

TEACHERS' EDUCATORS IN ROUMANIA. A QUALITY APPROACH

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Abstract. The following paper presents the results of a study regarding the quality of teacher training and the implications of the Bologna Process upon Romanian teacher training. In order to fulfil the objectives of our research we have questioned 50 university teachers working in 15 Romanian Teacher Training Departments about several aspects involved in teacher training: quality of teacher training, strengths and weaknesses of actual Romanian teacher training, student centred strategies in teacher training, causes involved in the lack of quality of teacher training and effective ways of improving teacher training. We analyse the results of the research referring to the specific objectives and pre-requisites of our investigation.

Keywords: pre-service teacher training, teacher training system, quality in teacher training, European credit transfer system

Introduction

In Romania, the Teacher Training Departments (TTD) are responsible with pre-service teacher training, which is organized within universities, based on specific regulations and has an independent syllabus. According to the data available on the site of the Ministry of Education³, in Romania, there are at present 44 TTDs in the state universities and 9 TTDs in private universities.

Within the context of the Bologna Process, pre-service teacher training, as part of the Romanian higher educational system, has experienced several changes in last years, even if, not all the changes reflect necessarily the European trends in this area. Starting with the accademical year 2005-2006, pre-service teacher training is organized on two degrees (Level one, taking place in the same time with the Bachelor's degree and Level two, simultaneously with the Master degree). The main changes occurred in pre-service teacher training in the last years were:

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³ The name of the Ministry of education varied over time: Ministry of Education, Research and Youth , Ministry of National education, Ministry of Education, Research and Innovation, Ministry of Education, Research, Youth and Sports (the current title), abbreviated as MERYS

- the introduction of the interview as a way of selecting students who enrol in pre-service teacher training;
- more hours for pedagogical disciplines within the syllabus of TTDs: Pedagogy I (Fundamental issues of pedagogy and Theory and methodology of curriculum) and Pedagogy II (Theory and methodology of instruction and Theory and methodology of assessment): 56 hours/semester instead of 42 granted with 5 credits;
- the introduction of Classroom management and Computer assisted instruction, as compulsory subjects in the third year;
- the introduction of a graduation exam for the end of Level I and Level II.

The legislative acts governing the changes listed above are: Law no. 288/24.06.2004 regarding higher education organization, Order no. 3928/2005 regarding quality assurance in higher education, Order no. 3617/16.03.2005 regarding the application of ECTS, Order no. 4343/17.06.2005 and Order no. 4316/03.06.2008, regarding the TTD syllabus, according to which, the Program for obtaining the TTD certificate is organized on two levels:

1. *Level I (30 credits)* takes place during the bachelor's degree, ends with a certificate of graduation, representing the partial certification for the teaching profession and conferring the right to exercise temporarily the teaching profession until acquiring a certificate "on the job confirmation" ("Definitvat").

2. *Level II (30 credits)* can be followed after the bachelor's degree and before the exam for acquiring tenure (Definitvat) and ends with obtaining a certificate of graduation of TTD.

At present, Level I includes the same number of subjects as before the introduction of the Bologna structure, but more hours and, also, provides classroom management and computer assisted instruction and an assessment portfolio as compulsory, for final assessment. Level II includes subjects like Psycho-pedagogy of adolescents, young and adults, Design and management of educational programs, Didactics of the teaching field, Practical work and two optional subjects and a final assessment portfolio, so we can say that the quality of pre-service teacher training increases quantitatively and qualitatively.

Methodological research

The present research is part of a more extensive project, whose aim is to identify the implications of the

Bologna Process on pre-service teacher training. In the global context of our research, we considered necessary to identify and analyse the opinion of university teachers working in Romanian TTDs regarding: quality of pre-

service teacher training, strengths and weaknesses of present pre-service teacher training, main negative/positive influences upon pre-service teacher training and ways of improving it.

The objectives of this research, based on a questionnaire addressed to teachers working in TTDs were:

- To outline a concept of quality of pre-service teaching training in the opinion of teacher educators.
- To identify the weight of student centred teaching and learning in pre-service teacher training;
- To identify strengths and weaknesses of the current pre-service teacher training;
- To establish a hierarchy of the aspects causing the lack of quality in pre-service teacher training;
- To prioritize the ways of improving pre-service teacher training.

In the context of our research we also wanted to test five specific assumptions (formulated accordingly with the field of educational policies):

- There are significant differences between the ways in which teacher educators perceive the quality of pre-service teacher training.
- The actual number of hours students spend for studying the subjects involved in pre-service teacher training does not match the number of credits granted for these subjects.
- Pre-service teacher training largely correspond to needs of the teaching profession in terms of scientific content and less in terms of teaching and managerial skills.
- The main causes contributing to the lack of adequate quality of pre-service teacher training are low student's motivation and specific national legislation.
- Pre-service teacher training can be improved by reconfiguring the practical work (quantitatively and qualitatively) from the teacher training program.

The questionnaire regarding teacher educators opinions and views on pre-service teacher training contains twelve questions, of four different types. We constructed the questionnaire taking into account the main changes of pre-service teacher training after the implementation of the Bologna regulations and the main aspects involved in the quality of initial teacher education: quality of pre-service teacher training, the relation between scientific, pedagogical and managerial information and abilities involved in pre-service teacher training, positive and negative aspects of training, strengths and weaknesses of actual initial teacher education, causes lowering the quality of pre-service teacher training and ways of improving pre-service teacher training.

The sample consisted of 50 teachers working in the TTDs from 15 Romanian state universities: West University of Timișoara (30%), Polytechnic University of Timisoara (12%), University of Bucharest (10%), Lower Danube University of Galati (8%), Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu (8%), Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iași (6%), University of Craiova (6%), University of Pitești (4%), Technical University of Iași (2%), University of Bacău (2%) University of Oradea (2%), University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine Cluj (2%), Polytechnic University of Bucharest (2%), Constantin Brancuși University of Targu-Jiu (2%), University of Târgoviște (2%). 80% of the respondents teach in conventional universities, 16% in technical universities and 4% in agricultural universities. Although, at first glance, it highlights the high percentage of teachers working in conventional universities, we believe that the research data are relevant because this type of universities are providing most of the teachers that will subsequently be integrated in secondary and high school education.

From Figure 1, we can observe the accademical degree, the field of competence, the age and the gender structure of our sample.

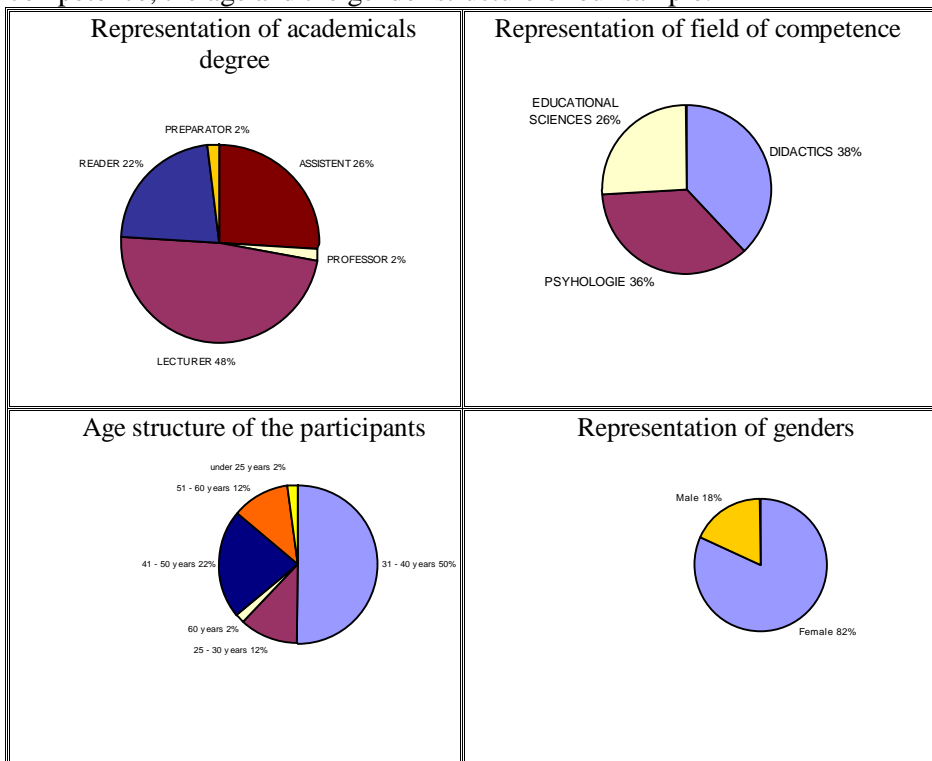


Figure 1: A series of charts presenting factual data of respondents

We present our findings in relation with the specific objectives (O) of our research:

O.1. To outline a concept of quality of pre-service teaching training in the opinion of TTDs staff.

We asked the teachers to associate tree items with the idea of quality of pre-service teaching training. Their answers outlined several significant categories listed in Figure 2. We choose to calculate the weighted value, using the following formula: $(1 \times 3 + 2 \times 2 + 3 \times 1) / (3 + 2 + 1)$. The weighted value, as an average obtained by weighting the frequencies recorded by each statement, depending on its position is a finer calculation process of ordering than the simple arithmetic mean.

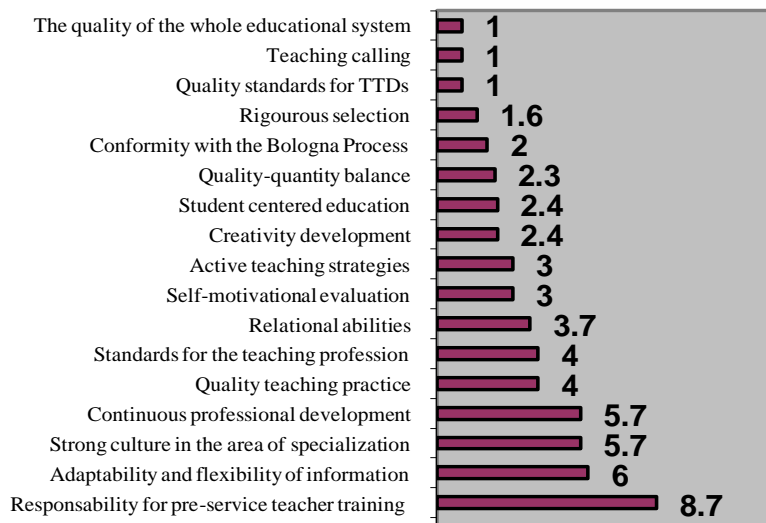


Figure 2: Quality of pre-service teacher training in the opinion of teacher educators

After statistical processing performed in SPSS, we found that the main statements that respondents associated with the idea of quality of initial teacher training refer to:

- development of teaching skills (weighted value 21): covers pedagogical skills and, also, those referring to communication, networking, research and methodology, which in the opinion of most respondents, are particularly important in terms of ensuring the quality of pre-service teacher training;
- student's interest and motivation for pre-service teacher training (weighted value 11.7) are considered by teachers essential to ensure the quality of this training; it is well known that for educational activities undertaken in higher education, student participation and interest are absolutely necessary,

although not sufficient, for ensuring the quality of university education. - acquisition of fundamental psycho-pedagogical knowledge (weighted value 11).

Among the associations made by respondents we found, also, the strong culture in the area of specialization, continuing professional development (5.7 weighted value), the high quality teaching practice and standards for the teaching profession (weighted value 4).

Self motivational assessment for the demands of the future profession has a weighted value of 3 as active teaching strategies; relational skills form a separate category in the opinion of respondents, having a weighted value of 3.7.

O.2. To identify the weight of student centered teaching and learning.

To identify the frequency of components which, in our view, circumscribe the student centred teaching (encouraging students' opinions, use of active teaching strategies, developing creativity and critical thinking, transparent evaluation process, student counselling) from the perspective of those who provide it, we asked teachers to assign each of these five elements with the corresponding frequencies: very frequently, frequently, sometimes, rarely and never. Most teachers involved in pre-service teacher training believe that student-centred learning are frequent or very frequent in the educational process conducted in TTDs, as can be seen in Figure 3.

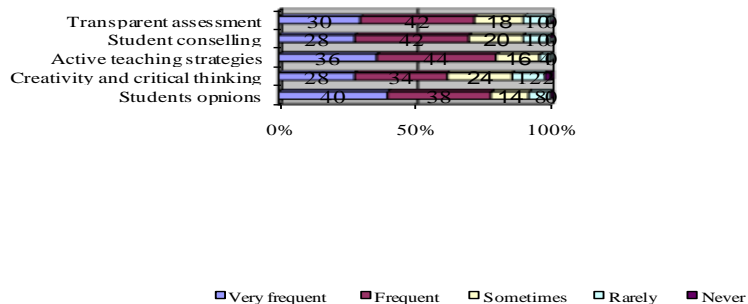


Figure 3: Frequency of student centered teaching and learning

O.3. To identify the strengths and weaknesses of the current pre-service teacher training.

To achieve this objective, we asked teachers three questions: Question 5 aimed to identify the respondents' opinions towards negative/positive aspects of pre-service teacher training; Question 7 through which we asked the participants to list two strengths and two weaknesses of initial teacher training; Question 8 aimed to identify the respondents' opinions regarding the opportunity of organizing pre-service teacher training, only as a Master degree and giving up to the current structure of pedagogical training.

The analysis and interpretation of the data we obtained after processing the responses to these three questions, reveal the following aspects:

- 48% of respondents believe that actual pre-service teacher training system has both positive and negative aspects, 16% of teachers believe that the current structure is not adequate, as opposed to 36% of respondents, who are satisfied with the current structure and organization;

- the main positive aspects of the current pre-service teacher training are: the usefulness of skills acquired at Level I in several areas, not just in the teaching career (72%), the knowledge of the teaching profession (62%) and the efficiency (money and time) of the current structure (48%);
- 60% of respondents believe that the Master program would not be an appropriate alternative, while 38% believe that this option is better than the current one; 2% of respondents did not answer this question;
- the major strengths of the current pre-service teacher training - in terms of weighted value -: refer to the insurance of complementarily between specialty and pedagogical knowledge and skills (12) and the gradual training, depending on the individual and, also, the systemical needs (10), but also the opportunity to clarify students' professional options (9.7%);
- the disadvantages are relatively numerous, the highest rates – in terms of weighted value - being obtained for: insufficient teaching practice (17.4) and lack of student motivation and interest (16.7), the inadequately integrated timetable of pedagogical syllabus in the timetable of the faculties (12.7); other disadvantages refer to the lack specific selection of students who attend the program, facultative status of the pedagogical syllabus (3.7), the low prestige of the teaching profession (3), lack of adequate funding and training facilities;

O.4. To rank the main aspects causing the lack of quality of pre-service teacher training.

In order, to identify the issues that negatively influence the quality of pre-service teacher training, we asked the university teachers to rank the main aspects that lower the quality of the education of future teachers. According to the answers showed in Figure 4, the low motivation of students preparing to become teachers (score 4.82) is the main cause of the poor quality of

initial teacher training. Financing of initial training, specific national legislation and the current structure of pre-service teacher training have approximately equal scores, ranging between 3.62 to 3.52.

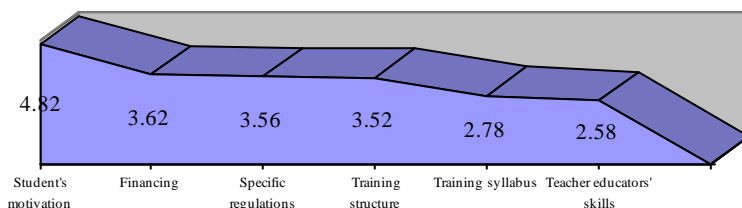


Figure 4: Causes of lack of quality of pre-service teacher training

We can notice that in the first question of the questionnaire, many teachers identified student interest and motivation to train as an essential element of ensuring the quality of initial training. The consistency of responses given by those who provide initial teaching training comes to reinforce the importance of student's motivation as an essential condition to ensure the quality of this training.

It is obvious that the success and quality of education - in any type of training - can be achieved only if the necessary resources are provided. As we all know, in education, human resources are the main resources involved in the process: teachers and students enrolled in the educational programs. Regarding teachers (respondents in this research), they considered - accountably- that the information and skills they possess are the last aspects causing the absence of an adequate quality of initial training, while the first place in this hierarchy is occupied by the motivation of students preparing to become teachers. If the students who enrol in pre-service teacher training are not sufficiently motivated, the educational activity is deeply flawed. Due to the recent developments in the Romanian society, the teaching profession has become less valued, many students who enrol in pre-service teacher training are not intrinsically motivated to become teachers, but they choose the training in order to have another option (sometimes final) on the labour market.

O.5. To rank the ways of improving teacher training.

We tried to establish the hierarchy of key changes meant to improve the quality of pre-service teacher training. As can be seen Figure 5, the first among the changes aimed to increase the quality of the initial teacher education is organizing the teaching practice in stages of 4 weeks (in each of the two semesters, students should participate only in practicing teaching in

schools); this change has received a score of 5 points being located at a distance of 1.12 points from the other elements listed in this question.

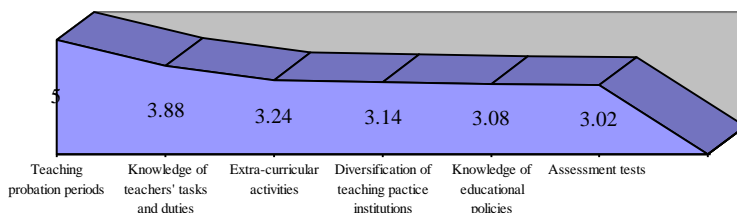


Figure 5: Ways of increasing pre-service teacher training quality

Knowing the tasks and duties of teachers in schools and the specificity of educational documents ranks second, followed by participating to extracurricular activities in schools. The diversification of teaching practice institutions (Country school inspectorates, Houses of Teaching staff, Universities), the knowledge of educational legislation and conceiving assessment tests, scored between 3.02 -3.14.

In the general context of our research, we also intended to identify the views and attitudes of those directly involved in pre-service teacher training about:

- The relevance of the current selection of students (interview) who enrol in pre-service teacher training; after statistical processing performed in SPSS, we find out that just one person among those who responded to the questionnaire considered that the interview is a relevant way of selection. 36% of respondents believe that the interview is relevant at a small extent, respectively, at a moderate extent, while 10% of the TTDs staff affirm that the interview has no relevance for its purpose; 16% of respondents believe the process of selection is appropriate, largely corresponding to the purpose it was introduced for. In our opinion, the possible reasons for the lack of effectiveness of this selection method is the time allocated to this activity (students enrol in the TTD program mainly in October, when teachers are already engaged in the teaching activities and they have not enough time to conduct professional interviews with hundreds or thousands of students, in the case of big universities); also, those who conduct these interviews are aware that the motivational spectrum of young high school graduates is not sufficiently crystallized. From our point of view, the utility of the interview lies more in its capacity to establish interpersonal relationships with students and make them accountable for their teacher training.

- the correspondence between the number of transferable credits allotted for the subjects belonging to pre-service teacher training syllabus and the actual number of hours that students spend in the study of these subjects. According to European and national regulations, the credit is a quantitative indicator of student's work, one credit point is allocated for 25 to 30 hours of study acquired through courses, seminars, independent study, projects, assessments, practical work. According to the curriculum currently available, Psychology of education, Pedagogy I, Pedagogy II and Didactics of the subject to be taught have 5 credits points, which means that, students should learn from 125 to 150 hours per semester in order to be promoted, less than for other subjects, such as Classroom management (3 credits). The teaching practice is granted with 3 credits in the fifth semester, and only 2 credits in the last semester, which means that students should spend 75-90 hours and, respectively, 50-60 hours in working for practical activities even if, through this subjects, students have the greatest opportunities to form their practical skills.

- the extent to which current initial teaching training is meeting the needs of the teaching profession in terms of scientific content, teaching skills, and classroom management information and abilities.

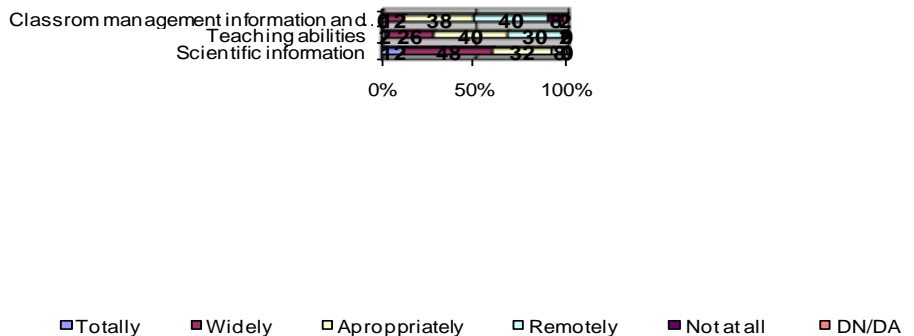


Figure 6. Teachers' opinions regarding the extent in which pre-service teacher training covers students' needs

As can be seen in Figure 6, 48% of respondents believe that, in terms of scientific content, pre-service teacher training largely corresponds to needs teaching profession. In terms of teaching skills, 40% of teachers consider these aspects appropriately covered. Regarding classroom management

information and skills, 40% of respondents consider that these aspects are approached only at a small extent, 38% in a suitable measure and only 12% say they largely correspond to the needs of teaching profession.

At the beginning of our research, we formulated five specific premises (P) regarding pre-service teacher training in the view of university teachers involved in it.

P.1. There are significant differences between the ways in which teacher educators perceive the quality of pre-service teacher education. The first premise is confirmed, given the broad range of categories (20) arising from the associations made by the respondents. The concept of quality of pre-service training subsumes a variety of aspects, the most important ones concerning the development of teaching skills (weighted value 21). Students' interest and motivation for training (weighted value 11.7) and the acquisition of basic psycho-pedagogical knowledge (weighted value 11) are located on the second and third position. With lower weighted value we found: developing creativity and student-centred learning, self-motivational assessment for future professional requirements, creation of an equitable balance between quality and quantity of information and compliance with regulations of the Bologna Process.

P.2. The actual number of hours students spend for studying the subjects involved in pre-service teacher training does not match the number of credits granted for these subjects. The second assumption is validated because the vast majority of teachers involved in initial training (80%) believe that students do not learn sufficiently for the number of credits assigned. Only 20% of respondents believe that the workload of students is in line with the number corresponding to the number of credit hours. None of the respondents believes that students learn more than is needed for the granted credits.

P.3. Pre-service teacher training largely correspond to needs of the teaching profession in terms of scientific content and less in terms of teaching and managerial skills.

This premise is confirmed entirely because: 48% of respondents believe that in terms of scientific content, initial teacher training corresponds largely to the training needs of the teaching profession; pedagogical skills are considered appropriate by 40% of the respondents; classroom management information and skills gained the highest percentage for the answer at small extent (40%), even if, the answer appropriately was chosen by 38% of the respondents.

P.4. The main causes contributing to the lack of adequate quality of pre-service teacher training are low poor student's motivation and specific national legislation. From the date we collected, we found out that the main cause contributing to lack of adequate quality of teacher education

is the motivation of students preparing to become teachers (score 4.82). Financing of initial training (score 3.62) and specific national legislation (score 3.56) are at a distance of 1.20 points from the student's motivation, which means that the fourth premise is confirmed only partially.

P.5. Pre-service teacher training can be improved by reconfiguring the practical work (quantitatively and qualitatively) from the teacher training program. Our last premise is fully confirmed because the main changes aimed to increase the quality of the pre-service teacher training are the restructuring of teaching practical works quantitatively and, also, qualitatively.

Conclusions

The present investigation allowed us to shape a picture of the current pre-service teacher training in Romania from the perspective of the Bologna requirements. Synthetically, analyzing the data presented above, we can conclude the following:

- the main factors which circumscribe the quality of pre-service teacher training are the acquirement of teaching skills, students' interest and motivation to train and basic psychological and educational knowledge;
- the current pre-service teacher training satisfies the real educational needs largely from the perspective of scientific information, appropriately in terms of teaching skills and in a small extent in terms of classroom management information and skills;

- students involved in pre-service teacher training learn less than they should according to the ECTS;

- current pre-service teacher in Romania has both positive aspects (the usefulness of teaching skills in several areas, financial and time efficiency, the provision of a progressive training) and negative (not enough teaching practice, students' low motivation and interest);
- the main cause of the lack of an appropriate quality of teacher training is the low student's motivation for the training program;
- the main manner of increasing the quality of teaching is to improve teaching practice activities.

Among the limits of our research, we mention the difficulties in achieving a national representative sample and the small number of relevant studies regarding the effects of the Bologna Process on Romanian higher education.

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