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ACADEMIC ADAPTATION – INTENSIVE PROCESS OF PREPARATION FOR PROFESSIONAL ADAPTATION

АКАДЕМИЧЕСКАЯ АДАПТАЦИЯ - ИНТЕНСИВНЫЙ ПРОЦЕСС ПОДГОТОВКИ К ПРОФЕССИОНАЛЬНОЙ АДАПТАЦИИ

Abstract:

This article analyzes various concepts regarding the need to optimize the process of adapting beginner teachers to ensure the continuity of the career path. From the academic literature researched by us, we will note only some of the multiple perspectives of professional adaptation, taking into account the following dimensions: *pedagogical adaptation* (educational aspect), *psychological adaptation* (teacher personality) and *sociocultural adaptation* (socio-cultural and relational values). The most important theoretical approaches and explanatory models are reviewed, regarding the relationship between academic adaptation as a difficult moment of adaptation in the university environment and the difficulties of professional adaptation, noting the observed impediments.

In the Republic of Moldova, the concepts of *academic adaptation* and *professional adaptation* were approached from various aspects of the theory and practice of human resource management in education, advancing research with an innovative character and relevant to the field of reference. In our view, when analyzing the theoretical and practical aspects, especially regarding *beginning*

teachers (without professional experience) and *professional adaptation* or the factors involved in *optimizing the professional adaptation process*, professional maladaptation must be understood restrictively, *depending on the personality of the teacher and on the culture of the professional environment*. To this end, beginning teachers need to have two types of information about the environment and about themselves: 1) regarding the culture and requirements of the educational environment and 2) regarding their own level of adaptation and flexibility. In this article are presented some practical ideas, through which we argue that *optimizing the professional adaptation of beginning teachers* begins with *academic adaptation*, which involves adaptation in the educational environment, adaptation to the characteristics of academic tasks. Therefore, a successful process of professional adaptation for teachers begins in the university environment and must contain special programs in which all employees in that field will be invited to participate.

Keywords: adaptation, academic adaptation, professional adaptation, beginning teachers

Introduction

In the general sense, *professional adaptation* is the process of easing a person in the professional environment, of adapting them to the work requirements and behavior of the work group. Of course, a first requirement in the process of *optimizing the professional adaptation of beginning teachers* is that as new employees they should always have a *clear and precise goal*. From an adaptive point of view, it is extremely important to both form a consistency of high organizational value and to develop the potential for change [3], [4], [13].

In current research, *professional adaptation* is evaluated on the idea of how new employees are able to cope with the stress specific to the professional environment. In our view, for beginning teachers, who have recently completed their studies and do not have professional experience, the first period of adaptation is strenuous and difficult to achieve. During this period, beginning teachers feel a state of uncertainty caused by the "employment shock", nurturing feelings of confusion and professional dissatisfaction. Based on the theoretical essence of the term *professional adaptation* identified in the literature, we must mention that the adaptation of the new employee can be monitored both informally (values, reactions and behaviors observed by the employer) and formally (activities specifically designed for that the new employee being introduced to the professional group with which he will collaborate). In particular, it is advisable to develop an *individual vocational adaptation program*, defined according to personal needs, to organize certain meetings, support sessions and professional development. If the adaptation of the new employee is not monitored, it can lead to professional dissatisfaction, reduced motivation, reduced involvement in the activities organized by the institution, non-adherence to the values of the institution, poor performance, etc. In addition, if there are many informal "antagonistic" groups in the collective, then joining the organizational culture becomes even more difficult [3], [4], [5], [11].

Certainly, the socio-economic transformations of our society influence the process of professional adaptation and give a special topicality to the researches dedicated to the adaptation of the beginning teachers. In our opinion, for educational success, it is important that each beginning teacher adapts easily and quickly to the new organizational requirements, complies with them without difficulties and achieves a balance between their own personality, work schedule requirements and student personality. In this context, professional adaptation is a result of the

interaction between the personality structure of the individual and the characteristics of the professional environment. It is also understood that adaptation to work requirements is a complex and a multidimensional process. In this sense, we consider that the adaptation to the current educational process, to the new ever-changing conditions of life, to the generation of students with modern visions, requires support for psychological balance and continuous training of the young specialist. Summarizing the stated ideas, we can state that professional adaptation, especially for beginning teachers, is a major issue that requires serious attention and complex research.

Theories and methods

Research on occupational adaptation has a considerable degree of relevance in that the dimensions analyzed can be used to develop a person's adaptive competence in a given environment. Professional adaptation involves a unique form of socio-cultural adaptation, which reflects the extent to which the new employee will be able to meet the requirements regarding organizational behavior, the accumulation of new information necessary for socio-professional integration [1], [5], [7], [13], [16].

From the perspective of understanding and using correctly the concepts used in this article, we will analyze some definitions starting from the explanation given by Jean Piaget [9, p. 95], who states that *there is adaptation when the organism changes depending on the environment, and this variation has as an effect a balance of changes between the environment and the organism, favorable to its conservation*. From this point of view, the initial process of professional adaptation must be understood as a *process of change for a better fit to the conditions of the professional environment*, more precisely, with the norms and requirements of the organization in which the new employee finds himself. This major goal involves the harmonious development of a personality capable of exercising and accepting some professional roles in relation to their own aspirations. Adaptation, mentions J. Piaget, results from the balancing of two processes: *assimilation* and *accommodation*. By *assimilation* is meant the changes that the body imposes on the objects of the surrounding world, and by *accommodation*, the opposite phenomenon, consisting in the modification of the actions of the individual in relation to the environment [ibidem, p. 20]. Therefore, in the first professional interactions between beginning and experienced teachers there is a *period of accommodation and assimilation*. Obviously, both beginning and experienced teachers focus their efforts on common goals, but their contribution differs in terms of quantity, quality and intensity. During this period, beginning teachers need moral and professional support.

The author Emil Păun [8, p. 169], quoting Lacey, identifies four stages of the professional development of the beginner in his first year of activity:

- the first period - the "honeymoon" is dominated by the euphoria of the beginning;
- the second period is dominated by the effort to understand the characteristics of the educational activity - curriculum, methodological aspects - and to adapt to the requirements arising from those;
- the beginning of a possible crisis of adaptation if the problems faced in the previous stage did not have the optimal solutions;
- it is the survival or, depending on the situation, the recognized and assumed failure.

Without proposing a detailed presentation of the psychic mechanisms in the stated stages, we emphasize that the lack of balance can be felt by beginning teachers as unpleasant and is remedied by the psychic process of balancing, *adjusting schemes by assimilation and accommodation*, which, in the end, they lead to professional adaptation.

By *assimilation*, new environmental information is integrated in the existing cognitive structures, and by *accommodation* structural changes occur in accordance with the assimilated information. If one of the two processes is disproportionate in relation to the other, the necessary balancing is not achieved, adaptation is not obtained, mention M. Zlate and V. Negovan [15, p.10]. As a deduction from what has been recorded so far, we can say that the *adaptation is operational throughout life*.

Analyzing the stages of personality development, G. Allport [2], M. Golu [6], P. Popescu-Neveanu [10], M. Zlate [14], A. Rean [16], noted the *first phase as an adaptation phase*, which involves the assimilation of common standards and the mastery of appropriate forms and means of action. One who joins a new community cannot stand out as a personality before *accepting the existing norms*. Therefore, if the teacher is not able to overcome the difficulties of adaptation, he will develop qualities that lead to personality disorders. All these clarifications have a common theoretical character, because at the level of some applied researches the distinction of these concepts is fused in the following reality: the *professional adaptation of the beginning teachers includes psychological, social, organizational and pedagogical implications*, set on the following objectives: 1) assisting the new employee in getting acquainted with work requirements; 2) optimizing the adaptation process in the professional group; 3) creating a climate of security, confidentiality and professional affiliation.

Analyzing various statements and remarks attributed to the process of *professional adaptation of beginning teachers*, we must emphasize that the implementation of *professional adaptation programs* is useful for students, beginning teachers and for pedagogues with professional experience who have been promoted or transferred to other schools.

In addition, professional adaptation is built in correlation both with the ability to process information correctly and with the development of communicative, organizational and relational skills. An incorrect assessment or insufficient knowledge of one's own skills and personality traits can have a negative impact on the process of professional adaptation. Adaptation is experienced by many teachers as a form of suffering, states Emil Păun [8, p. 155].

For these reasons, often adapting to professional requirements involves the gradual abandonment of professional illusions built on the basis of the ideal student, described and inoculated during the initial training.

Results

In addition to the ideas set out above, in the following we will try to show why the optimization of the process of adaptation of beginning teachers begins in the university environment. In accordance with the stated opinions, we consider that the initial training of teachers must be

understood as a *process of anticipatory professional adaptation*, having increased control over the process of academic adaptation, because during the university certain representations are formed about the teaching profession. In this sense, scientific evidence has been provided for the idea that ensuring the adaptation of the student pedagogue in a special environment (educational environment) and overcoming the difficulties of adaptation, requires increased special attention to the factors involved in the adaptation process, taking into account the dimensions of - *pedagogical adaptation* (instructive-educational aspect), *psychological adaptation* (personality) and *sociocultural adaptation* (sociocultural and relational values) [13].

Research conducted during the 2018-2019 academic year, on an experimental group of 52 subjects: 26 *beginning teachers*, working in pre-university education for no more than 1 year and 26 *beginning students*, year 1, without academic experience, allowed us to find that: there is a real correlation between academic adaptation and professional adaptation. Therefore, both beginning students and beginning teachers need support and guidance towards developing adaptation skills.

We specify that the experiment was organized at the discovery level, targeting the study of unadulterated facts without interventions, applying the tools selected in accordance with the purpose, objectives and operational indicators of the research. In this order of ideas, the objectives were established: 1) ascertaining the state of affairs existing at the moment of initiating the experimental investigation regarding the *level of communicative and organizational skills*; 2) ascertaining the state of affairs existing at the moment of initiating the experimental investigation regarding the *level of adaptation*.

Starting from the idea that communicating means expressing what you feel, meaning your inner world and to highlight the communication and organizational difficulties faced by respondents in the first period of adaptation, we offered each participant the opportunity to find out their *level of communicative and organizational skills*.

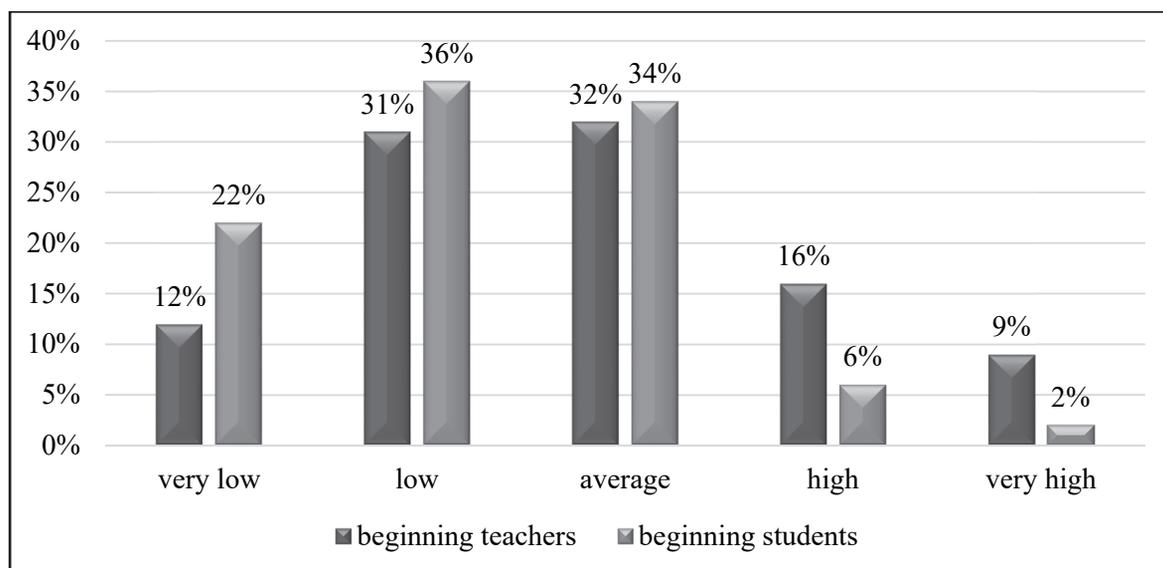


Figure 1. Values of communicative skills (beginner teachers/beginner students)

As previously specified, an important requirement in *professional adaptation* is the development of *communicative and organizational skills*, and for this purpose, all answers to the indicators of this two-dimensional component were analyzed: 1) to identify *communicative skills*: respondents' interest in communication; accommodation to a new team; reaction to requests or requests; attitude towards relationships; contact with strangers; and 2) for identifying *organizational skills*: the ability to guide in difficult situations; initiative; entrepreneurial spirit; perseverance; ambition; predisposition to organizational work; independence in relationships and self-critical spirit; self-control and firmness in decisions.

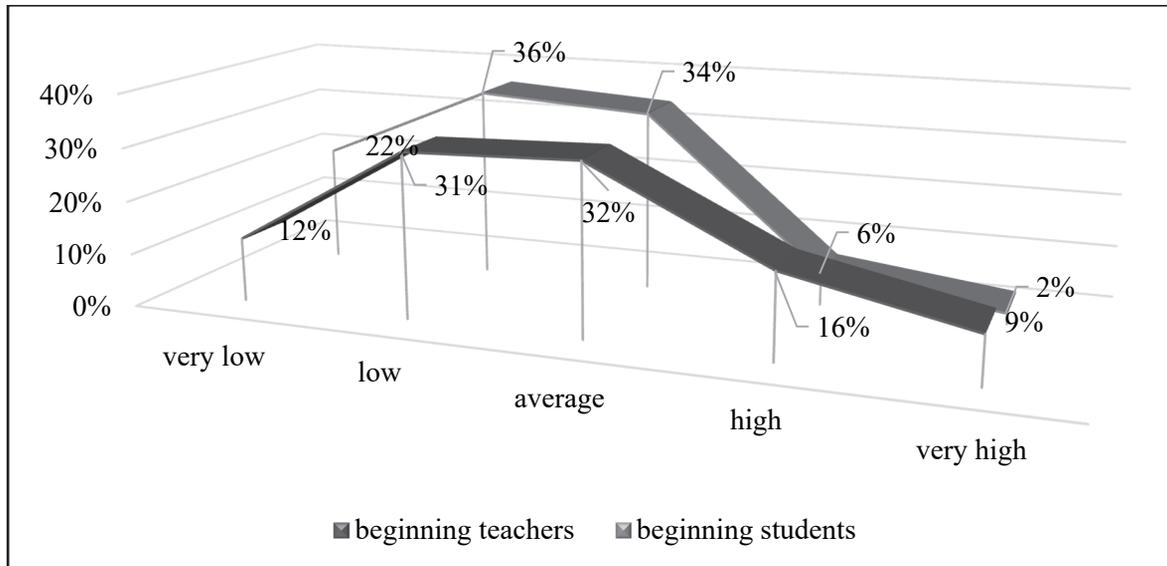


Figure 2. Comparative average values (communication skills)

As we can see in Figure 2., a small number of beginner teachers - 9% and beginner students - 2% demonstrated a *very high level* of communication skills, showing an insignificant interest in the established indicators; 12% of beginning teachers and 22% of beginning students showed a *very low level*, expressing non-involvement, inactivity or being self-contained, do not communicate, seek to be alone, rarely offer help to colleagues; 31% of beginning teachers and 36% of beginning students have shown a *low level* and those have great difficulties in communication, avoid relationships, hide their eyes, speak little and rarely, are shy, always feel "superfluous", they are not interested in certain activities to avoid failure, they are critical, they are insecure in their own strength, they are nervous, they show dissatisfaction with those around them. The results obtained showed a small difference at the *average level*: 32% of beginner teachers and 34% of beginner students have certain *communication skills* and are open to communication; 16% of beginner teachers and 6% of beginner students demonstrated a *high level*, being open to communication and relationships. Obviously, the importance of communicative skills in the process of professional adaptation is related to the organization of the interaction between those who communicate, ie in exchange not only for knowledge, ideas, but also for actions. In other words, the development of communicative skills from the perspective of professional adaptation involves the organization of joint actions, which allows the interlocutors to carry out a joint activity. Thus, based on the data presented in Figure 1 and Figure 2 we can mention that the tested subjects show low values on *communication skills*.

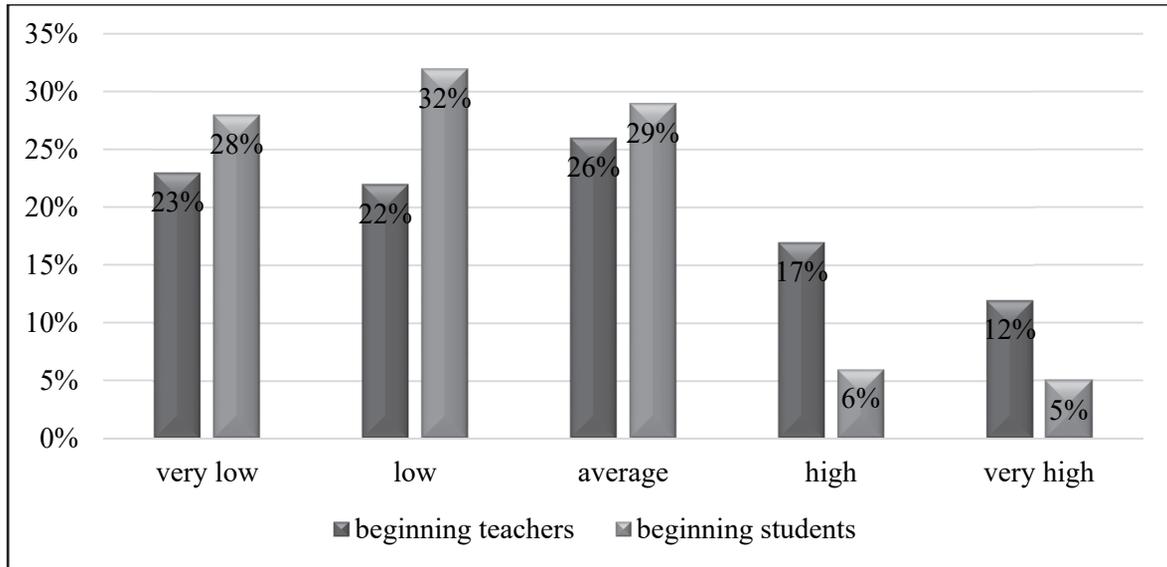


Figure 3. Results of organizational skills (beginning teachers / beginning students)

Obviously, the *organizational skills* can be observed during the approaches to taking relational decisions in the process of adaptation. In this sense, the idea is accepted that the choice of a certain organizational behavior depends on the context of the task to be performed, the desire for collaboration and motivation, the credibility and competence of beginner students, but also the professionalism of teachers.

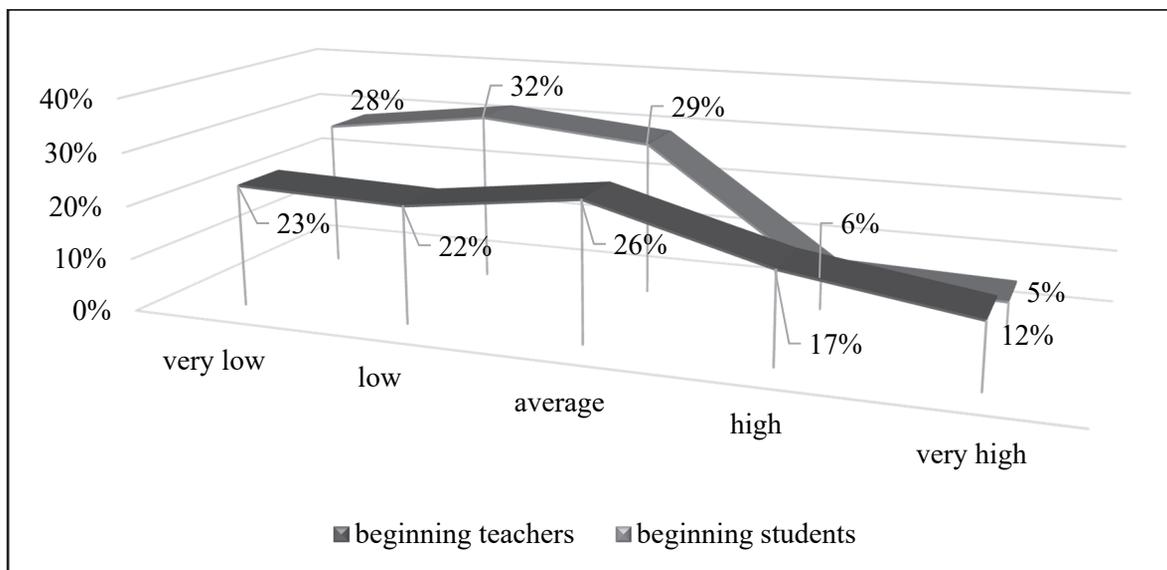


Figure 4. Comparative average values (organizational skills)

As we see in Figure 4., also a small number of beginning teachers - 12% and beginning students - 5% demonstrated a *very high level* in terms of organizational skills, showing an increased interest in the established indicators; 23% of beginning teachers and 28% of beginning students showed a *very low level*, expressing passivity, disinterest, not getting involved and not accepting changes; 22% of beginning teachers and 32% of beginning students have a *low level* and are those who find it difficult to navigate in a critical situation. Also, the results obtained showed a significant difference at the *average level*: 26% of beginning teachers and 29% of beginning

students have certain *organizational skills*, but do not like to be in the spotlight; while, 17% of the beginning teachers and 5% of the beginning students demonstrated a *high level*, being interested in the organizational process during the professional adaptation period. Certainly, *the importance of communicative and organizational skills in the process of professional adaptation* acquires observable dimensions in interpersonal and group relationships, in organizational behavior and promoted communication style. In this regard, an in-depth analysis of the adaptation process should include knowledge of one's own communication and organizational skills in order to develop them during training. Thus, both the development of communicative and organizational skills and professional adaptation involves operating with a series of factors and indicators that constitute the reference system for the level of achievement of the interaction between personality and all environmental conditions.

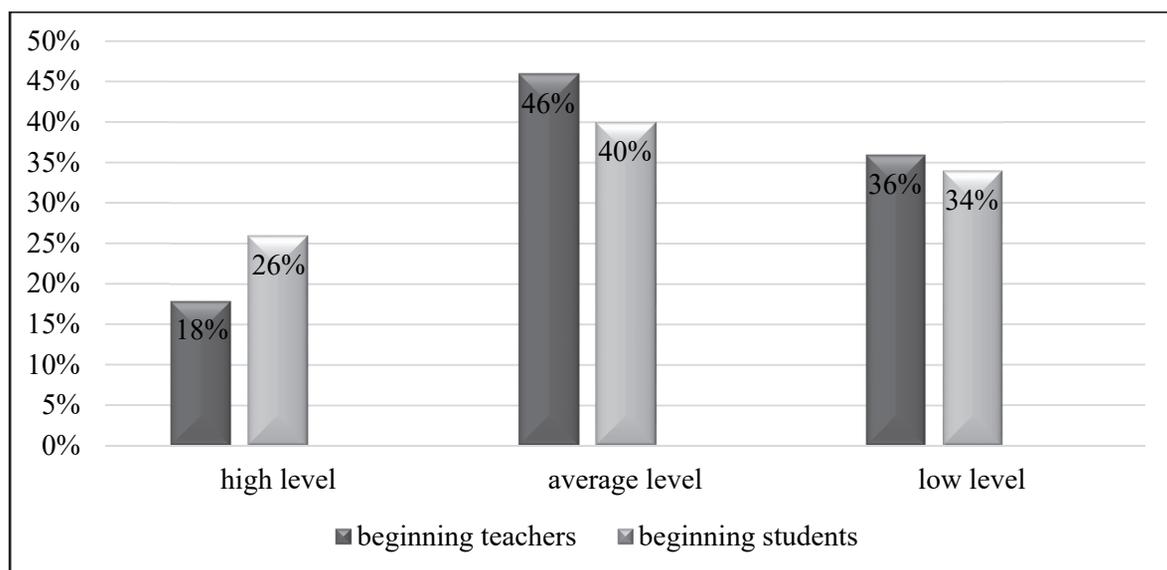


Figure 5. Distribution of values regarding the level of professional adaptation

The data presented in Figure 5 reveals the following picture of adaptation in the first period: *average level of adaptation* - 46% of beginner students and 40% of beginner teachers; *low level of adaptation* - 36% of beginner students and 34% of beginner teachers; *high level of adaptation* - 18% of beginner students and 26% of beginner teachers. As we can deduce from Figure 5, most of the respondents from both experimental groups have various adaptation difficulties. The results presented show that respondents with a *high level of adaptation* do not need major additional interventions in the adaptation process, they have their own adaptation strategies and are easily integrated in both the university and the professional environment. Respondents with *medium degree of adaptation* and those with *low degree of adaptation* need counseling, development of adaptation skills by implementing programs to optimize the level of adaptation.

Conclusion

Traditionally, when we think of the educational environment, the reference framework is that of the *open psychosocial climate*, a concept used more often in social psychology, but which is particularly important for all areas, because being unfavorable can generate many adaptation difficulties. Of course, the educational environment must support new employees. It is subject to

rules of professional ethics that are found in the organizational culture and policy, and, obviously, in the individual ethics of employees in management positions, responsible for adapting new employees. In such circumstances, the adaptation process requires the application of programs focused on the dimensions of: *prevention* - continuous process; *remediation* - intervention process and *optimization* - development process.

In our view, academic adaptation is an intense process of preparation for professional adaptation. Certainly, in the Republic of Moldova, the teaching profession is a strategic one. A successful professional adaptation is also supported by a legislative basis in the field. In the absence of adequate support, both students and beginning teachers will feel professional dissatisfaction and will give up on this noble occupation. Currently, more and more emphasis is placed on *teambuilding* - intensive training with members of an organized work team to develop cooperation, improving organizational communication, clarifying individual objectives in relation to organizational ones, integrating new members into the group, developing organizational culture, increasing participants' self-confidence and mutual trust within the team, the development of communication within the team, the development of interpersonal skills, etc. The purpose of a professional adaptation program must be oriented on the following dimensions: development of adaptive and integration skills, personality development, development of communicative and organizational skills, development of flexibility and self-control skills, positive self-awareness, acceptance and understanding of others, development of positive thinking, strengthening confidence in one's own cognitive abilities. Obviously, models and strategies for optimizing the level of professional adaptation can protect the new employee against emotional disturbances and negative effects on health. There are several categories of indicators of the quality of knowledge of the degree of professional adaptation: performance translated into skills, psychosocial integration in the group, satisfaction in the institutional context specific to the educational environment, behavioral norms and organization of activities, attitudes and work style, emotional states and motivation, communication and interpersonal relationships, etc. All these dimensions are correlated, their convergence being an indicator of their own skills that will facilitate adaptation and, obviously, professional success. In our view, the professional adaptation of teachers is an organized and dynamic process, which takes place in several stages and must be understood as a process that begins with academic adaptation.

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