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Educational Mentoring as a Framework for Reflection on Progress in Teaching the Romanian Language

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Abstract: This study examines educational mentoring as a structured framework for reflection on professional progress in teaching Romanian language and literature. The research aims to identify how reflective tools and mentoring practices contribute to improving teaching quality in a context marked by curricular change and diverse student profiles. The paper builds on contemporary research that conceptualizes mentoring as a collaborative and reflective model of professional development, extending traditional approaches to in-service teacher training. It aligns with studies emphasizing reflective practice as a core component of effective teaching and sustainable professional growth. A mixed research design was employed, combining quantitative and qualitative methods. Data were collected from institutional mentors through questionnaires, lesson observation sheets, analysis of mentoring documents, and written reflective materials, allowing for an integrated analysis of mentoring organization, reflective tools, and mentoring styles. The findings indicate that structured mentoring, supported by systematic reflective tools and regular interactions, enhances teachers' capacity for critical analysis of their instructional practices. Mentor experience and a collaborative mentoring style emerged as key factors influencing the depth and effectiveness of reflection. The study provides relevant insights for teacher educators, school administrators, and policy-makers interested in strengthening mentoring systems and reflective professional development.

Keywords: educational mentoring; reflective practice; Romanian language teaching; teacher professional development.

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1. Introduction

The teaching of Romanian language and literature contributes decisively to the formation of students' communication skills, critical thinking and cultural identity, having a transversal function in relation to all curricular areas. In this context, the quality of Romanian language teaching becomes an essential indicator of the performance of the educational system, and the professional development of teachers who teach this subject represents a strategic priority.

In the last decade, Romanian language and literature teachers have been facing a series of heightened professional pressures, generated by the dynamics of educational reforms and social transformations. Successive curricular changes, oriented towards competences and learning outcomes, require a permanent rethinking of teaching strategies, assessment methods and the teacher-student relationship. Adapting to the new curricular documents involves not only updating the content, but also developing complex pedagogical skills, which allow the integration of interactive, reflective and student-centered approaches.

At the same time, the linguistic and cultural diversity of the school population in the Republic of Moldova amplifies the complexity of the teaching act. Romanian teachers frequently work in multilingual educational contexts, where the level of linguistic competence of students is heterogeneous, and different cultural experiences influence the pace and methods of learning. These realities require differentiated pedagogical strategies, intercultural sensitivity and the ability to adapt the teaching approach to the real needs of students, without compromising curricular requirements.

In parallel, the increased performance demands imposed on teachers — reflected in external evaluations, professional standards and institutional expectations — contribute to intensifying the pressure on Romanian language and literature teachers. In this context, traditional models of continuous training, focused predominantly on the transmission of information and punctual participation in formal courses, often prove insufficient to support authentic and sustainable changes in teaching practice.

As a viable alternative to traditional models, educational mentoring is emerging as an effective mechanism for professional development, based on collaboration, reflection and learning from experience. Mentoring provides a structured framework in which teachers can critically analyze their own practice, receive contextualized feedback and build pedagogical solutions adapted to the concrete realities of the classroom. Unlike traditional training, mentoring capitalizes on the professional

relationship between mentor and mentee teacher as a space for systematic reflection on teaching progress, facilitating the transfer of skills and the strengthening of professional identity.

Therefore, investigating educational mentoring as a space for reflection on progress in Romanian language teaching becomes relevant from both a theoretical and a practical perspective. The analysis of this approach allows highlighting the potential of mentoring to respond to contemporary challenges in Romanian language teaching and to support the continuous professional development of teachers in a coherent, contextualized and sustainable way.

2. Literature Review

Educational mentoring is analyzed in the specialized literature as a complex process of professional support, built on collaborative relationships, mutual learning and systematic reflection on teaching practice. Contemporary models go beyond traditional approaches, focused exclusively on the transfer of experience, and place mentoring in a paradigm of continuous professional development.

Kram (1985) describes mentoring as a professional development relationship characterized by support, guidance, and the strengthening of professional identity, emphasizing the relational and evolutionary dimension of this process. This perspective is taken up and subsequently adapted in the educational field, where mentoring is viewed as a situated training mechanism, anchored in the reality of the classroom.

Studies by Hobson, Ashby, Malderez and Tomlinson (2009) highlight that mentoring for teachers, especially novice teachers, contributes significantly to reducing professional integration difficulties and developing pedagogical skills, when based on reflective dialogue and contextualized feedback. The authors draw attention to the risk of excessively directive mentoring, which can limit professional autonomy.

Crisp and Cruz (2009) propose a typology of mentoring functions, including emotional support, professional guidance, facilitation of reflection, and assessment of progress. This highlights that effective mentoring involves a balanced combination of support and stimulation of the mentored teacher's critical thinking.

Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) introduce the concept of "professional capital", arguing that investment in professional relationships, collaborative learning and mentoring generates sustainable effects on the quality of education. From this

perspective, mentoring is not only a tool for individual support, but also a mechanism for strengthening institutional capacity.

In the field of language teaching, Farrell (2015) highlights the importance of guided reflection for adapting teaching strategies to the linguistic and cultural diversity of students. This approach is particularly relevant for teaching Romanian in multilingual educational contexts, where teachers must manage significant differences in linguistic competence.

The literature highlights a variety of tools used in educational mentoring to facilitate pedagogical reflection. Among the most frequently mentioned are reflective journaling, lesson observation, structured feedback, and case study analysis (Brookfield, 2017).

Reflective journaling is considered an effective tool for developing metacognitive thinking, providing teachers with the opportunity to analyze their teaching decisions and identify areas for improvement (Hatton & Smith, 1995). Lesson observation, when followed by guided reflective discussions, contributes to transforming the teaching experience into a professional learning resource (Hobson et al., 2009).

In the Republic of Moldova, educational mentoring is regulated by the Education Code, which defines the mentor as an experienced teacher with a supporting role for the professional development of other teachers. This regulation reflects European trends in the professionalization of the teaching career and the institutionalization of mentoring.

At the European level, educational policy documents emphasize the role of mentoring in increasing the quality of teaching and in supporting teachers in complex educational contexts (European Commission, 2013). Also, OECD (2019) highlights the importance of mentoring in the early years of a career, considering it a determining factor in teacher retention and performance.

The normative and theoretical benchmarks stated support the need to investigate educational mentoring as a space for reflection on professional progress in teaching the Romanian language, providing the conceptual framework for the empirical analysis carried out in this study.

3. Research Course and Method Used

The study involved 25 institutional mentors who contribute to the training of Romanian language teachers. Participants were selected from various districts, representing the three main regions of the Republic of Moldova: center, north and south, to ensure a balanced geographical distribution and contextual relevance of the data.

The research had a descriptive-analytical nature and aimed to investigate how educational mentoring contributes to the development of professional reflection and progress in Romanian language teaching. The methodological approach was built on a mixed, quantitative and qualitative approach, which allowed the analysis of both the frequency and organization of mentoring activities, as well as the quality of the reflective processes involved.

To carry out the study, several dimensions of analysis were established, operationalized through specific indicators. The first dimension concerns the organization of mentoring, analyzing its institutional form, the type of mentoring (formal or informal), the way it is carried out (individual or group), the existence of a mentoring plan and the number of planned activities. These indicators allowed assessing the degree of structuring and coherence of the mentoring process.

The second dimension refers to the frequency and duration of mentoring activities, analyzing the rhythm of interactions between the mentor and the mentored teacher. In this regard, indicators such as the number of monthly meetings, their average duration and regularity were monitored, essential aspects for assessing the continuity and efficiency of the professional support process.

Another important dimension of the research is the reflective tools used in mentoring, which reflect the level of development of reflective competence. The analysis focused on the use of reflective journals, lesson observation sheets, the existence of a professional portfolio, the application of periodic self-assessments and the total number of tools used in the mentoring process.

Regarding pedagogical reflection methods, they were analyzed from the perspective of the ways in which the mentor facilitates critical analysis of teaching practice. The indicators used concerned the frequency of guided reflective discussions, the use of structured feedback after activities, the analysis of video recordings of lessons, the application of case studies and the level of structuring of the reflective process.

The research also included a dimension regarding the mentor's professional experience, assessed by the number of years of teaching experience, mentoring

experience, participation in training programs, and the number of mentored teachers. This dimension allowed highlighting the relationship between professional experience and the effectiveness of mentoring activity.

Finally, the mentoring style, defined as the dominant manner of interaction between the mentor and the mentee teacher, was analyzed. The indicators focused on the type of style adopted (supportive, directive or collaborative), the degree of autonomy encouraged and the level of joint involvement in planning teaching activities.

Data were collected through questionnaires, observation sheets, analysis of mentoring documents and written reflections, and their interpretation allowed the formulation of relevant conclusions regarding the role of mentoring as a tool for professional development and optimization of Romanian language teaching.

4. Results

The results were structured on the investigated dimensions: mentoring organization, frequency and duration of activities, use of reflective tools, pedagogical reflection methods, mentor experience and mentoring style.

4.1. Organizing Educational Mentoring

The analysis of quantitative data reveals that mentoring is predominantly organized in a formalized and structured form, in accordance with the provisions of the Regulation on mentoring activity (GD no. 608/2024). Of the total number of respondents: 72% declared that they participate in a formal mentoring program; 28% indicated the existence of informal forms of mentoring; 80% carry out individual mentoring activities; only 20% participate in group mentoring; 88% confirmed the existence of a mentoring plan developed prior to the activities. The results demonstrate a clear orientation towards institutionalized mentoring, which confirms the coherent implementation of educational policies in the field. The presence of a mentoring plan in most cases indicates a high level of organization and professional commitment. The low share of group mentoring suggests a limited use of collaborative learning, an aspect also reported in the specialized literature as being an insufficiently exploited direction in educational mentoring.

4.2. Frequency and Duration of Mentoring Activities

Regarding the distribution of the frequency of meetings, it was found: weekly meetings – 36%; bimonthly meetings – 44%; monthly meetings – 20%. The average duration of a mentoring session is between 60 and 90 minutes, with an average of 72 minutes. The data indicate a satisfactory regularity of mentoring activities, which allows monitoring professional progress and adjusting pedagogical interventions. The higher frequency is specific to novice teachers, which confirms the role of mentoring in the professional integration stage.

4.3. Reflective tools used in mentoring

The quantitative analysis of the use of reflective tools reveals the following distribution: 84% – lesson observation sheet, reflective journal – 76%; professional portfolio – 68%. The results indicate a consistent use of reflective tools, which confirms the orientation of mentoring towards the development of reflective competence. The reflective journal and the observation sheet prove to be the central tools of the mentoring process, facilitating the critical analysis of teaching activity. Teachers highlighted the fact that the systematic use of these tools contributes to awareness of their own practices, identification of methodological errors, and improvement of Romanian language teaching strategies.

4.4. Methods of Pedagogical Reflection

The data analysis indicated the following frequency of use of reflective methods: Guided reflective discussions – 82%; Structured feedback – 78%; Lesson analysis – 61%; Reduced video analysis 24%; Moderate case study – 46%. There is a clear preference for traditional reflection methods, based on dialogue and feedback. Advanced methods (video analysis, case study) are less used, which can be explained by the lack of specific methodological training and technical resources. The level of structuring of reflection is predominantly medium–high, which indicates the existence of a functional framework for pedagogical analysis, but also potential for optimization.

4.5. Mentor Experience and Mentoring Style

Of the total number of mentors investigated, 64% have over 15 years of teaching experience, 24% between 10 and 15 years, and only 12% have less than 10 years of experience in teaching. Regarding specific mentoring experience, 56% of respondents have practiced mentoring for over 5 years, and 72% have participated in continuing education programs dedicated to educational mentoring.

Also, most mentors (68%) coordinated the professional activity of more than three mentored teachers, which indicates a constant and systematic involvement in the support and professional development processes. The accumulated experience allowed them to more effectively identify the difficulties encountered by mentored teachers, to provide relevant feedback and to propose pedagogical solutions adapted to the specific educational context of teaching the Romanian language.

The results reveal a positive relationship between the level of professional experience of mentors and the quality of mentoring activities, expressed through the coherence of interventions, the continuity of support offered and the diversified use of reflection tools. Mentors with extensive experience demonstrate an increased capacity to capitalize on real teaching situations as professional learning opportunities and to support the reflective progress of mentored teachers.

4.6. Mentoring Style

According to the data obtained, 72% of the participants indicated that the mentor encouraged their professional autonomy, and 68% perceived the mentoring style as predominantly collaborative. The supportive style is characteristic of the initial stages of mentoring, when the mentored teacher requires constant guidance and clear feedback. As the mentoring relationship evolves, a gradual shift towards a collaborative style is observed, based on dialogue, joint reflection and co-construction of pedagogical solutions. The reflective-formative style, specific to mentors with long experience, is characterized by encouraging critical thinking, in-depth analysis of teaching situations and valorizing the mentored teacher's professional experience.

The results confirm that a flexible mentoring style, adapted to the level of experience of the mentored teacher, contributes significantly to the efficiency of the mentoring process.

5. Discussions

The research results confirm the role of educational mentoring as a functional mechanism for supporting professional reflection and didactic progress in teaching the Romanian language. The analysis of the investigated dimensions highlights the fact that the effectiveness of mentoring does not derive exclusively from its formal existence, but from the way it is structured, the pace of activities and the quality of the reflective interaction between the mentor and the mentored teacher.

A first relevant aspect is the high degree of formalization of mentoring, correlated with the existence of mentoring plans and the predominantly individual conduct of activities. These characteristics support the idea that institutionalized mentoring creates favorable premises for monitoring professional progress and for coherent pedagogical interventions. However, the low share of group mentoring suggests a limited use of collective reflection and peer learning, although the specialized literature emphasizes the benefits of sharing experience in professional communities.

The relatively constant frequency of mentoring meetings indicates a continuity of support provided to teachers, especially for novice teachers. This regularity allows not only to identify teaching difficulties, but also to track the evolution of reflective competence over time. The data suggest that mentoring becomes more effective when designed as a longitudinal process, rather than as a one-off intervention.

The consistent use of reflective tools, especially observation sheets and reflective journals, confirms the mentorship's orientation towards critical analysis of teaching practice. These tools facilitate the transition from descriptive to analytical reflection, allowing teachers to problematize their pedagogical decisions and identify directions for optimizing Romanian language teaching. At the same time, the reduced use of video analysis and case studies indicates the existence of methodological and logistical limits, which restrict the potential for deep reflection.

The professional experience of mentors proves to be a determining factor in the quality of the mentoring process. Mentors with extensive experience demonstrate a superior ability to adapt support strategies to the needs of mentored teachers and to transform concrete teaching situations into professional learning contexts. Effective mentoring requires not only solid pedagogical skills, but also developed reflective and relational skills.

The identified mentoring style, predominantly collaborative and autonomy-oriented, reflects a paradigm shift from traditional directive models. This orientation favors the assumption of professional responsibility by the mentored teacher and

contributes to the consolidation of the didactic identity, an essential aspect in teaching the Romanian language in a complex curricular and sociolinguistic context.

6. Implications and Future Directions

In practical terms, the results highlight the need to strengthen the reflective dimension of mentoring through the systematic use of teaching practice analysis tools. The integration of reflective journals, structured feedback and guided observations should become a constant of mentoring activity, not an option dependent on the individual initiative of the mentor.

At the institutional level, the results suggest the opportunity to expand group mentoring and collaborative forms of professional reflection. Creating communities of practice for Romanian language teachers could contribute to diversifying pedagogical perspectives and reducing professional isolation, especially in educational contexts characterized by linguistic and cultural diversity.

Another important direction concerns the ongoing training of mentors. Developing skills to facilitate reflection, using advanced methods (video analysis, case studies, guided self-assessment) and managing the mentor-mentee relationship are areas that require increased attention in training programs. Investing in the quality of mentors has a direct impact on the efficiency of the mentoring process and the quality of Romanian language teaching.

Looking ahead, future research could explore the impact of mentoring on student performance, as well as the relationship between the types of reflection developed in mentoring and concrete teaching-learning outcomes. Also, expanding the sample and including the perspectives of mentored teachers would allow for a more nuanced understanding of the dynamics of educational mentoring.

7. Conclusion

The study highlights that educational mentoring constitutes a coherent and effective framework for reflection on professional progress in Romanian language teaching. When systematically organized, supported by appropriate reflective tools and carried out in a collaborative climate, mentoring contributes significantly to the development of teaching competence and the optimization of pedagogical practices.

The results demonstrate that the reflective dimension of mentoring is closely correlated with the mentor's experience, the frequency of activities and the style of interaction adopted. Experienced mentors with a flexible style foster professional autonomy and critical thinking of mentored teachers, essential aspects in a field such as Romanian language teaching, characterized by curricular dynamism and educational diversity.

In conclusion, educational mentoring goes beyond the initial support function and emerges as a strategic tool for continuous professional development. Its systematic use can contribute to the consolidation of a culture of reflection and teaching quality, with lasting effects on the educational process and on the training of Romanian language teachers.

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