

V International Forum on Teacher Education

The Qualification of Teachers in Bulgaria – Necessity or Obligation

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Abstract

The report presents the main priorities of the ongoing training of pedagogical specialists in Bulgaria in terms of educational reforms. It traces the development of the main goals, the challenges and the opportunities for improving the competence of teachers. The report analyses the state educational standard status and professional development of teachers, directors and other pedagogical specialists in the system of preschool and school education.

Paper presents a part of a study aimed at examining the state of the system of teacher training, opportunities for optimizing the qualification system, the degree of teachers' motivation to participate in In-service training. More specifically, the object of the study is the satisfaction of the teachers of the programs and projects for training, their preferred organizational forms, motives for participation / non-participation in training, incentives that would attract young people to the teaching profession and others. The main research question in the study is „What are the factors that are most highly influence teachers to participate in training activities to enhance their competencies and personal and professional development?“. Anonymous survey conducted among teachers from schools and kindergartens in Bulgaria (Pernik, Sofia region, Stara Zagora and Pazardzhik) is used as a research method.

The main conclusions from the survey are: capabilities of different organizational forms to enhance personal and professional competencies of teachers are not used to the maximum extent; factors that motivate teachers to participate in training activities are useful training that challenge their creativity and innovation, and the achievement of their personal educational goals; forthcoming evaluation of teachers has a positive impact on the level of motivation for professional development; teachers are insufficiently involved in research and forums. In this context, they are made some recommendations for the use of all qualification forms that are included in the State educational standard for teachers' professional development (including participation in research and forums) and taking into account specific needs of teachers relevant and important topics, forms and methods of training.

Keywords: teacher qualification, qualification standard, motivation, priorities for professional development.

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Introduction

The qualification of teachers is one of the key indicators of the quality of education in Bulgaria. Several studies show that the main reason for the high achievements of students are competencies of teachers, rather than other factors such as organization, management, financial and other parameters. This fact determines the relevance and importance of the topic of initial, ongoing and maintenance qualification of teachers.

The acquisition of key competencies of teachers during their training in universities and their continuous improvement through participation in trainings, forums and other training forms a possible way to improve the quality of education. Especially valuable nowadays are not only academic and methodological knowledge and skills of teachers, but also their social competence. The attitude towards the values and the responsibility for the institutional development, skills for self-reflection and self-evaluation, partnership and shared experience, achievements and practices are a small part of the totality of social knowledge and skills that must have contemporary teacher.

Policies related to the continuing professional development of educational professionals stem from a number of European and national strategic documents (Strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth „Europe 2020“ strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training „Education and Training 2020“ European Qualifications framework for lifelong learning, National strategy for lifelong learning for the 2014-2020 year National strategy for development of pedagogical staff 2014-2020 year and others). In these documents main priorities in terms of training and qualification of teachers are linked to measures to continuous competence development of pedagogical specialists, improving the attractiveness of the teaching profession, retain qualified personnel in the teaching profession and attracting young people to the teaching profession.

A special place in the strategic guidelines occupies National Strategy for Development of pedagogical staff 2014-2020 year. The strategy is reported as negative trend insufficient involvement of teachers in vocational training — both in the short-term training (60 hours) and in long-term training (over 60 hours) and insufficiently studied motivational profile of teachers. In the Strategy shows that in most European countries continuing professional development is part of the professional duties of teachers and professional development opportunities are a major motivational factor for participation in activities of continuing training. So far the ongoing training of teachers in Bulgaria is not compulsory. In this regard, the Strategy set a main goal to build a „unified and efficient system of education, training, continuing training and opportunities for the professional development of teaching staff“ (National Strategy for Development of pedagogical staff 2014-2020 year, p. 33).

The main priorities and measures of the Strategy were reflected in the Law on preschool and school education, which is the new legal document in the context of reforms of education in Bulgaria. The law provides 19 state educational standards, one of which refers to the professional development of educational professionals.

Purpose and objectives of the study

The aim of this study was to trace the effect of the qualification forms among teaching professionals in Bulgaria (in particular among teachers), according to the regulations of the State Education Standard for continued training for the period 2016-2018 year. More specifically, the study has the following tasks:

- To establish basic forms of continuing education, in which teachers have participated in the period 2016-2018 year.
- To investigate the level of satisfaction of teachers trainings in this period.
- To trace the main factors that motivate (discourage) teachers to participate in forms of continuing training.
- To identify preferred topics for teachers training.
- To provide recommendations to optimize the system for continuous training of teachers.

State educational standard for ongoing teacher training applied in Bulgaria since the beginning of the 2016-2017 school year, ie more than two years. In the publications are not available enough data on the benefits of trainings during this period, which determines the relevance of the theme for the continuing training of teachers as a subsequent stage of the continuous improvement of knowledge and skills. In search of answer to the question "Obligation or need is ongoing training for teachers in Bulgaria?", before research practice standing basic questions, such as:

- What are the most common forms of continuing training involving teachers?
 - Do you use full variety of options provided by the State educational standard for continued training of teachers?
 - Satisfied are teachers the knowledge and skills during the training?
 - Are motivated teachers to develop their competencies?
 - What are the main factors that motivate (discourage) teachers to participate in forms of training?
 - What are the favorite topics for training? And other.
- Without being exhaustive, the study is an attempt to answer these important questions.

Literature review

Teacher qualifications include their education in universities (initial pedagogical and methodological training) and their continuous learning and professional development throughout their careers. The educational environment is dynamic and constantly sets new requirements and responsibilities to the teaching profession. Despite the knowledge and skills of teachers during their initial training and the efforts of universities to update their curricula and programs of continuing competence development, of teachers during the implementation of their employment, depends largely on the quality of students' learning. Today is particularly important for teachers to expand their competencies, observing the principles of lifelong learning in order to meet the requirements of modern educational environment (Feiman-Nemser, 2001, McDiarmid & Clevenger-Bright, 2008). Teachers must be able to support the learning of students (Abbatt and McMahon, 1993) to give a range of values of students (Cochran-Smith, 2006), to advise and support (Conway et al., 2009) and so on to form students as citizens of the future. They must constantly reflect knowledge and practices or, as he writes Fullan (2001), successful change in education lies in the improvement of group relationships and the exchange of best practices among teachers.

The ongoing training of teachers is a factor in the quality of education, as well as a criterion for measuring the achievement of quality education. After taking into account the negative trends listed in the National Strategy for the development of pedagogical staff 2014 - 2020 year for the ongoing training of teachers, the Law on preschool and school education as a basic document of reforms in Bulgarian

education requires teachers and other pedagogical specialists continuously improve their skills. According to Art. 219, para. 2 pt. 4 of the Law on preschool and school education, teachers are required to maintain and improve their skills according to organizational development policies of the institution and the specific needs of children and students with whom to work to improve the quality of their education (Law on preschool and school education). Teaching professionals[†] (including teachers) are required annually to develop their skills in order to improve their performance and increase performance and quality of training of children and students (Law on preschool and school education, art. 221, para. 3). The qualification of teachers is carried out by specialized service units, universities and research organizations at national, regional and municipal levels and is measured in credit qualification or professional degrees. Each teacher is required to raise their qualifications approved by the Ministry of Education programs (not less than 48 academic hours for every four years — the period of appraisal of pedagogical specialists. Qualification is performed as internal training activity at the institution — not less than 16 academic hours per year for each educational specialist. In internal qualification are not awarded credits (Law on preschool and school education, Art. 222, para. 1 and par. 3 Art. 223).

More detailed requirements for the qualification of teachers are presented in the state educational standard (Ordinance № 12 from 1 September 2016 on the Status and professional development of teachers, managers and other pedagogical specialists). In the Standard, the upgrading of the qualification is defined as „a continuous process of improvement and enrichment of the competencies of the pedagogical specialists for the effective fulfillment of the requirements of the performed work and for the career development“.

The main objectives are placed in State educational standards for teacher qualifications include:

- Updating or improving the competence or acquire new competencies, according to the professional profile of the post of "teacher".
- Implementation of the policy of the educational institution to ensure progress and improve educational outcomes for children and students, for their support and counseling.
- Satisfying the professional interests of teachers and enable planning of personal and professional development and career advancement.
- Creating conditions for exchange of best practices in the institution and its transformation into an environment of creativity and innovation.
- Increasing the attractiveness of the teaching profession and social status of teachers (Ordinance № 12 from 1 September 2016, Art. 43, para. 3).

The teacher chooses in what qualification forms to include. These objectives are realized in accordance with the level of professional development of teachers, depending on the results and recommendations of his attestation[‡], and in accordance with national, regional, municipal and school

[†] According to Bulgarian legislation pedagogical specialists are all involved in education who perform standard of teaching, namely: directors of kindergartens, schools and centers of support for personal development, vice-principals, teachers, educators, psychologists, school counselors, speech therapists, rehabilitation of hearing and speech, accompanists, choreographers, coaches in sport, the heads of "Information and communication technologies"..

[‡] Attestation of teachers is not yet implemented in the Bulgarian educational system. Conducting appraisals of teachers will follow in the upcoming school year 2019/2020.

policy. Summary target orientation of the policy of continuing training is presented in Figure 1.

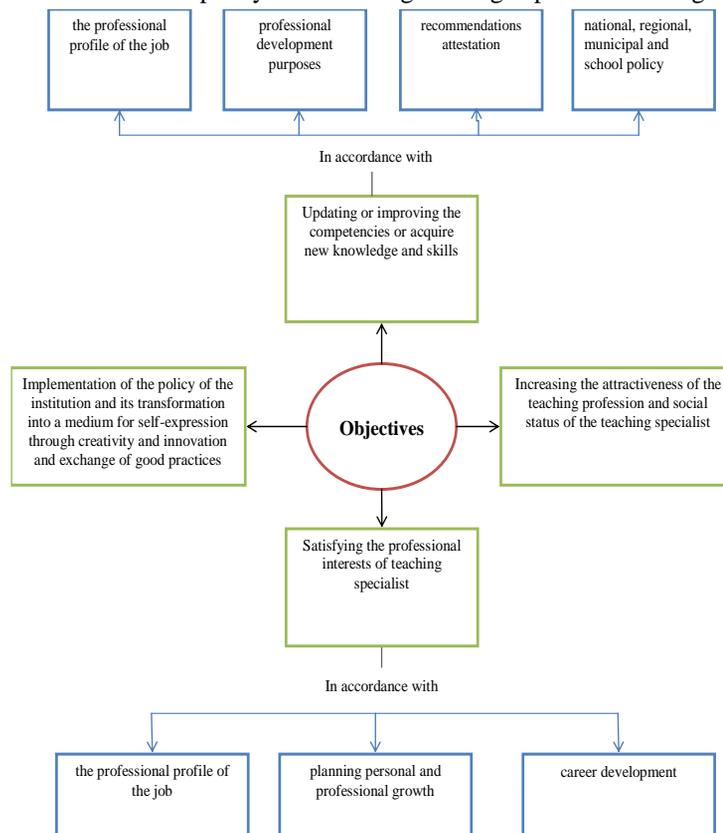


Figure 1. Objectives of the qualifications of the education specialists

Ongoing training, the subject of this study is „aimed at continuing professional and personal development within a lifelong learning oriented career development of educational professionals and their successful realization (Ordinance № 12 from 1 September 2016, Art. 45, para. 1 pt. 2).

The State Education Standard provides various forms of continuing training:

- Courses, seminars, trainings, workshops, lectures and other for: induction training; to periodically update their knowledge in a relevant subject, develop skills for teaching key competences for knowledge and application of innovative approaches in education, career counseling and guidance of students, etc. ; Integrated training; thematic training, etc.
- Specializations that support methodological, pedagogical and psychological training of teachers in a particular subject area.
- Professional - education specializations.
- Master classes - interactive form of training of teachers-innovators dedicated to sharing educational achievements, exchange of positive experience, discussing current trends and application of innovative technologies and practices.
- Forums (conferences, competitions, workshops, etc.) for presentation of results of

studies, research and creative activity, professional manifestation and to exchange experience and practices (Art. 47 of Ordinance № 12 from 1 September 2016) – Figure 2.

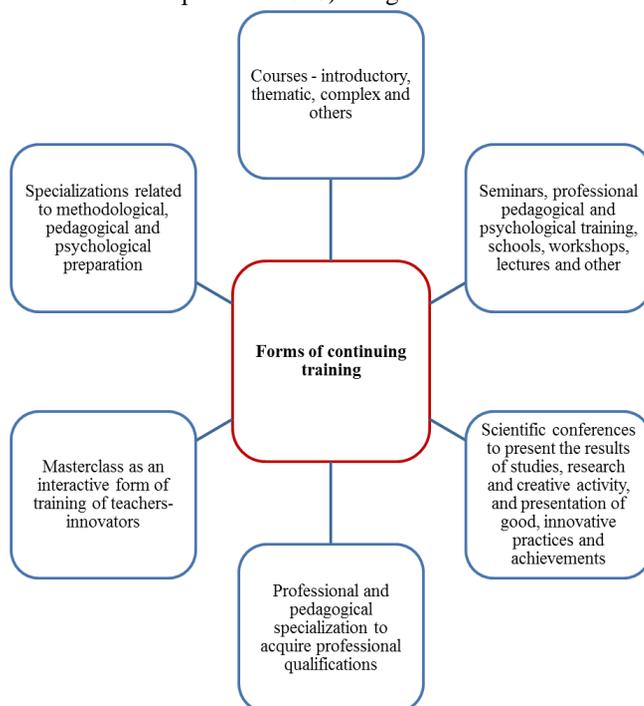


Figure 2. Organizational forms of continuing training

At the beginning of each school year, educational institutions (kindergartens and schools) prepare an annual activity plan (among other documents reflecting their policies for development of the organization), and plan training of pedagogical specialists is part of the annual plan. It is prepared according to the provided annual funding for training and recognizes the opportunities for participation in international and national programs and projects. Plan to be approved qualification rules for qualified institutional level.

Methodology

The main methods used in the study to achieve the objective and tasks are:

- Theoretical analysis of literature and especially the regulations on the problems of the topic, summary, formulation of conclusions and recommendations.
- Questionnaire survey.
- Interviews with some of the respondents.
- Statistics and diagnostic methods for the analysis of research results.

The study used quantitative method - filling out an anonymous questionnaire with established standardized selection responses (each question is given the opportunity to select another, different from those replies) and qualitative methods - interviews with some of the respondents, followed by analysis of results. The survey was conducted online and is the main method in the study. The choice of this method is based on the ability to cover a larger number of respondents from different regions in the country with minimal financial and time resources and the rapid collection, processing and analysis of data. Interviews

are selected as a complementary method. They provide an opportunity to study the problem in depth, due to the possibility of carrying out cross-checked with information gathered from the survey and any extra questions that are not pre-defined.

The survey was conducted among 185 teachers of kindergartens and schools in Pernik, Stara Zagora, Pazardzhik and Sofia.

Results

Through the study confirms the initial hypothesis of the author that teachers become more involved in short-term training (78% of the respondents), than in forms related to scientific research and surveys (Chart 1).

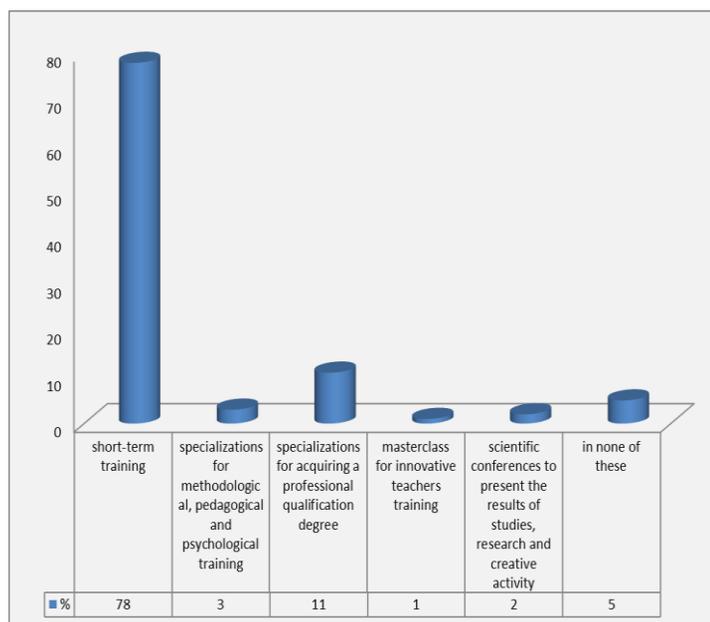


Chart 1. Answers to the question „In which of these organizational forms of continuing training you have participated in the last two years?

Part of the respondents have received a degree of professional qualification (11%), but few of them have participated in specializations for methodological support (3%) represented are his scientific research on various forums (2%) or visited training for innovative teachers (or master classes) — 1%. This means that no full use of the opportunities provided by Standard qualification of pedagogical specialists. According to the survey, participation in short-term training has increased in comparison with the analysis and conclusions presented in the National Strategy for the development of pedagogical staff 2014-2020 year, but participation in scientific meetings is unsatisfactory. Modern educational environment puts more and bright responsibilities to teachers. They must adapt to changing educational requirements of „customers“, to new curricula and teaching methods, to effective forms of interaction with parents and others. Participation in research would give teachers up to date information on matters of their interest from pedagogical practice. Presenting the results of studies in scientific forums would stimulate reflexive practice of teachers would enable teachers to explore and develop strategies with multiple solutions.

The respondents identified as most important these learning themes that are related to the

acquisition of competencies for management of modern educational environment (68% of respondents), use of modern educational technologies (65% of respondents), evaluation (self-evaluation) on the institutions (57%). Most likely these are the most deficient areas for teachers in which they do not have enough skills or do not feel confident enough. For example, self-assessment in educational institutions is a new form of quality management in the Bulgarian educational system and have not yet accumulated knowledge and experience for its effective implementation. The other two areas (educational environment and educational technologies) are associated with important educational and social competencies of teachers, such as creating a positive, tolerant and collaborative learning environment, formation of communication skills in students, skills for learning, skills for creative and critical thinking skills, decision making and problem solving, and many others. About a third of respondents considered significant topics related to working with parents and other contact groups (39%), professional portfolio (33%), modern methods of student assessment (32%) and inclusive education (27%). Teachers show a less important interest in themes of personal development, civic and social competencies. None of the teachers indicated answer „Not specified meaningful to me areas“. These data show the interest of teachers to ongoing training and their responsibility to improve their knowledge and skills. They provide information on which areas should be targeted priorities of directors of educational institutions and organizations who conduct training in the planning of trainings and internal training activities (Chart 2).

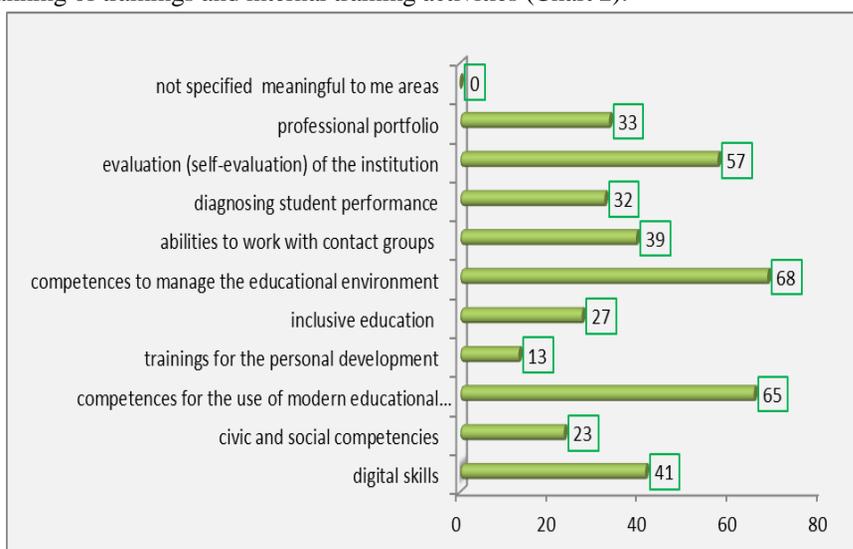


Chart 2. Answers to the question „Which fields of study are relevant and meaningful to you?“

The study answers the question about the factors that motivate/ demotivate teachers to participate in the qualification forms. The results show that the main motivator for teachers is the practical orientation of the topics for training (cited by 87% of the surveyed teachers) as well as the importance of the topics for training (85% of respondents are motivated to participate in the qualification forms of interesting topics to meet their own needs and deficits). About 1/3 of teachers identified as motivators for participation in training appropriate choice of place and time for qualifications (29% of respondents) and "obtaining training credits" (27% of respondents). These two criteria as motivating factors are not the highest priority for teachers, contrary to the expectations of the author. Surprising answers are related to two other criteria motives for participation in training forms: trainings are free (cited by 15% of the respondents) and the

opportunity for career growth (cited by 10% of teachers). This means that teachers prefer to pay for their education, but it is according to their preferences. Perhaps careers not excited enough teachers as career development of teachers is mainly horizontal hierarchical levels and much less vertically. A small part of the teachers indicated that they participate in training or have not participated in training (2%). The explanation of these answers, though a minimum number can be found in the lack of time, the presence of many other tasks, launch careers as teachers at this time, actual lack of motivation or others (Chart 3). Significantly, the factors that motivate teachers for continuing training and acquisition of new competencies or updating knowledge and skills are more than those who discourage them. To the question "What discourages you in the highest level of participation in training activities?", 98% of respondents said that they are motivated to participate in training and none of the factors did not discourage them. This means that teachers have a need for further training and development of competencies. If graded mentioned in the question criteria for the Study of disincentives according to the respondents' answers, the results are inversely proportional to the motivating factors. Again the largest share by discouraging element occupy trainings that are not practical and the lack of interesting topics. The conclusion we have is the following: it is constantly updating training programs and guides them to the competencies of the 21st century, as well as their practical, to meet the needs of teachers (Chart 3, Chart 4).

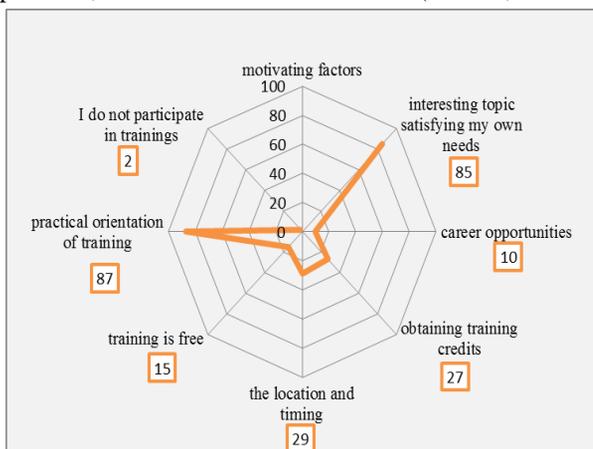


Chart 3. Answers to the question „What motivates you at the highest level when choosing a topic to participate in the qualification forms?“

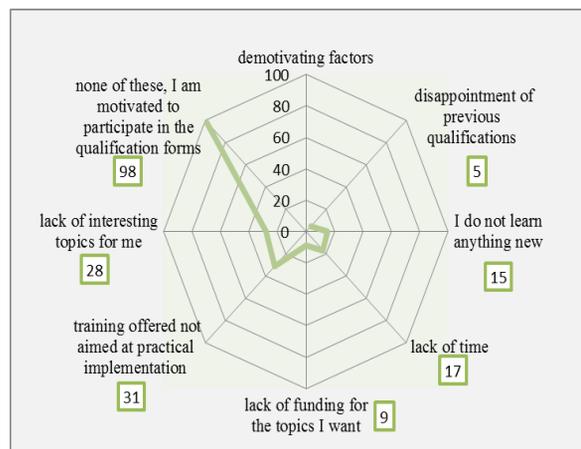


Chart 4. Answers to the question „What discourages you in the highest level of participation in training activities?“

The survey results, according to the responses of the discussed issues so far, along with the question "Which of these options determines your choice to participate in forms of training activities?" show once again that ongoing training is a necessity, not an obligation for teachers. In support of this assertion is the fact that the most important to them are opportunities to improve the competencies (for 76% of respondents) and to obtain a higher score in the upcoming attestation (in 2020), ie they are motivated development (69% of teachers). About half of respondents justify their choices to participate in training with the possibility of higher pay (52%) and creating a sense of personal achievement (41%). Although continuing training is compulsory for teachers (according to the State educational standard for qualification) for most of them it this circumstance is not decisive in choosing to participate in training (23% of respondents). Only 2% say they do not participate in forms of qualification (a fact that was

reported in the previous question). Again, can make assumptions that are teachers who are at the end of their career and are not motivated to qualify or are newly appointed teachers who have not yet joined in forms of qualification (Chart 5).

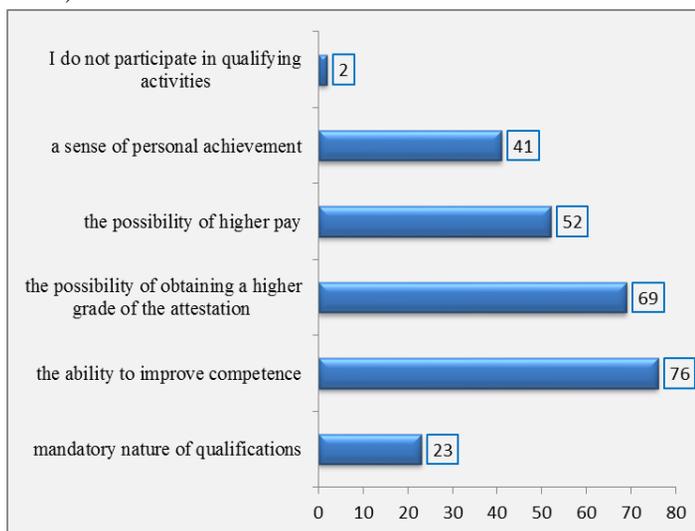


Chart 5. Answers to the question „Which of these options determines your choice to participate in forms of training activities?“

As mentioned above, in the survey were given the opportunity to freely express opinions from teachers. Part of teachers surveyed were interviewed for further clarification of issues related to ongoing training that comment in the next section.

Discussions

The survey results, interviews and free answers to teachers, give reason to comment on the positive and negative trends to ongoing training to teachers, and upcoming opportunities to reduce the negative trends.

What share teachers?

A. Positive trends

- Trainings are an important part of the overall activity of teachers.
- For most teachers mandatory nature of qualifications is not decisive in their choice to participate in the qualification forms.
- Teachers recognize that the educational environment is amended rapidly. Entering new technologies and they are not always ready to respond to the needs of students and parents. Not always have the improvements needed and current knowledge and skills that enable them to meet the needs of modern times and modern learning environment.
- Teachers are motivated to enhance their competences and apply the principles of the concept of lifelong learning.
- They are willing to engage in all forms of continuing education, which are regulated by the State Educational Standard (including short-term training, fellowships, scientific forums, etc.).

B. Negative trends

- Part of the qualification forms do not provide teachers new skills or do not conform fully to their needs to acquire new competencies adequate to the modern educational environment.
- Not in all cases, teachers have the right to free choice of topics for training, because sometimes the selection is made by the management of the school institution.
- Teachers experiencing some financial difficulties in their desire to participate in specializations for acquiring qualifications or to participate in conferences and publication of best practices as these financial costs are not reimbursed by the budget of school organization.

Problems pointed out by teachers are understood by the governing bodies in education. With a project of the Ministry of Education and Science (Project „Qualification for professional development of pedagogical specialists“, financed by the Operational Program „Science and education for smart growth“ 2014-2020[§]), from the beginning of 2019 are financed procedures for acquiring professional-qualification degrees. This is the second phase of the project and the priorities of the previous phase are retained (in the first phase funded programs aimed at innovative methods of teaching and management, and positive learning environment). After taking into account the need to expand research, including among teachers, Ministry of Education is considering further projects related to supporting research searches teachers. Envisaged training of teachers and students at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (Program „Education in science“), which will support the research.

Projects activities will largely reduce the negative trends identified by teachers. On the one hand the qualifying forms are target-oriented contemporary problems providing capabilities transformation from traditional education to digital education and implementation of new training technologies. They follow the priorities for the education system and aimed at the modern requirements of the labor market and consumers of educational services. The projects aim to support research of teachers. On the other hand they finance the ongoing training of teachers (and other educational specialists), giving a choice. Teachers can choose what form of training to include, what theme to choose, to choose specialization in acquiring professional qualification or to take advantage of complex opportunities that provide them with the projects. In addition to these advantages, the project "Qualification for professional development of pedagogical specialists" by specially designed electronic platform that serves the project activities will be collected statistical database of visited topics of pedagogical specialists and will analyze the acquired competencies and satisfaction teachers trainings. This will enable accountability for visited and conducted training activities, and assessing the quality of trainings.

Conclusion

It is undisputed that the competence of the teachers depends on the formation of competitive young people prepared for the jobs of tomorrow. Education is a system of the future, and the teachers are the ones who need to Prepare the students for this future and it so as to meet the demands of employers. And this problem will be more relevant in the future as requirements of the labor market are constantly changing. Most professions are digitized. Create new service sectors and products, and artificial intelligence are increasingly replacing human labor. More jobs are replaced and will be replaced by

[§] Project "Qualification for professional development of pedagogical specialists" - <https://teachers.mon.bg/ShowNews.aspx?NewsId=52>.

machines. These circumstances again confirm the need for advanced programs and practices that create and develop skills for the 21st century. They would have its maximum effect if targeted ensure the transformation from traditional education to digital education and are oriented towards new technologies and modern educational environment.

The survey can draw the following conclusions and recommendations:

Teachers in Bulgaria have a need for training to improve their skills. Their participation in the qualification forms is not determined by the mandatory nature of the training. Motivate them the desire to increase the competences of the application of modern educational technology in teaching and effective management of the educational environment. For teachers, it is important areas of training offered are relevant and meaningful to them, and to meet the training areas that are deficient for them. These are the main motivators for the tested pedagogical specialists. It is therefore necessary to more fully study the needs of teachers and their satisfaction with the ongoing qualifications.

Unsatisfactory to determine the participation of pedagogical specialists in scientific forums, research and master class for teachers-innovators. They are most often retrained in short-term training. Teachers should receive more methodological support for conducting research and financing for presentation of research results. This expands the scope of their competence based on providing opportunities for reflection and exchange of ideas and best practices and ensuring greater efficiency of the implementation of the Standard of status and qualification of teachers and use of all the opportunities provided by it. With the creation of skills for scientific studies teachers are trained to acquire professional-qualification degrees as educational research are part of the requirements for obtaining such degrees.

Conducting continuous monitoring of satisfaction of teachers in training and support, mutual reflection and exchange of best practices ensure the application of the concept of „lifelong learning“ as a continuous process and assistance to use all opportunities for training and creating a uniform system of classification that corresponds to the national policy for the development of teaching staff.

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