disparate qualification pathways for securing a permanent position within the primary school system, consolidating them into a unified standard requirement (Ministerul Educației, 2024e). The reform introduces two distinct professional pathways for those seeking to become primary school teachers.

The first pathway necessitates attendance at the Pedagogical Lyceum, followed by the attainment of a bachelor's degree programme in primary school pedagogy (*Pedagogia învățământului primar*). The second pathway starts with a bachelor's degree in primary school pedagogy, which must then be followed by a one-year didactic master's programme.

The ability to qualify as a professional teacher on graduating from a pedagogical high school, which was valid until 2024, was abolished by the most recent law on pre-university education. Nevertheless, teaching qualifications obtained at these training schools will remain valid until 2027 (*Legea învățământului preuniversitar no. 198/2023, Art. 249(9-10)*).

It is not possible to outline the one-year didactic master's programme here, as the implementation measures have not yet been adopted. Both the dual qualification for elementary and primary education at the Pedagogical Lyceum and the dual bachelor's degree programmes at universities were abolished by the recent law. The training programmes for elementary education will be separated from the programmes for primary school teachers, as is the case in the majority of European countries (Petrovici, 2004).

In October 2024, the Ministry of Education published separate methodologies for the study programmes of the elementary and primary sectors, which were subsequently subjected to public debate (Ministerul Educației, 2024f). The ministerial decree on the establishment of study programmes for teacher education in the primary sector contains a curriculum and proposals for the content of various subjects. The curriculum under discussion is also presented in table 4.

The proposed curriculum allocates a total of 658 hours to pedagogy and psychology, 518 hours to the didactics of the various primary school subjects (of which 84 are dedicated to 'music' and 'art'), and 728 hours to the teaching practicums. The proposed curriculum, which is currently still in the planning phase, comprises a total of 1,904 hours. It is notable that the teaching practicums are allocated a considerably larger proportion of the curriculum than was the case at the universities previously. For purposes of comparison, two tables that display the subjects and weekly hours for the two initial teacher education programmes valid until 2027, and the figures proposed in the plan, are presented in Figure 6.

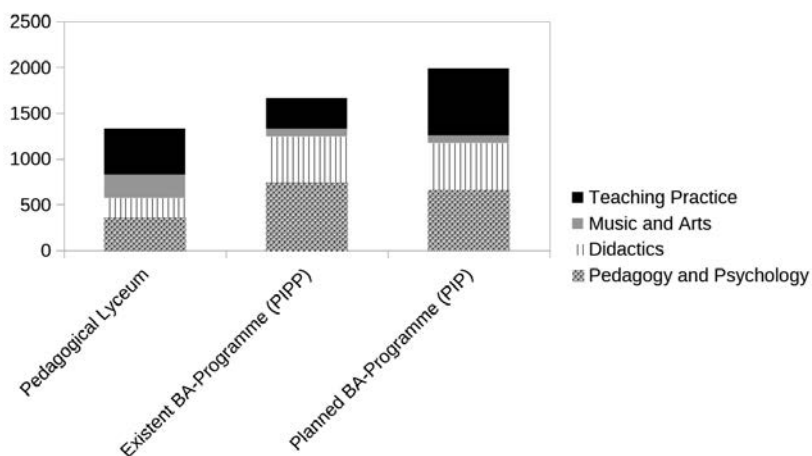


Figure 6: Comparison of Total Teaching Hours in Primary School Teacher Training (own illustration)

As stated, comparison of the two frameworks for initial primary school teacher training at university reveals that the new one allocates a greater proportion of hours to the teaching practicums. This should ensure that the initial training is comparable with other European initial teacher education programmes (OECD, 2020). Parts of the teaching practicums in the new curriculum should be organized within a compact time-period, comprising one week in the first year of study, two weeks in the second year, and three weeks in the third year. This form of pedagogical practicum, which was previously unavailable at the universities, existed at the Pedagogical Lyceum and was introduced to the bachelor's programmes as part of the new project proposal.

3.4.2 Political Background: 'Educated Romania'

The reform of teacher training is taking place as a result of the ambitious reform project 'Educated Romania' (*România Educată*), which commenced in 2016 under the auspices of the President of Romania and was concluded in July 2021 with the publication of a comprehensive report. The aim of this project was to analyse the state of the education system, identifying its shortcomings and formulating reform proposals to address these issues (OECD, 2020). The recommendations were in four key areas: the competence profile of the teacher, the initial teacher education programme, in-service teacher training, and the career management of teachers.

This project culminated in the reforms presented by the new education laws. The section on initial teacher education explicitly defines the alignment of teacher education programmes with the current teacher competence profile (Ministerul Educației, 2024e). This profile, which is currently under public discussion as a project proposal (Ministerul Educației, 2024f), should provide the basis for the development of curricula for the initial primary school teacher training (Legea învățământului preuniversitar no. 198/2023, Art. 166(1); Legea învățământului universitar no. 199/2023, Art. 102(2)).

The curriculum and methodology for establishing initial teacher training programmes for primary school teachers remain open to public debate and might be subject to change.

3.5 Early In-service Teacher Training

In accordance with the provisions set forth in the Law on National Education of 2011, an attempt was made to extend the initial teacher training programme by including a supervised practical first year as a teacher (Legea educației naționale no. 1/2011, Art. 236(1)). Consequently, a programme of continuous teacher training was implemented which aimed to equip mentors (supervisors of trainee teachers in their first practical year) with the requisite skills for the supervision of practical teaching placements. Additionally, a national database of mentors was established. But the proposed expansion of initial teacher training to include a supervised practical year had already been terminated in 2011. In 2022, a National Register of Mentors was once more established (Ministerul Educației, 2022) as a result of a systemic political and scientific project on the professionalisation of the teaching career, *PROF – Profesionalizarea carierei didactice* (Ministerul Educației, 2021), which targeted over 28,000 schoolteachers (Ministerul Educației, 2022). The Register of Mentors currently contains the details of 12,835 individuals. Nevertheless, the mentored practical year has yet to be implemented. The project has provided the requisite training for the mentors who will be responsible for implementing this measure (overview: Petrache & Mara, 2023).

It is not possible to say with certainty what the future of initial teacher training will look like, as the changes to the documents submitted for public debate cannot be predicted. The extent to which the ambitious and numerous reforms of the two new education laws and the 'Educated Romania' project will come into force after 2027, and whether a supervised year of practice will be added to the training of teachers in the future, cannot be foreseen at this time and will have to be the subject of a future analysis.

3.6 Further Training for Primary School Teachers

Further professional training for all teachers, including primary school teachers, is organised at the district level by the Houses for Teaching Staff (*Casa Corpului Didactic*). There are 42 of these professional educational centres in Romania (Ministerul Educației și Cercetării Științifice, 2024). The centres are subordinate to the District School Inspectorates (*Inspectoratul Școlar Județean*) and offer further training in a variety of topics. A teacher training centre was established in 2018 in Oradea for the benefit of Hungarian-speaking teachers (*Országos Magyar Továbbképző Központ / Centrul pentru Formarea Continuă în Limba Maghiară*), which offered further training for teachers throughout the country. A similar institution for German-speaking teachers has been located in Mediaș since 1998 (*Zentrum für Lehrerbildung in deutscher Sprache / Centrul pentru Formarea Continuă în Limba Germană*), but it is subordinated directly to the Ministry of Education.

Further training courses can also be taken at university level. These study programmes are designed to be undertaken concurrently with a professional career and conclude with the award of a first or second class degree in didactics (*Grad Didactic I* and *Grad Didactic II*). Since the implementation of the Bologna reform, more and more master's programmes are being offered that qualify students for specific professional/managerial roles, such as the management of institutions or tasks in education management.

4 Conclusion

In light of the ongoing reforms, particularly within the domain of primary teacher training, it seems reasonable to posit that primary school education will undergo a transformation in the coming years. The main development will likely be that teacher training will exclusively take place at the university level in a few years. If the current attempt to establish mentoring programs for new teachers is successful, this second phase of teacher training could positively impact the quality of schools. Nevertheless, it remains unclear whether the proposed reforms to teacher training will be sufficient to address the challenges currently facing primary education. These issues will be the subject of future

research projects, as will the effects of the current reforms on primary schools serving national minorities and rural schools.

Given the considerable teaching loads typically for university staff in the field of teacher training and education studies in Romania, it is perhaps unsurprising that relatively little research has been conducted at universities on these and other primary school-related issues (Cuciureanu & Pfützner, 2024, p. 464). Most empirical research with national validity is conducted at the CNPEE in Bucharest, although its resources are also limited. Additional research is carried out by international agencies such as the EU or the OECD (Kitchen et. al., 2017), which tend to focus on topics relevant to the economy. Nevertheless, these data can often offer a comprehensive insight into the empirical context of primary schools. Qualitative research, beyond that conducted for bachelor's and master's theses, would be a necessary addition to the existing body of knowledge. This is important because gaining qualitative insights into the challenges of quality development is essential for targeted management and implementation of reform processes.

In this sense, the Romanian primary education system is undergoing a profound transformation whose effects and outcomes are not yet foreseeable.

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