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Career Development Opportunities for Teachers in Bulgaria

Możliwości rozwoju kariery zawodowej nauczycieli w Bułgarii

In recent years, there has been increasingly more focus on careers, rather than jobs, and that is because the career takes an important part in the life of an individual. The word "career" is defined as "a path or progress in life." As a concept, it covers the entire range of activities and the growth of a person in the professional field. Usually, we understand that if someone has a "good career," they are successful in the professional sphere and that their work brings satisfaction.

Career development is a process that continues throughout a person's life. It covers occupations, qualifications, and various types of work and activities, including leisure. In the process of career development, one strategically explores, plans and creates the future realization of their goals, constantly seeking information and resources. At the same time, career development

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is strongly influenced by personal decisions, family background, education, school environment, and other social factors.

Career development includes the entire journey of a person - from choosing their future profession at young age, during the education period when they prepare for an active professional life, through the period of maturity when they are in the strongest period of their careers, and up to the time after retirement. In this sense, it is a continuous process of learning, following some flexible steps related to self-discovery, exploration of employment opportunities, decision-making and goal setting.

According to Zunker (1994, p. 13), career development reflects individually-defined needs and goals related to the stages of life and activities that influence career choices and, consequently, the realization of goals. The more the individual is aware of their potential and experience, the greater the probability of self-assertion and assuming the right direction in career development.

Teachers are the most important factor in the development and improvement of society and the education system, as they greatly shape the educational and social profile of future generations by helping them discover their potential, overcome shortcomings in their environment and background, and share with them the joy of development and the love towards learning. In order to accomplish their altruistic and professional tasks and to meet the expectations of society, teachers must continually learn and improve (Hutchinson, 2013).

In this respect, the career development of teachers involves different lines of professional realization. Firstly, a teacher must continually learn and enrich their knowledge of the novelties and changes in theory and practice. It is equally important for them to establish their professional status, to improve their competence, and know why not to further their career by taking managerial positions.

Teacher education is a continuous process, in which one acquires new knowledge and develops new skills, which, in turn, helps to improve pupils' learning. More and more studies confirm that high quality teaching influences the learning of students and that the high competence of teachers tangibly increases student achievement (Vermunt 2014, Vescio et al., 2008; Ronfeldt, et al., 2015; Stronge et al., 2011; Kunter et al., 2007).

Teachers provided with appropriate training to familiarize them with up-to-date information and new research on classroom management, appropriate technological tools, new learning resources, etc. can become a factor in the

successful progress of their schools (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017, Borko 2004).

Apart from training, the successful work of teachers depends both on the availability of appropriate resources, as well as targeted support tailored to the complexity and value of the teaching profession. In this plan, reforms related to the modernization of education inevitably relate to the professional and career development of teachers and their social status through support and qualification. At the same time, the career development process also includes aspects such as creative thinking, innovation or proactive attitude towards work and life.

The educational policy of the Republic of Bulgaria promotes the right and equal access to education through the implementation of quality and effective preschool, primary, secondary and higher education. In this context, care is taken to differentiate attitudes towards children and their diverse needs, in order to fulfil the obligation of the State to provide a material and technical base with qualified teachers where the children can receive an education corresponding to modern life.

The training and qualification of teachers from all levels of education is among the priorities of the state, a decisive factor for quality school education. At a national level, modernization is evolving in line with the process of reviewing and updating teacher training models in the European Community and the related common objectives and principles.

In 2016, in view of the new realities in Bulgaria, a new Preschool and School Education Act was put into effect. Along with the law, a number of state educational standards have been developed and implemented. Bulgaria also implemented a National Strategy for the Development of Pedagogical Staff (2014-2020). The aim of this strategy is to create a framework for national policies on education, training and career development of pedagogical staff, thus improving the quality of education.

In connection with these documents, the improvement of the qualification and professional status of pedagogical staff has become one of the national priorities in regard to education. The terms and conditions for the career development of the pedagogical specialists are presented in the Ordinance of the Ministry of Education and Science on the Status and Professional Development of Teachers, Directors and Other Pedagogical Specialists in effect from 27 September 2016.

With this regulation, there is an opportunity for teachers to be able to grow in their careers, not only on the basis of length of service in the profession, but also according to their additional qualifications and the results of the attestation of their work. This greatly reduces the period of career development; before, a teacher had to spend ten years in a pedagogical position in order to advance in the profession, while now, they are able to advance in their career within four years if they show creativity and initiative, as well as want to qualify and invest in its development.

In the aforementioned ordinance, career development is defined as an ongoing process of improvement of competences in the occupation of teaching or educational positions, or in the acquisition of degrees, in order to increase the quality and efficiency of education.

With this understanding of career development, there are two opportunities for the professional development of teachers:

1. Improvement and enrichment of competencies achieved through the acquisition of vocational qualification degrees, each of which is related to further qualifications and enrichment of the practical and theoretical training of a teacher. On the basis of the achieved level of qualification, the pedagogical specialists can acquire the following professional qualification degrees consecutively: fifth, fourth, third, second, first professional qualification degrees.

The training of teachers related to the upgrading of qualifications by acquiring professional qualification degrees is carried out by higher schools, established by the order of the Higher Education Act. The process of acquiring these degrees is carried out by the department of an institution that conducts training for acquiring the professional qualification and has program accreditation for the acquisition of a doctoral degree in a doctoral program corresponding to learning subjects.

The development and improvement of the qualification activity consists of the conceptual understanding that teacher education is a continuous process: lifelong learning, which is related to research, forecasting, planning, and information to rethink, update and effectively implement training programs consistent with national policy on pedagogical staff.

Qualification activities aim to ensure the correspondence between the needs of the educational system and the level of professional competence of the teachers and other pedagogical staff, providing them with opportunities

for satisfying professional interests and realization of goals, taking into account the priorities of the educational institution and the specific problems of each region.

The standard foresees that teachers will be required to undergo 48 hours of compulsory training in programs approved by the Ministry of Education and Science for the upgrading of qualifications at external institutions for a period of four years, as well as for 16 hours per year at the school in which they work. The external institutions will be specialized service units, higher schools and scientific, as well as training organizations whose programs will be approved by the Minister of Education and Science and will be entered in an information register. Qualifying credits will be accrued from mandatory qualifications and be used for attestation. One credit is equivalent to 16 hours of training, of which at least eight are attended. For four years, each teacher, director or other pedagogical specialist is required to acquire at least three credits from participating in training to upgrade qualifications. Credits are also awarded for publishing work in specialized publications.

Qualifications takes place at two levels: at the school for 16 school hours each year, and outside of the school for 48 academic hours in four years. For this purpose, each teacher is provided between 100 and 160 BGN under the current collective agreement – 0.8 percent of the Wage Fund. Other sources of the funds are the national Development of Pedagogical Specialists program, the Science and Education for Smart Growth operational program, and Erasmus+, which allows for the exchange of practices between different countries. The cost of the training and the awarding procedure for the Vocational Qualification Degree are paid by the teachers themselves. Holding a Vocational Qualification Degree is related to change in the initial base monthly salary.

2. Career development of teachers is also achieved through the occupation of consecutive teaching or tutoring positions. Positions for teachers and educators, including resource teachers are: teacher, senior teacher and main teacher.

The basis for the career development of pedagogical specialists is the length of service, obtained qualification credits, obtained professional qualification degrees, as well as the results of their attestation.

Higher numbers of qualification credits and professional qualification degrees are grounds for faster career development, regardless of the length teaching service.

3. There is also opportunities for the career development of pedagogical specialists in the sphere of education management.

The achieved level of professional competence, the professional activities, the achievements of the pupils and the career development of each teacher, director or other pedagogical specialist is proved by the *Professional portfolio of the pedagogical specialist*. The professional portfolio allows the collection, presentation and storage of documents and materials that prove:

- active participation in the educational process, in extracurricular and out-of-school activities;
- the dynamics of personal and professional results, and of the pupils with whom they work;
- professional development;
- and career development.

The professional portfolio reflects the objective self-assessment of the pedagogical specialist, maintains the motivation to improve qualifications, and assists the attestation process.

Every four years, each professional will be certified based on their portfolio. The first attestation will be in the 2020-2021 academic year to complete documents and materials on each pedagogue's activity during this period.

Attestation occurs every four years, which implies the requirement for compulsory qualifications (no less than 48 academic hours per period of attestation and no less than 16 academic hours per year within the framework of in-house qualification) for a professional portfolio, etc.

Career development is associated with growing prestige, with more responsibilities and with corresponding compensation. The professional development of teachers requires continuous improvement of qualifications to acquire new and additional knowledge, professional and research skills; to realize the aims of the school and create a drive for its development.

In general, the system for improving the qualifications of teachers in Bulgaria is based on the principle of self-initiative and voluntary participation.

Teachers can participate in different training programs based on their own initiative or upon the recommendation of their employer (the school principal) or of the Regional Inspectorate of Education.

Highly qualified and competent teachers are essential for effective education systems. Teachers today face higher and more complex expectations to help students reach their full potential and become valuable members of

twenty-first century society. The nature and diversity of these requirements implies that teachers, more than ever, should be professionals who make decisions based on a solid and up-to-date basis of knowledge.

Abstract: This article discusses the career development system for teachers in the Republic of Bulgaria. Career development is defined as the ongoing process of improvement of competences in the occupation of teaching or educational positions, or in the acquisition of degrees in order to increase the quality and efficiency of education. The professional development of teachers requires continuous improvement of qualifications, in order to acquire new and additional knowledge, professional and research skills; to realize the goals of the school and create a drive for its development. Career development is associated with increased prestige, more responsibilities and corresponding compensation.

Keywords: teachers, career, career development, qualification

Streszczenie: W artykule omówiono system rozwoju kariery zawodowej nauczycieli w Republice Bułgarii. Rozwój kariery zawodowej jest definiowany jako proces podnoszenia kwalifikacji poprzez zajmowanie kolejnych stanowisk dydaktycznych lub edukacyjnych, czy poprzez zdobywanie stopni naukowych w celu podniesienia jakości i efektywności kształcenia. Rozwój zawodowy nauczycieli wymaga ciągłego doskonalenia ich kwalifikacji w celu zdobycia nowej i dodatkowej wiedzy, umiejętności zawodowych i badawczych, aby mogli oni realizować cele szkoły i stwarzać warunki do jej rozwoju. Rozwój kariery jest związany z rosnącym prestiżem, większą odpowiedzialnością i odpowiednim wynagrodzeniem.

Słowa kluczowe: nauczyciele, kariera, rozwój kariery, kwalifikacje

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