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# WEAVING THE THREADS OF A CONTINUUM: TEACHER EDUCATION IN HUNGARY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF EUROPEAN DEVELOPMENTS

VASILEIOS SYMEONIDIS

## **Abstract**

*This paper aims to examine to what extent and how teacher education in Hungary reflects contemporary European policy and research developments with regard to the continuum of teacher education, meaning the overarching unity of initial teacher education, induction, and continuing professional development. First, the paper examines European policy documents to identify patterns and themes related to the continuum concept. Based on the specific analysis, a framework was developed to explore the continuum of teacher education and this was employed in the case of Hungary. Drawing from a content analysis of official documents and in-depth interviews with national policy experts and teacher educators as well as focus groups with teachers, the paper continues by analysing the development of teacher education in Hungary from the introduction of the Bologna reforms in 2005 to the restoration of undivided initial teacher education in 2012 and the implementation of a new system for the teacher career path in 2013. The findings indicate that while Hungary has adopted several structural elements related to the continuum which reflect European thinking, a lack of interconnections among the different phases of teacher education is apparent.*

## **Keywords**

*European policy, continuum of teacher education, undivided teacher education programmes, teacher career path, Hungary*

## Introduction

Since the OECD report “Teachers Matter” (2005) and the McKinsey report “How the world’s best performing schools come out on top” (Barber & Mourshed, 2007), there has been a resurgence of interest in teachers and teacher education in both Europe and the global education community which has translated into a variety of policy initiatives and research produced nationally and internationally. Although there are various reasons behind this development, the European Doctorate in Teacher Education (EDiTE) emphasises three of them: (a) evidence shows that the quality and effectiveness of education depends on the quality of the teacher labour force; (b) education systems face demographic changes related to teacher shortages and the composition of the learning population; and (c) there is increasing knowledge about human learning and the nature of professional knowledge (EDiTE, 2014, p. 3).

In Europe, the shift towards a knowledge-based economy in the late 1990s resulted in complex outcome-oriented governance in education, which emphasised lifelong learning as a goal for the individual and as a synonym for Europeanisation in the 21st century (Grek & Lawn, 2009). Through the Lisbon Strategy in 2000 and the “Education and Training 2010” work programme in 2002, the European Union (EU) initiated the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) in education, which included as the first objective for the education systems across Europe the goal of improving the quality of training for teachers and trainers at all education levels. Following these developments, an accelerating process of the Europeanisation of national education policies related to teachers and teacher education has been witnessed and teacher professionalism has increasingly become a European issue (EDiTE, 2014).

Several convergences among European countries are related to the selection and retention of teachers, the area of initial teacher education, the formulation of teacher profiles and competences, and the induction and professional development of teachers (Vidović & Domović, 2013). Moreover, through the OMC the following fundamental teacher policy concepts have been developed and sometimes implemented: (a) the definition and use of teacher competences; (b) the creation of a continuum of teacher professional development; and (c) support for teacher educators (Stéger, 2014a, pp. 338–339). The question “What is a European teacher?” has also sparked discussions within the European Network on Teacher Education Policies which aimed to discern Europeaness in teachers’ work and identified the following European dimensions: identity, knowledge, multiculturalism, language competence, professionalism, citizenship, and quality measures (Schratz, 2014).

Although the effort towards Europeanising teacher education is increasingly evident, poor and slow translation of general policy formulations

into national and local practices has been identified in various studies (Dale, 2009; Devos et al., 2012; Gassner, 2010; Vidović & Domović, 2013). A crucial reason for this development lies in the fact that transnational policy actors rarely address national educational contexts or the history and unique characteristics of national systems. Despite the initiatives and policies provided by international organisations and national governments, local adaptation has meaningful differences at the local and national levels and results in little fundamental change in schools and classrooms (Devos et al., 2012). Teachers are deeply embedded into societies and cultures, and therefore national contexts are of crucial importance for understanding the function of teacher education systems around the world. Tatto (2011, p. 510) argues that it is necessary to understand context and culture for “collaborative construction of policy knowledge” instead of simply borrowing policy. Similarly, Caena (2014) emphasises the innovative potential of “*glocal* developments” in European teacher education which can tackle global challenges with a mediation process that goes beyond the global–local dichotomy.

The present paper arises from an ongoing study of the Europeanisation process in teacher education and aims to illustrate potential influences of this process with regard to the continuum of teacher education in the case of one EU member state, namely Hungary. Hungary is among those Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries which experienced a rapid transformation following the collapse of the Iron Curtain and actively pursued integration into the EU, including a constitutional amendment allowing accession in 2004 (Batory, 2010). Due to the influence of European policy coordination mechanisms and EU structural funds, the role of education in Hungary, as well as in other CEE countries, was redefined within the new context provided by the EU’s lifelong learning approach (Halász, 2015). However, the Eurosceptic Hungarian government in office since 2010 has introduced several laws to centralise power over education. The role of teachers and teacher education was also redefined by two major recent reforms which will be the focus of this paper, namely the restoration of undivided teacher education in 2012 and the introduction of a new system for the teacher career path in 2013.

First, the paper examines EU documents in teacher education, focusing on the continuum of teacher professional development, a concept closely connected to the EU’s lifelong learning agenda. Based on the analysis of European policies, a framework was developed to help to investigate the phases of the continuum in the case of Hungary and to design the instruments for data collection. Maintaining its focus on Hungary, the paper continues with empirical findings for each phase of the continuum. In the final part, discussion and conclusions are drawn followed by recommendations for future research.

## Methods

This study followed an exploratory and descriptive case study design (Yin, 2009) combining content analysis of policy documents with empirical findings from interviews and focus groups. The main unit of our case study analysis is Hungary, while sub-cases of one higher education institution, Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE), and two schools were examined to illustrate the microdynamics at the institutional and local levels.

First, EU policy documents were analysed, including Communications from the European Commission and European Council Conclusions related specifically to teachers and teacher education produced since the Lisbon Strategy in 2000. Following Mayring's (2000) qualitative content analysis, an inductive approach was applied aiming to grasp repeating patterns and emerging themes from the documents with regard to the continuum of teacher professional development. Once the main patterns and themes were defined, a framework with indicators was developed. The specific framework was used to develop the interview and focus-group guides and was applied in a deductive way to analyse some of the latest policy documents related to teacher policy and teacher education in Hungary as well as interview transcripts.

To explore the case of Hungary, semi-structured and in-depth interviews were conducted with seven policy experts who work at national education agencies, such as the Education Authority and the Hungarian Institute for Educational Research and Development, or who have participated with a consulting function in recent nationwide reforms related to teachers and teacher education. The specific interviews aimed to provide a macro perspective on system-wide changes related to teacher education and their closeness to recent European and international developments with regard to the different phases in the teacher education continuum. Interviews were also conducted with eight teacher educators at ELTE in Budapest, the largest teacher education provider in the country. Specifically, interviews were conducted with five teacher educators specialising in pedagogy and/or psychology (TE-PP), two in subject methodology (TE-SM), and one in subject discipline studies (TE-SD). Since teacher education is often seen as a disciplinarily fragmented field, it was considered essential to include teacher educators from different academic disciplines in order to grasp the ambivalent dynamics of institutional politics and interests.

Finally, two interviews with school principals and two focus groups with teachers were organised in two Hungarian public schools in order to illustrate how practising teachers perceive the reforms related to their continuing professional development. One focus group with five secondary school teachers took place at one of the ELTE practice schools, while the other was conducted with six lower secondary school teachers at a suburban school

outside of Budapest. These schools were selected because of their close collaboration with ELTE, their involvement in EU-financed development interventions and mobility projects, and the innovative character of their mentoring programmes.

Interviewees were selected according to a generic purposive-sampling approach, defined as a way to strategically sample participants who are relevant to the posed research objectives (Bryman, 2012). Although an interview guide was employed, the semi-structured interview format allowed new ideas to be brought up by the participants, while questions were tailored to the interview context and to interviewees. The interviews were transcribed and mailed back to the participants for approval. For ethical reasons, the anonymity of the participants is ensured.

### **European policies on the continuum of teacher education**

Among various influential European trends related to improving the quality of teacher education, this paper focuses on the continuum of teacher professional development, which is a fundamental concept in European teacher policies (EDiTE, 2014; Stéger, 2014a). The continuum refers to a harmonised overarching unity of initial teacher education (ITE), induction, and continuous professional development (CPD), meaning that teachers are expected to develop continuously from a lifelong-learning perspective (Stéger, 2014a, p. 339).

The development and dissemination of the continuum concept was the result of a two-way interaction process between the European Commission and member states. Stéger (2014a) argued that the EU raised awareness of the specific concept by setting it as a common goal of Council Conclusions irrespective of country characteristics, while member states shared their policies and practices and thus influenced European thinking. At a policy level, there is widespread agreement among member states on two priorities, namely the necessity to link the different phases of teacher education and the great significance of CPD for all teachers (Gassner, 2010, p. 36).

Starting from the *Common European Principles* policy paper in 2005, the European Commission recommended that the teaching profession should be seen as a continuum. Almost three years later, the Commission issued the *Communication to the Council and the European Parliament on Improving the Quality of Teacher Education* in September 2007. The continuum was linked with the idea of lifelong learning and the Commission defined it as “a seamless continuum of provision embracing initial teacher education, induction into the profession, and career-long continuing professional development that includes formal, informal and non-formal learning opportunities” (European

Commission, 2007, p. 12). ITE is not enough to provide teachers with the necessary skills for a lifelong teaching career, and thus teacher education and professional development need to be seen as a lifelong task and structured and funded accordingly. To this end, teachers should participate to induction programmes during the first three years in the profession, have access to structured guidance and mentoring, and take part in regular discussions regarding their training and development needs. Formal, informal, and non-formal means are meant to support the development of teachers' competences, while other opportunities to participate in CPD, including exchanges and placements, need to be recognised.

In 2009, the *Council Conclusions on the Professional Development of Teachers and School Leaders* reaffirmed and strengthened the need for teachers' lifelong CPD. The Council agreed that efforts should be made to ensure the following: (a) newly qualified teachers are provided with support and guidance; (b) a reflective approach is promoted; (c) all teachers receive regular feedback on their performance; (d) based on the feedback, sufficient CPD opportunities become available for practising teachers; (e) CPD programmes are relevant and controlled for quality; (f) teachers and school leaders are encouraged to participate in exchange and mobility schemes; and (g) teachers and school leaders are encouraged to participate in advanced professional training and development, pedagogical research, and opportunities to develop their knowledge of other sectors (Council of the European Union, 2009, pp. 6–7).

The 2014 *Council Conclusions on Effective Teacher Education* made concrete recommendations about the phases of the continuum, focusing particularly on ITE and the need to develop teacher competences throughout the teacher's career (Council of the European Union, 2014, pp. 3–4). With regard to ITE, the Council invited member states to ensure that teacher education programmes include an adequate mix of subject knowledge and pedagogical competences reinforced by integrated periods of practical teaching experience. Self-reflection and collaborative work, adaptation to multicultural classrooms, and acceptance of leadership roles were noted as necessary competences for prospective and in-service teachers. The Council stated that ITE could also benefit from quality-assurance arrangements and regular reviews, with emphasis placed on achieving the required learning outcomes, the quality of teaching practice, and the relevance of what is taught. Enhanced cooperation and partnerships with different stakeholders was also considered important in the design of teacher education programmes. To this end, EU financial resources, such as the Erasmus+ Programme and the European Social Fund, can be utilised.

Last but not least, a policy handbook on improving ITE, published in 2015, analysed the teaching profession continuum with a focus on how ITE could be better linked with the next two phases, induction and CPD

(European Commission, 2015). Among the several policy recommendations, the first and most challenging was strengthening the interconnections among the different phases in the continuum, with the implication that each phase is informed by the one preceding and influences the one following. A coherent and integrated approach requires bringing together five interrelated perspectives: addressing teachers' learning needs, support systems, career paths, the organisation of competence levels, and the impact of school culture (European Commission, 2015, p. 4). ITE is the starting point for this ongoing process and lays the proper foundation and mindset, but it should not be considered a stand-alone and complete phase. Throughout the continuum of teacher learning, reflection is the key to helping teachers to develop a sense of agency to assess their needs and self-direct their learning. School leaders and CPD providers play an important role in creating practice-oriented and research-based professional development opportunities that have a strong impact on strengthening teacher agency.

The following table aims to summarise the main patterns of European recommendations related to the continuum concept.

Table 1

*Framework of European recommendations with regard to the teacher education continuum*

<p>Teaching profession continuum: Patterns across the phases</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Strengthening links among ITE, induction, and CPD</li> <li>➤ Enhanced cooperation, partnerships, and networking with a broad range of stakeholders</li> <li>➤ Promoting a reflective approach and developing a sense of agency, including self-directed learning</li> <li>➤ A coherent teacher competence framework with different competence levels throughout the continuum</li> <li>➤ Recognising formal, informal, and non-formal professional development opportunities</li> <li>➤ Supporting flexible career paths</li> <li>➤ Improving practice through links with research</li> <li>➤ Quality assurance and regular reviews</li> </ul> <p><i>ITE</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Recruitment, selection, and induction of the best candidates</li> <li>➤ Alternative pathways to entering the profession</li> <li>➤ Balanced mix of subject knowledge, pedagogical competences, and integrated periods of practical teaching experience</li> <li>➤ Promoting effective digital teaching and learning</li> </ul> <p><i>Induction</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Delivered as a coherent programme (i.e. personal, social, and professional support)</li> <li>➤ Comprises the first part of a career-long system</li> </ul> <p><i>CPD</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Programmes which are relevant, tailored to needs, and practice-oriented</li> <li>➤ Utilising mobility and exchange schemes</li> </ul>
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Within the limits of its legal power, having reviewed the available scientific evidence, the Commission has published advice for policymakers and developed an agenda for policy reform in teacher education (Gassner, 2010). The above list is not exhaustive and focuses on an analysis of policy documents referring explicitly to teacher education and the continuum concept. Other documents describe each of the different phases more thoroughly and offer detailed recommendations. However, we can generally observe that European recommendations are not very precise or specific, while they imply a hidden harmonising discourse, as other studies on lifelong learning have also noted (Rasmussen, 2009).

For the purposes of this paper, we use the European recommendations as a roadmap to analyse national initiatives which do not precisely refer to or follow the EU recommendations but seem to reflect what we can call *European thinking*. Acknowledging the overlap between European and global trends in teacher education, we employ here the term European thinking to refer to opportunities which have opened up with the emergence of the European space in education (Dale, 2009), particularly in terms of various European policy instruments (e.g. the Bologna process, development interventions, the OMC) and the growing professional collaboration of key European networks and associations in the field of teacher education (EDiTE, 2014). The aforementioned patterns can help us reveal what Börzel and Risse (2003, p. 58) term the “misfit” or incompatibility between European and domestic processes, policies, and institutions. The misfit is a necessary but not sufficient condition for expecting domestic change, and thus a second condition lies in various facilitating factors (e.g. actors, institutions) who respond to adaptational pressures and influence change (Börzel & Risse, 2003).

### **An overview of the Hungarian teacher education system**

ITE in Hungary has gone through three major waves of transformations since the change of the political system: standardisation of content in 1997, the Bologna reforms in 2005, and restoration of the previous undivided ITE programmes in September 2013 (Stéger, 2014b, p. 25). Teacher education providers include 16 state universities, 10 colleges, 2 universities and 3 colleges run by churches, and 2 private institutions (Sági & Varga, 2012, p. 106).

The Bologna system brought major changes to the structure of teacher education in Hungary. It introduced two cycles with the first covering specialised knowledge of subjects, providing similar courses to all students, and the second introducing specialised pedagogical, psychological, and methodological master-level training. Within this consecutive 3+2-year model,

ITE took place during the two-year master's degree programme. Teaching master's degrees required the completion of a psychological and pedagogical module for 40 credits, two subject modules for 80 credits, and a school-practice module for 30 credits during the last semester of the programme, resulting in a total of 120 + 30 credits. However, arguments against the Bologna system suggested that fewer excellent students chose to pursue teacher education at the master's level after completing their undergraduate degrees. It was further argued that many students who had intended to become teachers after their secondary education decided to enter the labour market after their receiving their bachelor's degree without continuing their education at a higher level, while other students chose to pursue master's studies in another, non-teaching programme (Sági & Varga, 2012).

Following those arguments, the government in office from 2010 decided to review the Bologna structure and restored the previous undivided programme for the education of general subject teachers starting from the 2013–2014 school year. This means that student teachers for lower- and upper-secondary education (ISCED 2 and ISCED 3) have to choose between a 4+1-year programme and a 5+1-year programme, respectively, in which there are no exit bachelor's degrees after three years. This new concurrent programme defines altogether 100 credits for non-subject specific modules, with an increase in the duration of school practice from six months to a full academic year at the end of the studies leading to a master's degree. The result seems to be an emphasis on subject-related studies and a lighter treatment of pedagogy and psychology (Cedefop, 2016). Vocational and art teachers can be educated through both the consecutive and concurrent models, while ITE for pre-school and primary-school teachers (ISCED 0 and ISCED 1) lasts three and four years, respectively.

Upon successful completion of the ITE phase, prospective teachers need to undertake an initial two-year induction period during which they are classified as *novice teachers*. During this period, schools are required to provide mentoring to novice teachers. At the end of induction, an accreditation exam takes place which allows teachers to continue their teaching career as a "Teacher I" (OECD, 2015). Participation in CPD is considered a professional duty, and teachers must complete a minimum of 120 hours of CPD every 7 years (Eurydice, 2016).

### **The continuum of teacher professional development in Hungary**

This section presents findings related to each phase of the continuum and their interconnections. To understand how Hungary deals with the continuum of teacher learning, we examined the redefined role of the undivided ITE,

the introduction of the induction system, and the role of CPD. The new system for the teacher career path is also described briefly as it has redefined teachers' professional profile, connecting the profession with all phases of the continuum and with the idea of teachers' lifelong learning. Empirical data are used to highlight tensions and illustrate the findings, while the case of ELTE is used when talking about the views of teacher educators.

#### *The redefined role of ITE*

The restoration of undivided ITE programmes started as a contra-reform to the implementation of the Bologna process in the field of teacher education. Among the various reasons behind this restoration, it was clear that macro- and micro-organisational politics played crucial roles throughout the process (Kotschy, 2012). Within this context, interest groups who were against the Bologna reforms work to convince politicians and some parts of society of the harms of the Bologna system and the superiority of the previous undivided structure, which eventually succeeded when the government changed in 2010.

However, the undivided ITE programmes were also restored in haste, with limited consultations, and while the divided system was still functioning (interview, national policy expert). It was planned that this new system would include a higher and more symmetric allocation of subject-related studies, but it retained a number of Bologna aspects which make a difference compared to the pre-Bologna version of undivided programmes. Specifically, the overall credits allocated to preparatory teaching courses remained higher than they had been in previous times, while the teaching practice period was prolonged to one year. However, almost all teacher educators interviewed for this study indicated that six years of study for a teacher is "too much."

*When I think about the number of years a student teacher has to spend studying nowadays, it is the same as for doctors. And, of course, if a parent thinks about providing their child with training for six years, and then the child becomes a teacher or a doctor, with same six years financed by the family, the salaries and status are incomparable. (interview, TE-SM)*

Pedagogy and psychology experts at the Faculty of Education and Psychology (PPK) at ELTE expressed concerns that their courses appear mainly during the first three years of study and are therefore not embedded in a coherent way throughout the teacher education programme. Students first encounter pedagogy and psychology modules, then move on to subject methodology courses, and after that enter the short and long periods of teaching practice. Although the credits have been reduced, pedagogy and psychology experts have tried to integrate many subjects from the previous divided programme into a new and limited curriculum, aiming to keep some of the core elements and approaches to teaching from the previous programme. The new curriculum

of pedagogy and psychology is structured around four modules: the teacher as an individual, the teacher as part of society, teaching professionalism, and teaching in institutional contexts. The new modular structure and the strong synthesis of psychological and pedagogical content, as well as the introduction of horizontal aspects, such as reflectivity, individualised support, and adaptability, were seen as positive aspects by some of the interviewed teacher educators. However, the very small amount of credits (1–2) allocated to a variety of courses has proven dysfunctional, and efforts to change this situation are currently evident.

As a consequence of unhealed wounds left from the Bologna period, cooperation among different faculties at ELTE remains problematic. Different institutions do not share a common vision of teacher education and thus teacher education programmes appear fragmented. Each student teacher receives a different curriculum with courses from the different faculties, and since the whole process is currently administered by a teacher education centre within the university, teacher educators at the PPK feel they have lost ownership of ITE programmes. Although a list of competences for education students exists, the faculties have never agreed as to how to interpret the overarching training and outcome requirements. Moreover, the pedagogy and psychology experts felt that the status of their disciplines has decreased in the eyes of students, who “*receive a lot of impressions from other faculties and arrive here with a lot of immaturity and a bad mentality; they don’t understand why they should learn all this stuff*” (interview, TE-PP). The different faculties may also transmit different approaches to learning. For example, while the PPK follows a social constructivist approach, subject methodology departments may provocatively disregard this specific approach (interview, TE-PP).

With regard to school practice, questions were raised as to the quality and efficiency of how it is currently implemented. The following arguments were raised: (1) the gap between theory and practice has widened because practice is placed towards the end of the studies, after all theoretical courses have been finished, and is not accompanied by any introductory or professionally oriented course; (2) teaching practice was prolonged mainly so that students would graduate in September, when they could actually seek a job, instead of in January, in the middle of the school year; (3) there is no mentoring network in place; and (4) students receive no financial compensation during the practice period and often have to search for a school placement themselves. There was also a major issue related to the university practice schools in which many students undertake their teaching practice. The specific schools are generally considered “*elite*” schools “*atypical*” for Hungary, as their student population is rather homogeneous both ethnically and in terms of socio-economic background. The following quote is indicative:

*What I experienced during my university teaching practice was very different from the real school situation, because at the university you go to these elite practice schools, but if you go out and start teaching in a real school then you can face more difficult students and many challenges. (focus group, novice teacher)*

#### *The induction phase*

National policy experts referred to the introduction of an official induction system in Hungary as a necessary step for bridging ITE with in-service training and starting to consider teacher professional development as a continuum in accordance to European trends. Government Decree 326/2013 on the promotion of teachers regulated the period of induction as the first phase in teachers' professional careers following the successful completion of ITE certification exams. The process of planning the induction period was supported by EU structural funds and regulatory frameworks produced at the European level.

*The policy handbook on induction which was prepared by an EU expert group was a very useful tool that we could implement in Hungary during the past four years. We worked out a system of induction, planned the two-year period and the kind of examination, and produced handbooks for mentors as well as beginning teachers. The base was worked out at the European level and then we implemented it into the Hungarian system and I think it works well. (interview, national policy expert)*

During this two-year probationary period, teachers are classified as novice teachers and are appointed a mentor who is usually a teacher with at least five years of experience. Novice teachers have fewer teaching hours, keep a working diary, and observe lessons which they later discuss with their mentors. Their activities may include familiarising themselves with the curriculum and policy documents, participating in school projects, and organising school events. Novices also make a plan of their activities for each semester and a self-assessment of their practice based on the official teacher competence list, indicating their strengths and weaknesses as well as areas in which they would like to improve. Mentors support the novices in their everyday tasks and challenges, observe some of the novices' lessons, and assess the novices' work twice per year.

While the law provides some basic requirements, the relationship between mentors and novices is generally defined by mutual agreement between the two. At the end of their induction period, novices are assessed by a committee based on three criteria: (1) a portfolio produced by the novice teacher; (2) observation of at least two lessons; and (3) a defence of the portfolio by the novice teacher. A list of 8 competences, disaggregated into 62 indicators and a system of 3 grades, is used to measure teachers' performance. The specific competence list follows a learning outcomes approach, which has

proven to be similar to the training and outcome requirements of ITE. Upon successful completion of the assessment, the novice teacher is promoted to the next category of Teacher I. The same competence list is used for qualifying teachers for further categories in their career path. Teachers have ambivalent views regarding the competence list, however, since some consider the list as overdeveloped and difficult to translate into their practice, while others feel disappointed and consider the list to have “*not fulfilled its purpose to hold badly performing teachers accountable*” (focus group, teachers).

Moreover, the fast implementation of the career system led to several issues which are still prevalent during the induction phase. The new teacher career system was introduced as part of the 2013 Public Education Act and thus remained separate from ITE, which is regulated by the 2011 Higher Education Act. The gap between ITE and induction is also reinforced by the fact that induction does not provide feedback to ITE and school mentors are neither monitored nor adequately trained by higher education institutions. As one interviewee observed, “*Induction seems to be there just to make sure that we do not employ people who are not capable of teaching; instead it should help to produce reflective practitioners who develop over the continuum*” (interview, national policy expert).

To date, mentors are not required to hold any kind of certification of their ability to act as experts supporting novices. Although the initial idea was to allocate the given task to teachers who had undertaken specialised mentor training and reached a certain level in the career ladder (Master Teacher), the shortage of qualified mentors and the increasing need to support novices led schools to allocate the task to interested teachers with some years of experience. This situation has resulted in school mentors enjoying a status lower than that of teacher educators at university, and thus there is no common understanding of the teacher educator’s role. Last but not least, some schools with teaching shortages seem to overlook the purpose of the induction period. As another interviewee noted, “*Some schools allocate more lessons to the novice teacher to substitute for other teachers; they use him or her as a regular worker and don’t regard him or her as a trainee who is here to learn*” (interview, school principal).

#### *Continuing professional development*

Since Government Decree 111 of 1997, teachers in Hungary have the professional duty to attend in-service training. There are two fundamental forms of in-service training: (a) 120 hours of obligatory in-service training every 7 years; and (b) preparations for the teacher special examination which leads to a diploma and is a precondition for becoming a “Master Teacher” in the new teacher career path (Government Decree, 111/1997). Although the two forms remain separate, there is a clear effort to include the lifelong learning perspective and the continuum thinking by linking

teachers' professional development with the career path system. However, national policy experts mentioned that the term CPD, although translated into Hungarian, lacks professional meaning because it still uses a very course-based idea of in-service training, similar to the way in-service training was defined by the 1997 Decree.

*Continuous professional development is like an artificial word in Hungarian; it doesn't really mean anything, so you have to keep on repeating that it is not further training. Further training is something that happens to someone, it is not something that you generate yourself. However, in continuous professional development, you yourself generate your own professional development and this has to be explained in Hungarian, because you cannot really say that I took a CPD course. But somehow there was a cultural change because the professional pedagogical communities agreed with the wording provided by the European Commission documents. I have only translated these documents into Hungarian and their adaptation has become common knowledge and has become more widespread since 2008. (interview, national policy expert)*

Similarly, interviewed teachers seemed ambivalent as to the impact of CPD on their professional practice and development. While most of them acknowledged the professional benefits of CPD, some teachers thought of CPD as a formal duty and not a personal investment or a tool for answering school-based problems, mainly because of the obligatory character and the limited financial support they receive. As of 2010, in-service professional development can only be financed from targeted tender funds because normative funding support was abolished and teachers have to self-finance their participation in CPD (Sági & Varga, 2012), especially if it takes place at universities or with private training providers. Participation in CPD is in addition to teachers' regular workloads.

Moreover, participating in the obligatory 120 hours training every 7 years does not translate into financial or career advancements. Only the form of CPD linked to the special examination can lead to promotion, which is also not guaranteed. Since the specialisation programmes vary (school leadership or mentorship), the Minister of Education decides on a yearly basis which specialisation is valid for becoming a Master Teacher based on system needs and not on teachers' professional merit. However, the structure has proven to allow flexible career paths through the special examination process. With regard to content, many CPD programmes take the form of traditional courses offered by universities or pedagogical training centres, while informal or non-formal training opportunities organised by the school or online providers are considered invalid for allocating the necessary amount of credits. This can be gleaned from the following extract.



Master Teacher: *We organise internal trainings at our school and it is a very natural thing to organise professional days where we try to learn new things, such as how to use an app.*

Interviewer: *And is that recognised for collecting your CPD credits?*

Master Teacher: *Well, 30 of the 120 credits can be certified by the school principal based on these internal trainings – but it has never happened in practice! So it has to be an accredited course and it depends on the school provider, because it is easier to keep track of accredited courses.*

Teacher II: *Many of us collect more than 120 credits anyway. Many teachers do it because of intrinsic motivation, while others have problems to collect these credits. And if someone hasn't collected the credits during the given period, he/she will receive a warning from the school district. (focus group, teachers)*

At the moment, the organisation of CPD is rather turbulent. A special committee within the Education Authority is responsible for accrediting training programmes, which can be organised by any public or private training provider. Training needs are established by the local authorities, schools, and individual teachers, while the responsibility for organising formal CPD plan lies with the school principal (Eurydice, 2016). During the period of decentralisation in Hungary, schools were receiving funding and could choose from a variety of courses provided on the free market. It was stated that, “*Teachers’ needs were dominant and many innovations were possible, but sometimes teachers couldn’t actually recognise what they really needed*” (interview, TE-PP). Since 2010, the situation has changed dramatically and the involvement of private providers is decreasing, as can be seen in the next extract.

*In recent years, in-service training has been a big mess in the country. It was a very simple thing to receive the accreditation from the Education Authority and even within the university there was no coordination. It sometimes happened that a department from the university thought of an in-service training programme and sent the application letter directly without even the dean knowing about it. Not even the rector. Nobody knew about it. Only the department who organised it. And then they received the accreditation and started the course. Can you imagine that? That is absurd. (interview, TE-SD)*

In an effort to centralise and control this situation, the government is currently considering allocating certain responsibilities for organising CPD to higher education institutions, although nothing has been regulated yet. The main idea is that there will be five large universities in the country which will be responsible for organising CPD on a regional basis. While the universities appear willing to receive additional funding, teacher educators expressed concerns that this might be yet another step from the government in increasing control over universities and reducing their autonomy by making them even more dependent on public funds.



## Discussion and conclusion

This study focused on exploring the continuum of teacher education in Hungary considering European developments and recent policy reforms in the country. The findings indicated that Hungary has adopted several structural elements related to the continuum mainly in terms of formalising the induction phase, introducing teacher competence frameworks, and initiating a model for the teacher career path focused on lifelong learning. However, the changes have currently been implemented at the structural level, and although financial conditions and career perspectives have improved for teachers, the profession's status remains relatively low and the reforms need more time to become embedded in the system.

On several occasions, domestic actors in Hungary utilised European resources, such as the Bologna process, development interventions, and peer learning policy handbooks, to reform teacher education, but implementation happened in haste and within the context of macro- and micro-organisational politics. As a result, various stakeholders felt distrusted and cooperation among the different actors involved in teacher education remains a challenge as evidenced in the case of ELTE. Political culture appears to be a crucial factor in the implementation of educational reforms (Devos et al., 2012), and this has proven to be the case also in Hungary. Changes during the Bologna implementation and the subsequent restoration of undivided ITE programmes were politically influenced and met with resistance because they destabilised existing power structures within and across institutions. Similar studies have concluded that implementation at the national level is often politically difficult, although there is sufficient knowledge about the policy measures to be taken and several of the policy measures have been recognised as effective through research and peer learning activities (Gassner, 2010).

The misfit between European and domestic processes has proven significant with regard to interconnections among the different phases in teacher education. In Hungary, there seems to be a lack of communication particularly between ITE and induction, while CPD is not effectively linked to the newly established system for the teacher career path. The different phases do not provide feedback to one another and appear fragmented. ITE has experienced the biggest changes within the past ten years in terms of content and structures, but highly qualified and motivated candidates, mainly in the natural sciences, appear to have made teaching their second choice (interview, TE-SD). Undivided ITE programmes emphasise subject-related studies, although the reflective approach seems to have penetrated the system, as can be seen in the content of preparatory courses and the portfolio assessment. Induction comprises the first part of teachers' career path, and requirements have been defined for both mentors and novices. Practically speaking, however, the

mentoring system currently faces several challenges. Validation of informal and non-formal learning remains an unresolved issue for CPD, while professional development programmes seem to be course-oriented and not always tailored to teachers' individual needs. Efforts to centralise the system also imply that CPD might move further away from addressing school and local needs.

This specific study has highlighted some of the potentials and tensions of implementing reforms in the teacher education system of Hungary. It has further contributed to the analysis of national education reforms through the lens of contemporary European developments, providing an analytical tool for studying the continuum of teacher education which can be further developed and used to examine implementation processes in other countries. Future research could analyse other aspects of European teacher and teacher education policies and the extent to which these influence national reforms through soft policy mechanisms. Studying other countries could enable comparisons and help to explore how Europeanisation reveals itself in teacher education, a field overlooked by contemporary research on European integration.

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