



## **Identification of needs for the professional development of teachers in pre-university education in Albania**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study is to research the research instruments that are applied in identifying the needs for professional development of teachers in different educational systems compared to the Albanian educational system. Alternative hypotheses in the study explore the identification of teachers' needs for professional development in the pre-university system. The method used in the study is based on the techniques of official documentation review, observation through self-declaration instruments, interview, etc. Surveyed teachers participate in the process of identifying needs for professional development, as well as education specialists in the cities of Tirana, Durrës and Kavajë implemented by the Ministry of Education and Sports in the academic year 2016-2017. The sample of the study consists of surveyed teachers who participated in the process of identifying the needs for professional development, as well as education specialists at the local level in the cities of Tirana, Durrës and Kavajë implemented by the Ministry of Education and Sports. The conclusions of the study show that the strategic document of MAS 2014-2020 for the professional development of teachers reflects the document of the European Strategy for improving the quality of education. Also, the areas included in the MAS instrument for identifying the needs for professional development are essential elements of teachers.

**Keywords:** Identification of needs, instrument, test, professional development

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### **ENTRY**

The identification of the needs for the professional development of teachers constitutes a permanent activity of educational institutions at all levels. The identification of needs starts at the school level, continues at the level of the Regional Educational Directorates (DAR/ZA) and ends at the national level. According to the Instruction of the Ministry of Education and Sports (MAS), in the academic year 2015-2016, the process of identifying teachers' needs for professional development was developed in the pre-university education system. Based on the MAS Guidelines, the basic instrument used in the process of identifying the needs for professional development was the test. All teachers of the pre-university system who have less than 20 years of teaching experience were subjected to the testing process.

The purpose of the process is to identify the needs of teachers who teach in all profiles and levels of the curriculum in the pre-university system for their professional development. The professional development needs identification instrument assessed four areas of teacher education: Planning, Teaching and learning, Ethics and communication, 4 Professional development. Depending on the obtained results, the areas where he needs further professional development will be determined for each teacher.

The process of identifying the needs of teachers for professional development has been undertaken in

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recent years, a process during which the Institute of Education Development (IZHA) through DAR/ZAs drafts a document summarizing the needs of teachers in the pre-university system, which serves as basis for their training programs.

*The purpose* of this study is to research the adequate instrument to identify teachers' needs for professional development in the pre-university education system. The study includes the research of the test as a research instrument in the identification of professional development needs compared to other alternative instruments that are used in research practice. The study relies on the theory of research methods, specifically on the design and implementation of research instruments, as well as on the theory of educational sciences, bringing them closer to European experiences.

*Research question* : How does the test stand as an instrument compared to other research instruments for identifying teachers' needs for professional development in the pre-university system?

*Hypothesis* : There is a positive linear relationship between the test as an instrument for identifying the needs for professional development of teachers in the pre-university system and the psycho-emotional state of teachers.

The conclusions of the study are important for teachers and school leaders, for specialists of different levels of pre-university education, for leaders of local and national educational institutions. They may also serve educational researchers to replicate the same or similar studies in the future with diverse study samples.

## **1. Literature review**

Knowledge is considered the most important capital to generate new ideas and achieve well-being. The rates of its increase are very fast. The school allows access to only a small part of the information, so it should help young men and women to develop the appropriate competencies for accessing information and processing it in a way that, in addition to general competencies for life and work independent. For our school, it is very important to determine on what basis the content of what needs to be learned will be chosen, how to choose what is important from the large world of information, but also how to realize the structuring of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values for a specific purpose. The ability to distinguish the knowledge necessary for school constantly requires critical attitudes towards this knowledge (Curriculum Framework, 2016). The author Hassel, 1999 considered professional development as the process of improving the skills and competencies of staff, necessary to produce excellent results in the education of students. Professional development means activities programmed and developed to promote the professional and personal development of teachers. Shulman, 1987 described professional development as an extensive knowledge base for teacher education. He identified seven categories of professional development, which were: 1 content knowledge, 2 general knowledge of pedagogy, 3 knowledge of curriculum, 4 knowledge of pedagogical content, 5 knowledge of students and their characteristics, 6 knowledge of the context of education, 7 knowledge of the aims and aspects of education. He also identified four sources of knowledge: 1 knowledge within the discipline, 2 educational materials and structures, 3 formal educational knowledge, 4 practical wisdom. Author Gordon, 2004 has specified the meaning of successful professional development. According to him, successful professional development includes the combination of experiences that enable teachers as individuals, groups of teachers or teaching institutions to improve the curriculum, teaching and assessment of students, with the aim of facilitating the process of growth and development of students.

In general, there has been a strong tradition of teacher training that emphasizes equipping teachers with

required pedagogical skills, instructional technology, and practical experiences.

However, research shows that teachers teach according to the way they were taught. For teachers to grow professionally, they need professional development opportunities. Their professional development plays an important role in today's global education reform movement. What is evident in most current political initiatives in education is an attempt to rethink the teaching profession as an ever-changing profession, dependent on their training. Existing teacher training programs are prepared on the basis of a wide range of activities such as: teacher orientation consultations, workshops and seminars, symposia, courses, printed publications, video services, centers of excellence in teaching, presentation of teaching in schools, seminars training and research. The key point is that learning does not end when the training sessions are over. Teachers need ongoing support to apply the skills and concepts learned in professional development programs. Therefore, previous models of teacher training may not be adequate to meet the expectations and challenges in teacher preparation, which have emerged from recent education initiatives. Moreover, these programs from time to time feel a lack of coordination with the existing curriculum and with the reality in the classroom to meet the new challenges.

The concept of *need for professional development* summarizes a variety of definitions or dimensions. One of the simplest explanations is: The need for professional development is the difference, or space between what is and what should be, or what we seek to achieve. What are some of the institutions and methods that contribute to identifying the real needs of teachers for professional development.

In our pedagogical practice, ***the external evaluation*** is carried out by the inspection, while the internal evaluation is carried out by the school director. The administrative institution responsible for identifying teachers' needs for professional development is the Inspectorate. The inspection with its structures through the use of observational instruments, the implementation of questionnaires, the implementation of tests, etc. must identify for each school and teacher subject to the inspection, which are the areas where the teacher feels the need for professional development. But, on the other hand, no less important is ***the internal assessment***, which is carried out by the school director. The school administration, through the observations it carries out in the teaching process, constitutes another very important source, or point of reference, which must be taken into consideration for determining the needs of teachers to be trained for different aspects of teaching. Another way to identify the needs is the analysis of the results of ***the standardized exams*** that are represented by the release exams for basic education and the matura exams for secondary education. Also, the analysis of the results achieved by teachers in ***the qualification exams***, or in the collection of certificates with credits as well as in the preparation of their professional portfolio, are again two indicators on which we must base ourselves to determine the real needs of teachers for training. Standard instruments are again a powerful tool to identify teachers' professional development needs. Standardized instruments can include three different subjects, but which are channeled for the same purpose - absorbing or gathering the needs of teachers for training: 1 students, 2 teachers, 3 managers, 4 parents. It is understandable and undeniable that ***the teacher*** is the epicenter of identification, analysis and assessment of professional development needs, translated into training needs. The instruments for identifying the needs for professional development are carefully designed professional formats that aim to collect the thoughts or opinions of teachers, managers or even specialists regarding the start of their professional development and their needs to reach further stages. professional in their career. The instruments are designed and processed mainly by the staff of specialized research institutions and more specifically in identifying the needs for professional development in the field of education.

The test according to the author Sokoli 2014 represents an integrated system of questions, requests, issues, tasks logically connected between them, which are related to a certain field and which must be solved to

measure and evaluate knowledge, skills, attitudes. The objective tests are constructed in such a way that different evaluators reach the same assessment for the level of knowledge, skills and attitudes, based on a key of correct answers. The most common objective test is the multiple-choice test. Some of the advantages of multiple-choice tests include: 1 more material can be covered than with other types of tests, 2 scoring is easier. Some of the limitations of multiple-choice tests include: 1 they measure low levels of thinking, 2 they carry opportunities for guesswork, 3 they carry opportunities for easy copying.

According to Eurydice 2015, the test is considered *high stakes* in European models, since it exerts pressure on the concerned persons and the result is not 100% accurate. In some states the only use of the test is for a raise or to decide whether a teacher will stay in that position or not.

A questionnaire as another measurement instrument according to Matthews and Ross (2010) is a set of questions that research participants can answer in a variety of ways. Most questionnaires are intended to collect pre-structured data and as such contain a set of responses from which the respondent can choose, although some questionnaires may include more open-ended questions that allow the respondent to answer questions according to the way you think.

Questionnaires are used in a wide range of social research situations and to gather information about many types of social issues and phenomena. The types of data collected by questionnaires include: 1 facts, 2 descriptions, 3 knowledge, 4 opinions, 5 attitudes, 6 information, 7 responses, 8 quantities. Advantages of questionnaires: 1 collection of more extensive information, for a large number of people in a relatively short time, 2 the survey is usually done for phenomena that the eye of the observer cannot capture, nor the interview cannot reveal them, 3 anonymity is preserved. Disadvantages of questionnaires: 1 accuracy of questionnaires may be questionable given the more or less shallow nature of most questionnaire responses, 2 non-response rate is high, 3 respondents they see the questionnaire as an imposition and a waste of time.

According to Eurydice (2015) in ten educational systems such as those of Belgium (German-speaking community), the Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Slovakia, Finland and Sweden, the Needs Plan and Training for teachers are determined at the local level or from the school, including teachers. In Lithuania, training needs are usually determined through a consultation process involving teachers, internal and external recommendations and evaluations, as well as the opinion of various stakeholders of the individual school. Luxembourg and the United Kingdom (Scotland) are the only education systems in which the Teacher Training Plan is primarily the responsibility of the teacher, although these needs are discussed and approved by the relevant leaders.

In other education systems (Bulgaria, Estonia, Ireland, Spain, Cyprus, Malta, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Liechtenstein, Montenegro, and Serbia), all the actors mentioned above participate in defining needs and designing of the training program. In most cases, higher-level authorities provide a general outline of the primary things in their education systems as a whole, while teachers design programs based on their individual needs.

Local authorities and schools then bring the two elements together within the context of school program development. In Bulgaria and Ireland, the professional development plan is prepared at the school level. It is based on the needs expressed by teachers and national campaigns undertaken by the Ministry of Education

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

.Techniques used in the study include: 1 review of official documentation, 2 survey using self-report instruments. The instruments used in the study include: 1 form for reviewing official documentation, 2 semi-structured interview, 3 focus group.

The format for reviewing official documentation, semi-structured interviews, as well as the focus group format contain dimensions and statements that focus on the components of teachers' professional development at work, identification of professional development needs, instruments used to identify development needs professional in different European countries.

The sample of the study consists of teacher respondents who participated in the development of the test to identify the needs for professional development. Education specialists at the local level in the cities of Tirana, Durrës and Kavaje were also included as respondents in the study. The study was conducted in several public gymnasiums in the cities of Tirana, Durrës and Kavaja. The selection of schools was non-random and purposeful based on the ranking of schools based on the results of the State Matura. The selection of teachers in interviews and focus groups was non-random and purposeful, including teachers of different subjects.

Interviews were conducted immediately after the end of the test in the three cities where the study was conducted to collect teachers' opinions about the instrument used. The interviews were conducted with the teacher respondents who expressed their willingness to express their opinion about this test. Some of the teacher respondents were willing to confirm the content of some of the test questions. Also, with some other teachers who were part of the testing, focus groups were organized through which opinions and suggestions were received. The teachers were willing to answer questions. Interviews were also conducted with three representatives of DAR.

The focus group was carried out with a mixed sample, which included teachers of different curricular fields and subjects, as well as local DAR/ZA specialists that included the cities of Tirana, Durrës and Kavajë. The focus group was conducted in an atmosphere of understanding and free exchange of thoughts and ideas between the respondents. The conclusions of the focus group discussions were summarized synthetically to be used as a basis for the analysis of the findings. Typological analysis was used to process the data collected through research instruments such as official documentation review forms, interviews and focus groups.

### **3. Results and Discussion**

#### *3.1 Results of review of official documentation*

In the Pre-University Education Strategy document **2014-2020**, the Ministry of Education and Sports is giving great importance to the professional development of teachers. This document affirms the importance and expectations regarding continuing professional development. According to the Pre-University Education Strategy, one of the policies recommended by the Council of Europe dedicated to strengthening the professional profile of teachers is related to the review of the effectiveness, the quality of the initial academic and pedagogical training of the teacher, as well as the establishment of coherent and equipped systems with the right resources for the recruitment, selection, internship and professional development of teaching staff, based on clearly defined competencies, needed at every stage of the career as well as the improvement of digital competence (MAS, 2014). The development of capacities for the training of teachers in scientific and professional aspects and of leaders for leadership and management is considered the biggest challenge for education in the coming years. In this aspect, the building of capacities for professional development and the provision of services remains a major challenge . Currently, each teacher is required to attend 18 hours of training per year (MAS, 2014). The process of developing new curricula, which began in September 2014, requires the acquisition of new understandings

and methods for building knowledge and competences. It is necessary, at least, to double the capacities, if it is required to meet the needs for professional development. Teachers should be able to regularly update their competences in the field of technological innovations. They should know the practices of *child-friendly classrooms* and participate in training programs for the deep understanding of individual differences, non-discrimination and tolerance, as means to prevent violent behavior in schools, etc. In this context, the focus of this strategic priority are: 1 the training of new teachers; 2 design and implementation of quality curricula for professional development; 3 creating mechanisms to help teachers achieve professional standards and implement the new curriculum; 4 licensing of new teachers and periodic licensing of all in-service teachers.

The focus of the European Strategy for improving the quality of education according to Eurydice 2013 is the continuous professional development of teachers. Based on the Conclusions of the Council of Europe held in May 2014, it is emphasized that the provision of continuous professional development according to the appropriate standards is important to guarantee that teachers possess and apply the relevant competencies for the realization of an effective lesson. These documents also emphasize the importance of adapting continuous professional development to changes in teaching and learning, interdisciplinary and collaborative promotion, digitization and the use of all educational resources.

Expected results in the fulfillment of goals according to the strategic document of MAS 2014-2020 define:

---From 2016, capacities for assessing needs for professional development are functioning.

---As of 2018 the licensing of all teachers in the system has been completed and 5% of them hold more than one license.

---As of 2017, at least 50 need-based professional development programs are accredited.

---Since 2015, mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating professional development programs and their impact have been in place.

---Since 2017, the administrative guidelines for professional development have been harmonized with the legal framework in force and are being implemented.

---Since 2017, specialists of the Ministry, local educational units and school principals have been trained with accredited programs for leadership and management.

---From 2017, the Ministry, in cooperation with IZHA and KPA, certifies trainers of programs for professional development.

---Since 2018, sustainable mechanisms for professional development have been operating in the school.

---Since 2017, the system for the administration of data for professional development has been in operation.

---Since 2017, the programs of the Faculties of Education are harmonized with the educational policies of the Ministry and with international standards, and all the personnel of the Faculties of Education have been trained through professional development programs.

---From 2018, instruments are used for cooperation at the national and international level of our educational institutions of every level (MAS, 2014).

---The main activities for the fulfillment of the expected results according to the strategic document of MAS 2014-2020 include:

---Administrative instructions for professional development are harmonized with the legal framework

---Specialists of central institutions, local educational units and school leaders are trained with accredited programs

---Capacity for assessment of professional development needs is developed

---Professional development programs are accredited

- Trainers are periodically certified
- Teachers are periodically certified and licensed
- The computer system for the administration of data for professional development is built
- The mechanisms for the sustainability of professional development are strengthened
- Trainings are monitored and evaluated
- Cooperates for professional development at the national and international levels
- The study programs of the Faculties of Education are harmonized with the educational policies of the Ministry and international standards.
- Projects are developed by the departments of the Faculties of Education for educational research
- Quality students are encouraged to attend the Faculties of Education.
- The analysis of the review of the 2014-2020 Strategy of MAS results that this document is based on the document of the European Strategy for improving the quality of education. So the complete coherence of the MAS 2014-2020 strategic document and the European Strategic document is evident.

The instruction of MAS " ***For the identification of the needs for the professional development of teaching staff in the pre-university education system***" on the basis of which the identification of the needs of teachers at the national level was carried out includes four main areas 1 planning, 2 teaching and learning , 3 ethics and communication, 4 professional development.

According to the guidelines, the instrument for identifying the professional development needs of teachers is built on the basis of several fields, which refer to the general standards of the teacher. Each of the areas summarizes some issues on the general education of the teacher, which guide the design and structure of the instrument (MAS, 2015).

The field of *planning* includes: (a) planning according to the needs of students; (b) learning objectives or outcomes; (c) learning resources; (d) planning real-life situations; (e) ensuring planning coherence, (f) planning assessment instruments.

The field of *teaching and learning* includes: (a) teaching-learning methodology; (b) assessment of learning; (c) interview techniques and discussions; (d) classroom and student behavior management; (e) the physical environment of the classroom; f classroom climate.

The field of *ethics and communication* includes: a code of ethics; b communication with students; c communication with parents; d)communication with colleagues; (e) cooperation with the community.

The field of *professional development* includes: (a) participation in professional development activities; (b) participation in professional networks.

The analysis of the review of *the MAS Instruction* for the identification of professional development needs shows that the document is comprehensive and contains the most important areas of teaching activity. The fields included in the instrument and their components are indispensable elements of teachers' professionalism.

### 3.2 Results of interviews and focus group

The results obtained from the interviews and focus group are based on a non-representative qualitative sample and as such cannot be generalized for the school population of the cities of Tirana, Durrës and Kavajë.

The majority (70%) of the respondents interviewed and the majority (65%) of the respondents who participated in the focus group affirmed that they agreed with the process of identifying professional development needs.

The majority (60%) of the interviewed respondents and the majority (57%) of the respondents

who participated in the focus group affirmed that the test is not the most suitable instrument for identifying professional development needs.

The majority (64%) of the interviewed respondents and the majority (67%) of the respondents who participated in the focus group affirmed that they had experienced a high level of stress and anxiety during the development of the test.

The majority (59%) of the interviewed respondents and the majority (57%) of the respondents who participated in the focus group affirmed that instead of the test, other instruments could have been used that did not burden them emotionally, but without specifying which ones they could use. were these instruments.

According to the majority of interviewed respondents (62%) and the majority of respondents who participated in the focus group (70%), the identification of the needs for professional development could not be based only on the test results, but without specifying what the methods or alternative techniques.

About (38%) of the respondents interviewed and about (30%) of the respondents who participated in the focus group specified that, in addition to the test, the level of teaching in the classroom, teacher qualification exams, could serve to identify the needs for professional development. as well as the graduation and matriculation exams.41% of the interviewed respondents and 43% of the respondents who participated in the focus group specified that instead of the test, questionnaires or interviews could have been used to identify professional development needs.

According to the majority of respondents interviewed (55%) and the majority of respondents who participated in the focus group (58%), the questions of the test for identifying the needs for professional development presented some inaccuracies in the structure.

According to the majority of the interviewed respondents (53%) and the majority of the respondents who participated in the focus group (56%), in the test questions there were often alternatives or very close ones that were difficult to separate, or the same alternatives.

According to the majority of respondents (73%) who were interviewed and the majority of respondents who participated in the focus group (61%), the test was conducted digitally only in the city of Tirana, while in other cities it was conducted in the form of a written test .

According to the majority of respondents (76%) who were interviewed and the majority of respondents who participated in the focus group (69%), in the process of identifying the needs for professional development, not all categories of teachers were included: (a) teachers with over 20 years of work, (b) substitutes, (c) vocational school teachers as these categories of teachers also need to be trained.

31% of the respondents interviewed and 42% of the respondents who participated in the focus group claimed that the teachers were not trained in advance to carry out the test digitally, which also affected their distraction and increased stress levels.

All respondents (100%) representatives of DARs/ZAs interviewed and participants in the focus group affirmed that the identification of needs for professional development is a centralized process, where the role of DARs/ZAs is very small.

15% of the interviewed respondents and 7% of the focus group respondents claimed that the



content of the test was very similar to the questionnaire developed by IZHA for the identification of needs several years ago.

### Conclusions and recommendations

The conclusions of the study are based on: a the results obtained from the review of official documents, b the results obtained from the interviews conducted with teachers and education specialists, as well as c the results obtained from the focus group.

--The strategic document of MAS 2014-2020 for the professional development of teachers reflects the document of the European Strategy for improving the quality of education.

--The MAS guideline for identifying needs for professional development is a comprehensive document and contains the most important areas of teaching activity.

--The fields included in the instrument and their components are indispensable elements of teachers' professionalism.

--The process of identifying the needs for professional development is perceived positively by teachers in the pre-university system.

--The test is not considered the most suitable instrument for identifying the needs for professional development because it is considered a *high stake instrument* and because of the experience of stress and anxiety during its development by the teachers.

--In order to identify the needs for professional development, not only the test results can be used, but also the level of teaching in the classroom, the teacher qualification exams, as well as the exit and graduation exams.

--In order to identify the professional development needs of teachers, in addition to the test, alternative instruments such as questionnaires or interviews can be used.

--In structuring the content of the test used to identify the needs for professional development, some inaccuracies in the way the questions are structured have been identified.

--The test was conducted digitally only in the city of Tirana, while in other cities it was conducted in the form of a written test.

--In the process of identifying the needs for professional development, only teachers with less than 20 years of professional experience were included

--MAS and IZHA to continue the inclusion in the instrument of identification of needs for professional development in the following areas: (1) planning, (2) teaching and learning, (3) ethics and communication, (4) professional development

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