

PECULIARITIES OF TEACHER TRAINING IN THE FIELD OF PRIMARY EDUCATION

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Abstract. This thesis explores the distinctive characteristics of teacher training in the field of primary education. It examines the unique pedagogical, psychological, and methodological aspects that differentiate primary education teacher preparation from other levels of teacher education. The study analyzes the competencies required for primary school teachers, the structure of training programs, the role of practice-oriented learning, and the challenges faced by higher education institutions in preparing qualified primary education specialists. Special attention is given to the context of non-state higher education institutions and the evolving demands of modern primary education.

Keywords: primary education, teacher training, pedagogical competencies, practice-oriented learning, professional development, primary school teacher, educational programs.

Introduction: the uniqueness of primary education teacher training

Primary education occupies a foundational position in the educational system. It is during the primary years that children develop basic literacy, numeracy, cognitive skills, and social competencies. The quality of primary education is directly dependent on the quality of primary school teachers. Consequently, the training of primary education teachers requires a distinct approach that differs significantly from secondary or higher education teacher preparation.

The peculiarities of primary education teacher training stem from several factors: the age characteristics of primary school children (typically 6–10 years), the integrative nature of primary education, the teacher's role as both an educator and a subject instructor, and the need for multi-disciplinary competencies. Understanding these peculiarities is essential for designing effective training programs and for ensuring the quality of primary education as a whole.

This thesis aims to systematically analyze the distinctive features of teacher training in the field of primary education, identify the core competencies required, and discuss the implications for higher education institutions, particularly non-state institutions.

The distinct nature of primary education as a field of study

Primary education differs fundamentally from other levels of education in several dimensions:

Age-specific characteristics

Primary school children are in a critical stage of cognitive, emotional, and social development. They transition from concrete to abstract thinking, develop reading and writing skills, and form their initial attitudes toward learning. A primary school teacher must understand child psychology, developmental stages, and age-appropriate teaching methods. This requires specialized training in developmental psychology that is more intensive than that for secondary school teachers.

Integrative curriculum

Unlike secondary education, where subjects are taught by specialized teachers, primary education typically involves a holistic, integrated curriculum. The primary school teacher often teaches multiple subjects: mother tongue, mathematics, science, social studies, arts, and physical education. This demands broad subject knowledge combined with the ability to integrate content across disciplines.

The teacher as a multifaceted professional

The primary school teacher plays multiple roles: educator, instructor, caregiver, counselor, and communicator with parents. This multifunctionality requires training that develops not only teaching skills but also socio-emotional competencies, communication skills, and ethical responsibility.

The formative nature of primary education

Primary education shapes foundational skills and attitudes that influence lifelong learning. The teacher's role in this formative period is critical. Training programs must therefore emphasize the development of diagnostic skills to identify learning difficulties early, as well as differentiated instruction strategies to address diverse student needs.

Core competencies of the primary school teacher

The competency profile of a primary school teacher is multidimensional. Based on international frameworks (e.g., UNESCO, OECD) and national standards, the following core competencies can be identified:

Subject competence

The teacher must possess deep knowledge of the core subjects taught in primary school: language and literacy, mathematics, natural sciences, social studies, arts, and physical education. However, this knowledge must be pedagogically adapted to the developmental level of young learners.

Pedagogical Competence

- **Instructional strategies:** Mastery of diverse teaching methods appropriate for young learners, including play-based learning, inquiry-based learning, and cooperative learning.
- **Lesson planning and assessment:** Ability to design developmentally appropriate lessons and assess student progress using formative and summative methods.
- **Classroom management:** Skills in creating a positive, structured, and safe learning environment.

Psychological Competence

- Understanding of child development theories (Piaget, Vygotsky, Erikson).
- Ability to identify and address developmental delays, learning disabilities, and socio-emotional challenges.
- Skills in fostering motivation, self-esteem, and positive attitudes toward learning.

Communicative and Social Competence

- Effective communication with young children using age-appropriate language.
- Collaboration with parents and families to support children's learning.
- Teamwork with colleagues and school leadership.

Structure and Content of Primary Education Teacher Training Programs

The preparation of primary education teachers typically combines theoretical study with extensive practice. A well-designed training program should include the following components:

Foundational Disciplines

- Child and developmental psychology
- Pedagogy and educational theory
- Philosophy and sociology of education
- Health and physical development of children

Subject-Methodological Disciplines

- Language and literacy teaching methods
- Mathematics teaching methods
- Science and social studies teaching methods
- Arts and physical education teaching methods
- Integrated curriculum design

Professional Practice

- Observation and assisted teaching in primary schools
- Supervised teaching practice (practicum)

- Student teaching (internship) lasting one semester or longer
- Reflective practice seminars

Practice-Oriented Training as a Key Feature

A distinctive feature of primary education teacher training is the centrality of practice. Unlike many other academic disciplines, teaching cannot be learned solely through theory. Research consistently shows that the quality of practice-based experiences is one of the strongest predictors of teacher effectiveness.

The Role of School-Based Practicum

The practicum provides prospective teachers with opportunities to:

- Observe experienced teachers in authentic classroom settings
- Gradually assume teaching responsibilities
- Apply theoretical knowledge to real-world situations
- Develop classroom management skills
- Build relationships with students, parents, and colleagues

Models of Practice-Based Training

Several models have been developed to strengthen the practice component:

- **Cooperative or partnership model:** Universities collaborate closely with demonstration schools where student teachers are placed.
- **Professional development schools:** Schools serve as sites for both teacher training and educational research.
- **Residency model:** Student teachers spend an extended period (often a full academic year) in a school, working alongside a mentor teacher.
- **Clinical model:** Modeled after medical education, this approach emphasizes supervised practice, case studies, and reflective practice.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Primary education teacher training is characterized by a unique set of features that distinguish it from other areas of teacher education. These include:

- The integrative and holistic nature of the primary curriculum
- The age-specific psychological and pedagogical demands
- The multifaceted role of the primary school teacher
- The centrality of practice-based training
- The need for a broad and balanced competency profile

To ensure the quality of primary education teacher training, especially in non-state higher education institutions, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Strengthen practice-based training** by establishing formal partnerships with schools, providing structured mentoring, and extending the duration of internships.

2. **Develop a competency-based curriculum** that clearly defines the knowledge, skills, and attitudes expected of graduates and aligns courses with these competencies.
3. **Invest in faculty development** to ensure that instructors have both academic expertise and current experience in primary school settings.
4. **Create demonstration or model schools** where student teachers can observe exemplary practice and engage in supervised teaching.
5. **Incorporate inclusive education** throughout the curriculum, not as a standalone course but as an integrated theme across all subjects.
6. **Foster reflective practice** through portfolios, teaching journals, and action research projects.
7. **Enhance digital competencies** while maintaining a balance with hands-on, experiential learning.

By attending to these peculiarities and implementing these recommendations, higher education institutions can better prepare primary school teachers who are competent, confident, and committed to the foundational years of children's education.

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