

Findings from international studies suggest that policy investments aimed at improving teacher quality may be associated with enhanced student performance. State policies regarding teacher education, certification, recruitment, and professional development can make a significant difference in the qualifications and competencies teachers bring to their work.

The present research investigates the correlational factors associated with the quality of teaching staff in the Romanian pre-university education system, with a particular focus on teachers' continuous professional development as part of teacher professionalization policies. Following the logic of international research in this field, the study emphasizes the investigation of the effects of continuous professional development, understood as direct state investments, on the outcomes of primary school students.

The dissertation is grounded in a complex sequential research design comprising three analyses: legislative analysis, impact analysis, and an explanatory case study, each with its own research design. The theoretical framework employed in the study is rooted in effectiveness research and builds upon the two models commonly used in the literature to measure teacher quality: the value-added model and observation-based evaluation. In the impact analysis, I employ a reinterpretation of the value-added model, while in the case study I use the observation-based model. For the analysis of public policies, I relied on Hall's social learning theory and Vedung's taxonomy in order to map the measures adopted by policy makers to improve teacher quality, with a particular emphasis on affirmative measures targeting rural areas.

The research findings indicate that teachers' continuous professional development is institutionally understood primarily as an administrative obligation rather than as an investment in quality. This is suggested by the predominance of regulations: out of the 221 provisions identified during the period under analysis, 194 are regulatory measures, alongside the mandatory requirement for teachers to accumulate a certain number of professional credits, as well as selective funding mechanisms limited to specific training programs. At the level of the impact analysis, the results indicate that vulnerability-related and cultural factors remain the predictors with the greatest explanatory power for students' educational outcomes. Economic predictors become stronger as students advance through school, as suggested by the presence of variables such as area of residence and average income tax levels in the regression models explaining the results of fourth-grade students. Teachers' participation in continuous professional development did not show correlations with student outcomes; however, the proportion of substitute teachers among the total teaching staff represents an important predictor of students' Mathematics results, both in second grade and fourth grade.

The explanatory case study approached teachers' continuous professional development from a different perspective, namely as a school-based training program. The findings of this exploratory study suggest that school-level continuous professional development has effects on both the teaching process and student outcomes. However, the study also highlights the importance of teachers' professional profiles, as teachers may respond differently to the same training program. These variations are shaped by teachers' motivations and levels of engagement, but are also influenced by school culture and the leadership of the principal.

The findings of this research constitute an important input for public education policies aimed at increasing equity within the Romanian education system, particularly in addressing the rural–urban divide through improving the quality of human resources in education.