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Initial Teacher Education in Hungary: Issues, Policies, Practices

Abstract. Initial teacher education has gone through some radical changes in the past two decades: the two-cycled, Bologna-type system was introduced in 2006, but a few years later, in 2013 it was restored to the so-called undivided system. In resonance with international trends and national processes and developments, these reforms resulted in the appearance of some new elements in teacher education such as the mentoring system or the use of portfolios, while some other existing components with longer traditions (e.g. the pillar of practice schools) have gained even more importance. This paper aims to summarize and reflect on these changes and elements of initial teacher education through a critical pair of lenses, focusing on teacher preparation for lower and upper secondary education (ISCED levels 2 and 3) by contextualizing teacher education and revealing the challenges and progressive elements.

Keywords: Hungary, initial teacher education, practice, portfolio, research-based teacher education, mentoring, innovation in teacher education

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Introduction

In the last decade, there have been some radical changes in the structure, content, and output requirements of teacher education in Hungary. In many cases, these changes have followed contradictory trends and posed serious challenges for teacher educational institutions, educators, and students. Meanwhile, higher education institutions (HEIs) offering teacher education seek to respond to the changing societal needs by reshaping the structure and content of their programmes. Our study examines the changes of the last two decades from the perspective of initial teacher education (ITE) institutions, focusing on ISCED levels 2 and 3. We chose this segment of the continuum because the most radical transformations have taken place in this area, and the changes themselves are a good indication of the national trends in each period.

Understanding the context is indispensable to reveal the nuances of any teacher education system (Burns & Köstler, 2016; Cochran-Smith et al., 2014; Kauko, et al., 2018; Mason, 2008). Teacher education is interpreted in the complex context of educational policies in which ITE and continuous professional development (CPD) represent different stages of a unified lifelong learning process (Caena, 2014; OECD, 2011). Moreover, teacher education belongs to both the world of schools and the world of HEIs, implying that both systems affect it. In our study, we aim to reveal the true nature of ITE in this complex context.

On these premises, our paper studies ITE focusing on ISCED levels 2 and 3 along with four major pillars: (1) firstly, we summarize the *relationship between university-based teacher education and public education* and introduce some of the major changes from the recent years that have affected the approach, structure and content of ITE. (2) Following this, we summarize *the challenges* that have emerged in the past years by identifying the most significant dilemmas of the national professional discourse: recruitment and entrance examination in reflection to teacher shortage, the content of ITE concerning pedagogical and methodological themes, the transforming role of teaching practice. (3) The next chapter focuses on the *major structural and content-wise developments in ITE*. We devote a special focus to some progressive elements of the system, such as the teaching practice and its support systems (mentoring, practice schools), competence frameworks, the use of portfolios in the assessment. (4) Last but not least we summarize some of the *innovative developments* and initiatives in Hungarian ITE, such as the reevaluation of research-based teacher education, the strengthening role of reflection, as well as the emphasis of student teachers' ICT-related competence development.

1. Context of Teacher Education

1.1. Historical Perspectives of Teacher Education

In Hungary, teacher education essentially exists since the emergence of education (996), as content and training courses for teacher preparation were available from the beginning for those who were teaching in the lower grades. However, its institutionalization can be linked to modernization, and as part of this, to the development of the public education system. Institutionalized teacher education first appeared for elementary school teachers, and it took place in the form of secondary education. This kind of teacher preparation was implemented in grammar schools, which traditionally are the institutions for intellectual education in Hungary. Although teacher educators in these schools had a university degree, most of them did not have a professional background in the field of Pedagogy.

Teaching in the lower and upper secondary phases of the public education system (ISCED levels 2 and 3) was traditionally considered as a highly prestigious, well-recognized profession, and it was sharply differentiated from the elementary school teaching (ISCED level 1) both in terms of teacher preparation and social prestige. The aspects of pedagogical content and teaching practice of secondary school teachers gained importance at the end of the nineteenth century: pedagogical content appeared in university-based teacher education and the system of practice schools maintained by the universities was developed. This was the time when the Teacher Education Centre, which was responsible for coordination, was established as an organizational unit in the universities offering teacher education. As a result of the communist dictatorship and the Soviet influence, there were only a few structural changes in teacher education; however, the weight of pedagogical and psychological contents was increased. After the regime change, Hungary transitioned from a communist country to a democratic state. However, some of the characteristics regarding teacher status that were formed during the Soviet period still strongly influence the possibilities of teachers as agents (Lannert, 1998). One of these is the low prestige of the teaching profession, which is mainly due to the particularly low salaries compared to the European average, and which also significantly contributes to the continuous low level of students selecting the teaching profession.

An interesting phenomenon is that despite the above-described factors, for a long time Hungary had not struggled with teacher shortage; this has become an urgent issue only in recent years. As the salary situation did not radically change after the change of regime, these factors still determine the weak advocacy power of teachers; the social prestige of teachers is low, the low selection among them is strong. The scope of teachers as agents of educational policy has also significantly deteriorated since the change of school maintainers in 2010: as most of the schools' maintainer is the state, teachers are also state employees; therefore, an increase in teacher vulnerability can be observed (Radó, 2011). After 2010, the right-wing

government, which had 2/3 majority in the parliament, launched a re-centralization process in the Hungarian educational system.

In the last ten years, the working conditions of teachers have also changed. The government delegated many decisions from institutional and individual levels (from schools and teachers) to the central educational administration: 90% of teaching content is prescribed in the National Curriculum, the textbook-market is centralized, and teacher evaluation is mostly conducted by local educational authorities. Besides, the administrative responsibilities of teachers have increased. The increased centralization and control have significantly reduced the professional autonomy of teachers.

These processes have also contributed to the reduction in the attractiveness of a teaching career: administrative overload and the over-centralized operation resulting in decreased teacher autonomy were compensated by the teacher career model and an increase in salaries only in the initial period. Since the introduction of the career model (2013), teacher salaries are fixed, and this influences the prestige of the profession in a negative way, especially concerning vocational education. From 2020 those working in vocational education will not be part of the civil servant employment system as other teachers that have a rigid, but reliable payment system, but these teachers will be offered market type contracts to keep them in the profession. However, all these measurements will not significantly change the fact that teacher salaries are the lowest not only among the Hungarian salaries of graduates but among international teacher salaries as well. Moreover, Hungary has the longest time to reach the salary ceiling (20–25 years) (Chrappán, 2013; Varga, 2017). These issues drastically lower the chance that young people will enter and stay in the teaching profession. Various scholarship systems support the retainment of student teachers during their teacher education, but this does not solve their retainment in the profession after graduation.

1.2. Teacher Career Model and Required Pedagogical Qualifications

One of the possible solutions for retaining teachers in the profession is the so-called teacher career model, which combines an administrative advancement system and a CPD philosophy. The latter one is a wide and flexibly interpreted, adaptive, learning-outcome-based model that adapts both formal and informal self-development of teachers. The career model consists of 5 stages: the stages of Apprentice, Teacher 1 and Teacher 2 are mandatory, while the phases of Master Teacher and Research Teacher are optional (Figure 1.). However, the career model is based on a Weberian administrative career advancement pattern, where the years spent on the career weigh much more than the quality work – this characteristic is especially problematic for young teachers. The qualification procedures are based partly on previous formal education and partly on portfolios presenting the candidates' professional work. The portfolio as a tool was introduced to teacher education in Hungary with the Bologna-type system, and from there it was shifted

to the teacher career model as well; therefore, portfolios have become an integral element of the full length of teacher education (including ITE and continuous professional development).

Figure 1.
Teacher Career Model

	The Name of stages	Input conditions
Non-mandatory stages	Research Teacher	min. 14 years, 2nd qualifying procedure, PhD degree and publication activity
	Master Teacher	min. 14 years, 2nd qualifying procedure
Mandatory stages	Teacher 2	min. 8 years experience, teacher's qualification exam, 1st qualifying procedure
	Teacher 1	2 years experience, qualifying exam
	Apprentice	MA teaching degree

Note. Chrappán & Bencze, 2015, p. 320.

Teacher education is naturally linked to the public education system. The required qualification for the different phases of the public education system varies by the different emphases and expected roles of the teachers. Table 1. summaries the connection between the public education system and teacher education qualifications.

Table 1.
Pedagogical Qualifications in Reflection to Public Education

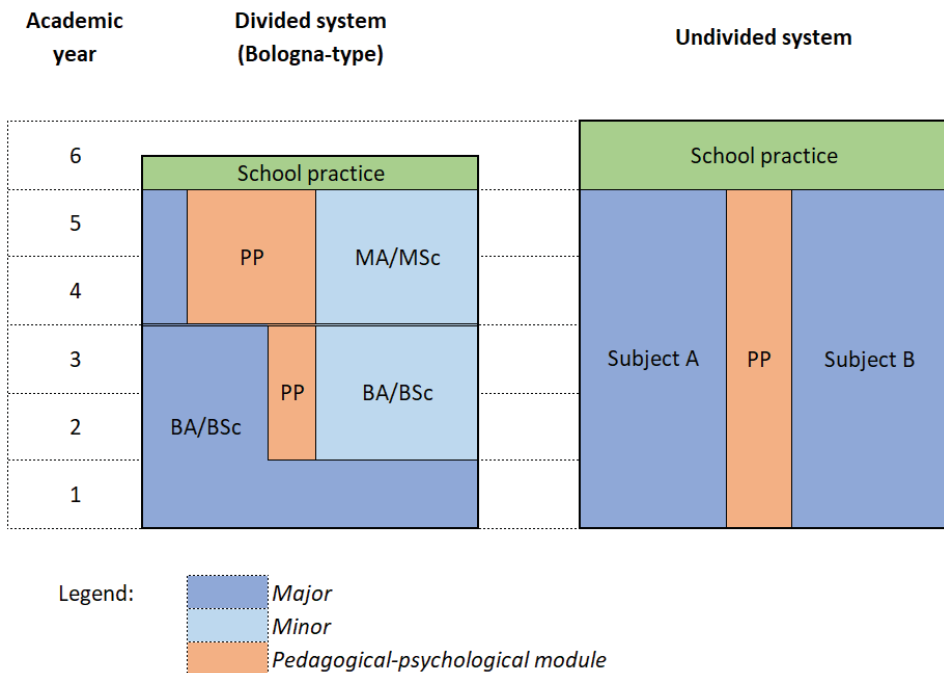
Type of institution	Pedagogical qualification	Taught subject
elementary school (ISCED 1) (grades 1–4)	BA-degree	all subjects
elementary school (ISCED 2) (grades 5–8)	MA-degree	subjects of general education adequate to degree
grammar school (ISCED 3) (grades 1–4 or grades 1–6 or grades 1–8)	MA-degree	subjects of general education adequate to degree
vocational education (ISCED 3)	vocational teacher (vocational MSc + teacher MA)	vocational (theoretical and practical) subjects in vocational training
vocational education (ISCED 3)	vocational trainer (vocational secondary/higher qualification)	vocational training in and outside the school

1.3. Bologna-type vs. Undivided Teacher Education – the Present of ITE

Teacher education has undergone two general transformations over the past twenty years. The first transformation was the introduction of the two-cycled, Bologna-type teacher education in 2006. The second major change was the abandonment of the two-cycled, Bologna-type system and the introduction of the so-called undivided teacher education in 2013. Reasons for the change included: a significant reduction in the number of student teachers in the Bologna-type system; students completed their minor disciplinary studies with poorer performance; some were dissatisfied with the reduced number of disciplinary credits (especially with regards to natural sciences), while they considered the 50 credits of pedagogical-psychological preparation too high. The introduction of the undivided system just partially remedied these criticisms, but it managed to put in balance the two disciplinary fields; however, the pedagogical-psychological module was significantly reduced (from 50 to 28 credits). Figure 2. compares the structure of the two-cycled, Bologna-type teacher education and the undivided system.

Figure 2.

Comparison of the Bologna-type Teacher Education and the Undivided System

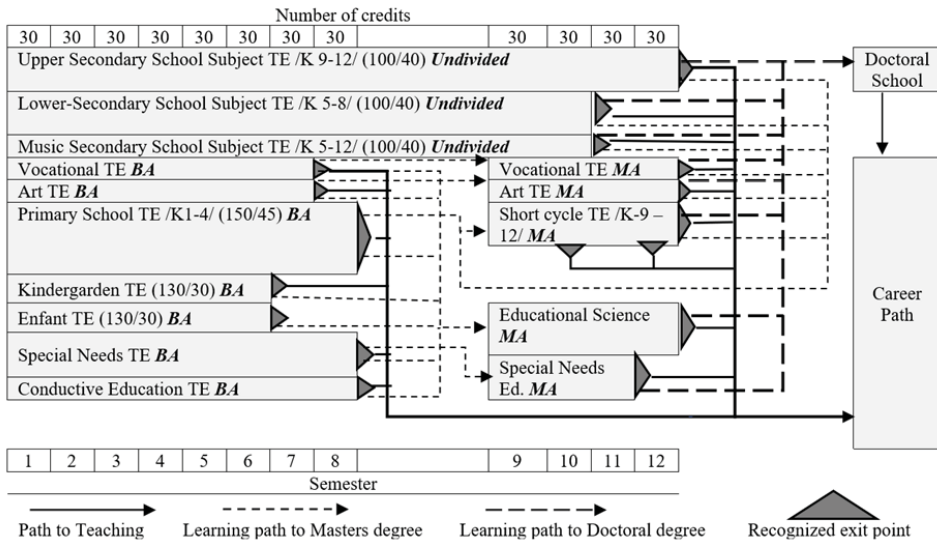


Note. Pesti, et. al., 2017.

In the undivided system of teacher education, the collateral nature has strengthened, but some consecutive forms of teacher education are still present (mostly in the form of short programmes, lasting for 2, 4 or 5 semesters). These are partly residual programmes from the Bologna-type system (MA programmes in vocational teacher education), partly programmes linked to the undivided system (e.g. for those with no previous teacher education).

The wide range of paths with varying entry conditions and programme length all facilitate the increase of accessibility and quick accomplishment of teacher education – this is a structural reaction to the growing threat of teacher shortage. The structure of teacher education has become rather complicated, Figure 3. aims to provide an overview of the possible paths in teacher education.

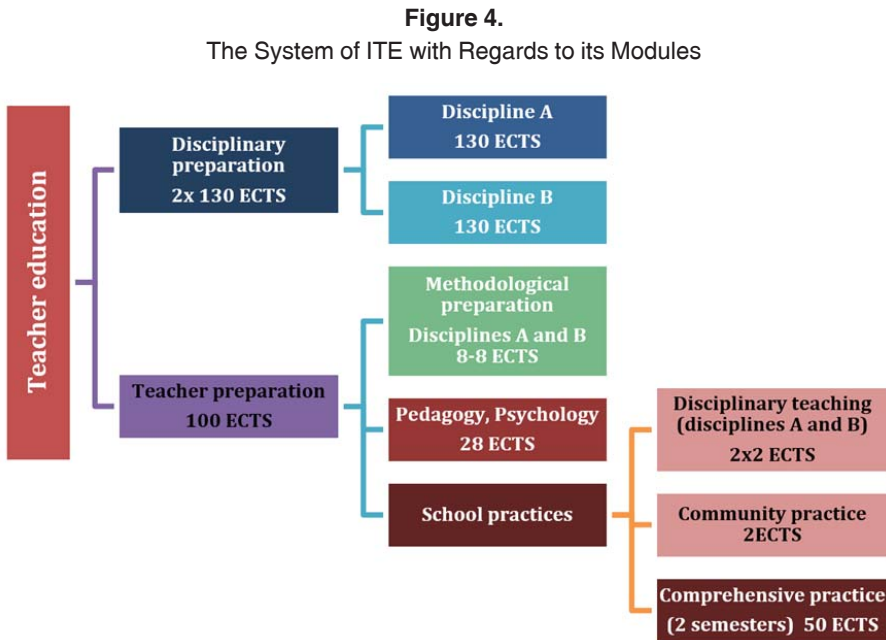
Figure 3.
An overview of Various Paths in Teacher Education



Note. Kopp & Kálmán, 2020.

Disciplinary preparation constitutes the biggest slice of the current, undivided system of teacher education, but it is a major issue that the curriculum and the actual course contents in ITE programmes are not sensitive enough to public education content; they are halved versions of non-teacher-education-related disciplinary studies. Although this cannot be changed easily, the enrichment of programmes with more teacher education-specific content is necessary and possible. The teacher preparation in these ITE programmes is mostly restricted to theoretical pedagogical and psychological studies, methodological courses, and school-based teaching

practice in a practice school. This is followed by an external, one-year long practice. Figure 4. illustrates the system of ITE with regards to its modules.



However, the rapid and deliberate swelling of student teacher numbers makes input and in-process quality screening and selection impossible; therefore, the training and the content are responsible for developing some kind of a comprehensive education strategy for students with very diverse motivation and preparedness. Halving the pedagogical-psychological module is not a deliberate decision in case of a persistently present, unfiltered population. This can be remedied by the increase of student time; there are more options to achieve this: continuous measurements during teacher education, which introduces adaptive training loops to the system, thus providing students with individual development tasks (obligations); the introduction of intensive student activities that can be conducted with individual support (projects, individual tasks); increasing efficiency by modern technical possibilities and educational philosophical approach (from blended learning to seamless learning). These changes expect a transformation in mindset and reforms in content and requirements and are currently in the initial stage.

2. Challenges of ITE

2.1. Teacher Shortage with Reflection to ITE

Hungarian public education, similarly to many other countries, is struggling with the growing teacher shortage, which will result in a critical situation in two to four years. In 2012, Hungary was among those countries where the general teacher shortage was quite small, “as far as shortages are concerned, prospects look gloomy in light of the high number of expected retirements” (Carlo et al., 2013, pp. 32–34). However, the situation is much more complex these days. Available statistics do not support the assumption that teacher shortage is an urgent issue in Hungary to a full extent; partly because the macro-level indicators of student-to-teacher ratio seem to be improving due to the ongoing demographic tide, and the available data seem to be masking the actual deficit due to a mandatory increase in teaching hours a few years ago. Although there is no absolute teacher shortage, the relative shortage is already visible, especially with regards to disciplinary fields (Hungarian language and foreign languages, natural sciences, informatics, art and physical education, as well as vocational teachers), regional distribution (continuous fluctuation in kindergartens and schools in disadvantaged areas increases teacher shortage) and institution types (primary schools and vocational educational institutions). An underlying cause of teacher shortage is the age of the Hungarian pedagogical society: the average age is constantly increasing, while the proportion of recently graduated, younger teachers entering the profession is decreasing (Varga, 2019).

This crisis is mostly affecting the system of teacher education, even though structural changes and financial incentives (teacher education scholarship schemes) have been implemented in recent years to get more people graduating from teacher education institutions to enter the profession as quickly as possible. This can be done in part by expanding teacher education quotas at the expense of other MA courses, and in part by broadening the range of short-cycle teacher training courses, and facilitating horizontal (transition between different disciplines) and vertical (transition from other BA or MA courses to teacher MA) transitions. While teacher education policy expects a wide range of outputs in the short term, it favours quality teacher education and thus selective recruitment. This is implemented by the increase of the entrance study score (compared to other majors) and the career aptitude test. The aptitude test is a centrally defined, uniform exam (including a motivation letter, a pedagogical situation analysis, and a discussion about career motivation). While the aptitude test has not been measured since the introduction of undivided teacher training (since 2013), it is known that it does not bear any selection function, almost 100% of the candidates are admitted to ITE. Its absolute advantage is that the discussions reveals the potential student teacher candidates’ general pedagogical beliefs and attitudes, which would enable the development of an adaptive training process (if the system could provide sufficient resources for adaptive learning

paths and loops). After the aptitude test at the entrance to ITE, there are no further measurements, feedbacks regarding the pedagogical and psychological suitability of the student teacher; quitting ITE is mostly due to career corrections or drop-outs. Therefore, we can conclude that the system of ITE allows both suitable and less suitable students not only to enter but to go all along the way, and this places a heavy burden mostly on the practice fields, the schools. The nonselective nature of ITE and the reduced theoretical education both increase the schools' and mentor teachers' responsibility, reinforcing the importance of professional collaboration between HEIs and partner schools.

However, the key issue to address teacher shortages is not the quality of the training but rather the attractiveness and retention of the teaching profession. Attempts have been made to increase the attractiveness of the profession by introducing the teacher career model that involves a significant increase in salaries (but also a significant surplus of work, including significant administrative burdens). Still, the teacher salaries are not only lower compared to other graduate salaries, but they are not differentiated sufficiently, and the actual work quality is not reflected in them. The difference between primary and secondary school teachers' salary is less than \$100 (OECD, 2019, p. 344), and hypothetically this negligible difference could mean that there is a general recognition of primary school teachers; this is far from the reality since Hungary offers some of the lowest salaries in the OECD countries (*ibidem*). These problems underlie the feminization of the teaching profession, which, indirectly though, also deteriorates the prestige of the profession resulting in the career change of the best teachers. The country struggles to find a way out of this negative loop by continuously reforming ITE and supporting apprentices; however, the results are not yet visible.

A recurring topic with regards to the relationship between the school system and teacher education is whether teacher education can prepare teacher candidates for the subject content and special roles (the role of a headmaster, competitions, preparation for graduation, etc.) that actually await them during their career. The most common topic in the national professional discourse is whether the disciplinary content provided by the universities corresponds to the teaching content in public education. Over the last 10 years, the National Curriculum and the Framework Curricula have undergone constant changes. The newest National Curricula were accepted and published in the spring of 2020 in a somewhat unexpected manner; therefore, now the new Framework Curricula need to be developed. The perspectives of teacher education and institutions offering these programmes do not coincide, and this is a source of ongoing debate among the stakeholders. It is in teacher education's interest that university preparation covers the content of the public education curricula as fully as possible; meanwhile, the universities bear a more scholarly approach to teaching. There is a legal regulatory element to enforce the subject needs of public education: the so-called Training and Output Requirements (8/2013

Decree, 2013). This decree contains the mandatory disciplinary and pedagogical-psychological-methodological elements for each major. Compliance with these requirements is monitored at each institution by the Hungarian Accreditation Committee when launching a new programme. One of the aspects of monitoring is whether the programme is in line with the teacher competences required to implement the National Curriculum and Framework Curricula. Actual, in-process monitoring does not exist, nor does a quality assurance system based on rigorous student feedback. Thus, the presence of public education's expectations in teacher education is up to the professional conscience of the HEIs involved.

2.2. Teaching Practice

In the everchanging economic, social, technical and cultural context of education, the teaching practice, which is an integral part of any teacher education programme, has to face several challenges, including the restructuring of programmes, the appearance of new stakeholders with a diverse background, the development of new types of partnership models, as well as the strengthening of educational outcome-based programme design (Halász, 2016). Although the international trends have a strong influence on reinterpreting the roles and functions of teaching practice in general, at the same time these changes are strongly contextualised since national school traditions and local school cultures have a significant impact on the processes (Rapos et al., 2014).

Hungary's ITE faced major restructuring in 2013, and since then, teacher education programmes include three types of practice that student teachers must undertake: *pedagogical, psychological and teaching practices parallel with the training, community pedagogical practice parallel with the training, and an individual, school-based teaching practice at the end of the programme*. All these practices facilitate student teachers in "(1) the acquisition of general pedagogical and discipline-related, as well as teachers' role-related practical knowledge, (2) the acquisition and practice of skills and attitudes, (3) the introduction to the world of work (school life, school management, communication with parents, individual tutoring of students, collaboration), (4) the acquisition of basic skills in assessment of teaching, learning and other educational processes and of professional development (8/2013 Decree, 2013)" (Pesti, 2019, p. 57).

The first type of practice that student teachers participate in is the *individual and group practice*, led by a so-called "leading teacher", and it takes place parallel with other components of the teacher education programme. It is accounted for at least 2 ECTS per disciplinary field, and it must include at least 15 individual teaching hours, supplemented by various, teaching-related activities, such as observations and analysis of lessons taught by in-service teachers (8/2013 Decree, 2013). The overly detailed nature of the competence framework is one of the biggest challenges of organizing and implementing this type of practice in a manner that supports the

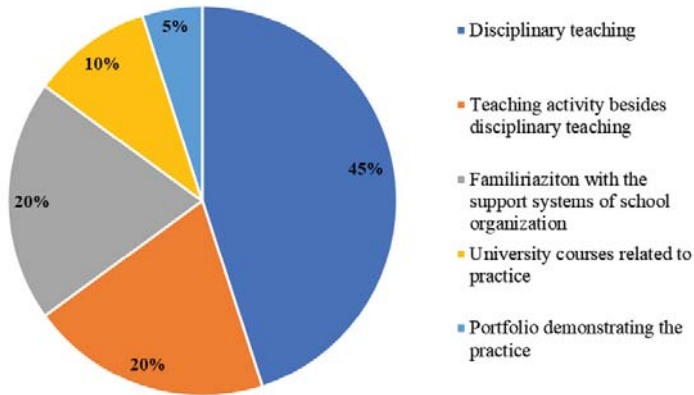
establishment and strengthening of the relationship between theory and practice along with the framework. Moreover, although mainly the leading teacher is responsible for supporting the student teacher during the practice, other actors are also involved in this complex process (e.g. university-based teacher educators, school community, etc.), and the responsibilities are not always clear.

The second type of practice is the *community pedagogical practice*, which accounts for at most 2 ECTS, and it aims to provide experience on non-school-based pedagogical, extracurricular activities (e.g. camps, study groups, etc.) (8/2013 Decree, 2013). While supporting student teachers in their professional socialization, this type of practice is effective only if it is implemented in a community service learning mindset if it truly reacts to the needs and requirements of the community, and if the experiences gained through this practice activate student teachers' learning (Rapos & Kopp, 2015).

The third type of practice is by far the dominant one: the *comprehensive individual teaching practice*. It is accounted for 48 ECTS, and student teachers undertaking this practice are supported by a school-based mentor teacher (who is an in-service teacher) and a university-based teacher educator. This type of practice aims to facilitate student teachers in the familiarization with the complexity of the school system, its social and legal environment, and last but not least, the system of public education through various activities. The *comprehensive practice* lasts for 2 semesters, and it includes subject teaching, non-subject teaching, school-based projects, teacher duties, etc (8/2013 Decree, 2013). Similarly to the *individual and group practice*, this type of practice intends to further strengthen the relationship of theory and practice, but in a much complex context of school reality, where, although still in a supportive "safe" environment, student teachers have the opportunity to experience the reality of the teaching profession. This practice also focuses on the development of competences, but instead of doing it one by one, it aims to facilitate students in establishing the connections between them; however, it is important to notice that at the start of this practice the student teachers still not bear all the competences indicated in the Training and Outcome Requirements.

Figure 5. illustrates the distribution of various components related to the *comprehensive practice*.

Figure 5.
The Components of the Comprehensive Teaching Practice



Although the regulations do not take it into account, there is a fourth type of practice: many university-based courses have elements of a practical nature (e.g. school visits, lesson observations, teaching and non-teaching activities in schools, etc.). In many cases, these *hidden practical opportunities* are rather ad-hoc, not visible in the programme neither at the institutional level, and this is far from being effective (Rapos & Kopp, 2015). These kinds of hidden practices are valuable although to ensure their effectiveness, they shall be planned and implemented at least at the programme level.

3. What is Going Well?

Teacher education is highly dependent on the cultural context everywhere; it is not influenced merely by the successful international patterns, but it is also determined by the educational and cultural traditions of the country, as well as the social attitudes concerning the role of schools and teachers. This is the reason why it is not easy to adopt an effective procedure from the international context because it might not fit organically into the local context (Fazekas, 2018). The changes of the past decade in teacher education in Hungary have included both progressive and retrograde elements, and some of these have become an immanent part of the system. The following sections introduce some of these elements.

3.1. Mentorship

Mentoring has been an immanent part of teacher education in general, but it was introduced to the Hungarian system only with the Bologna-type teacher education; the previously mentioned *comprehensive individual teaching practice* made it necessary for student teachers' teaching practice to be continuously facilitated by a mentor. Mentoring has been a central theme for the past decade due to its novelty

and systemic lack of experience. It has appeared throughout the continuum of teacher education; mentoring has a key role not only in the *comprehensive individual teaching practice* in ITE, but it has become an integral element of the career model as well, especially in the apprentice phase.

The implementation of the Bologna-type teacher education was financed by large-scale EU-funded tenders: the theoretical foundations of mentoring, the dissemination of institutional good practices and the preparatory programmes for mentorship established the mentoring system in Hungary, and in parallel to these, intensive field research was also launched (Simon, 2019; Fűzi, et al., 2016; Stéger, 2014). The mentoring of student teachers and apprentices is not the same (Sallai, 2015) because while in the case of student teachers mentoring focuses on a more rigorous professional management and introduction to the profession in close cooperation with the HEIs, apprentices are already qualified teachers who need more support from their mentors in fine-tuning the pedagogical processes and obtaining routines in special activities (Vargáné & Nagy, 2015).

The selection and preparation of mentor teachers are based on an agreement between the HEIs and the schools; the preliminary formal requirements are the appropriate major, five years of experience, and, if possible, the mentor teacher qualification exam. Partners may deviate from these requirements (because increased student numbers and the one-year-long teaching practice have led to higher demand and thus a shortage of mentors in some places). In the apprentice phase, the appointment of mentors is entirely the schools' responsibility.

The mentoring system has performed well since its introduction in the last decade; both the students and the schools like this system, as it serves a kind of a career incubation providing more protection for student teachers and apprentices (Sallai, 2015), and this can be considered as the main protective factor against early career change (Stokking, et al., 2003; Ballantine & Retell, 2020).

Strengthening the mentoring role from a professional and organizational point of view is the task of the coming period; the latter mainly concerns the recognition of the mentor role in the schools. The professional supportive role of teacher education institutions plays a significant role in strengthening the professional identity of mentoring, as well as in building a bridge between public education and teacher education.

3.2. University-based Practice Schools and Partner Schools

In section 2.2 we have already reviewed the various types and some challenges concerning teaching practices during ITE. This section also focuses on teaching practice, but through a much brighter pair of lenses; we are going to introduce to elements – one old, one new – that combine traditional and innovative components. For 150 years, teacher education in Hungary has been based on practice schools. These schools were established beside universities with the aim to support

teacher education. During a century and a half, regardless of political systems and educational policy trends, the status of practice schools has remained stable, and these institutions define the practical preparation in teacher education to a great deal.

Practice schools are public educational institutions maintained by HEIs, and besides the usual tasks of public education, their main mission and mandatory responsibility are to participate in ITE. Currently, there are 32 practice schools in Hungary maintained by one of the 14 HEIs offering teacher education. 17 of the practice schools belong to the 6 largest HEIs (KIR institutional database, 2020). So-called “leading” teachers manage student teachers’ practices that are related to university courses (e.g. pedagogical, psychological, or methodological lesson observations, microteaching, etc.). Among the three types of practices in ITE, the *individual and group practice* is the one which shall be implemented in practice schools by law. This practice is the first opportunity for student teachers to teach in a longer, comprehensive manner, based on their plans, in a real-world school context. This is the first intensive encounter with the subject and the school reality; therefore, quality support is particularly important. Leading teachers are those pedagogically and methodologically prepared practitioners who have the most routine in the practice schools and who regularly participate not only in the school-based support of student teachers but also in teaching university courses.

Although the other two types of practices (*community practice* and *comprehensive practice*) can also take place in practice schools, in most cases universities assign so-called partner schools with these practices instead of practice schools. There are several reasons for involving partner schools: the capacity of practice schools is finite; practice schools are essentially elite schools as they are less suitable for introducing student teachers to the average pedagogical reality. Acquiring the partner school status is also a recognition and a significant opportunity for innovation because the partner schools are constantly close to teacher education and research.

At the same time, the one-year-long *comprehensive practice* is a divisive experience; on the one hand, this practice is a good opportunity for the schools to alleviate the teacher shortage by employing student teachers, while on the other hand, the view that a six-months long practice would be enough has started to gain emphasis. This would allow graduates to enter the profession sooner; student teachers during their practice do not have decision-making rights due to their student status; therefore, mentors are constantly under increased pressure. The implementation of comprehensive practices by the partner school network has become a good practice in Hungary, and it is increasingly becoming a professionally grounded pillar of ITE.

3.3. Competence Framework

The learning outcome-based approach in educational planning started to gain significance in general around the turn of the century, and Hungarian ITE joined

this mainstream trend by defining competences for teacher education within the framework of the Qualification Requirements of Teachers in 1997 (Symeonidis, 2019). In view of the approach, the year 2013, when HEIs providing ITE were expected to develop new training programmes, was a major turning point; a line of documents were developed to support the implementation of learning outcome-based approach relying on the European Qualification Framework (European Commission, 2009): the National Qualification Framework and the Document of Territorial Qualification Characteristics differentiate knowledge, skills, attitude, and autonomy and responsibility, while the Training and Outcome Requirements (8/2013 Decree, 2013) for ITE indicate knowledge, skills and attitude as the main competence elements, and autonomy and responsibility have become a new competence field (Pesti et al., 2017).

There is a general trend either to consider competence frameworks as a policy tool, a top-bottom approach to assess teachers in a pragmatic manner or to take advantage of them as means for improvement, guidance in the professional development of teachers (Symeonidis, 2019). Although the competence framework used in teacher education is undoubtedly thoroughly detailed (there are 8 competence fields, each broken into knowledge, skills and attitude components containing more than 120 learning outcomes (Pesti et al., 2017)), it can be a powerful tool to track and reflect on student teachers progression throughout their teacher education.

The 8 competence fields that guide teacher preparation, as well as assessment at the end of the programmes, are defined in the Training and Outcome Requirements (8/2013 Decree, 2013):

1. Developing the student's personality together with tailor-made treatment, based on individual needs
2. Helping and improving the development of students' groups and communities
3. Having knowledge of the special methodology and the special subject
4. Planning the pedagogical process
5. Supporting, organizing, and managing the learning process
6. Assessing pedagogical processes and the students
7. Communication, professional cooperation, and career identity
8. Autonomy and responsibility

A common use of this competence framework is to integrate it as a fundamental part of the portfolio, where student teachers are expected to reflect on their readiness for teaching along with the competence fields by presenting various documents and reflections.

3.4. Assessment through Portfolios

The introduction of the Bologna-type teacher education in 2006 also brought conceptual and structural changes. The definition of competence fields as learning

outcomes and the semester-long teaching practice required a practice-based assessment tool which was suitable for tracking students' development process and outcomes. Portfolios were chosen as a tool for such assessments, and although the long cycle ITE system has taken over the Bologna-type teacher education's place, the portfolios remained and are widely used in the current ITE system as well.

According to the national regulations, the portfolios aim to prove that students are capable of self-reflection, integrating and applying the knowledge they acquired during teacher education, and evaluating the relevant scientific literature and the effectiveness of their teaching and/or pedagogical work (8/2013 Decree, 2013). All this can be achieved through the presentation and reflective analysis of documents developed during teacher education, and especially those developed during the teaching practice.

A portfolio is an innovative tool with numerous advantages including a reinterpreted learning culture and support, alternative assessment procedures, the development of reflective writing skills, various media-related competences (especially when preparing an electronic portfolio), as well as the symbiotic development of theory and practice (Feder & Cramer, 2018). Moreover, it can support students in finding employment, and some sources consider portfolios as a useful tool in evaluating and accrediting training programmes (Strudler & Wetzel, 2011). However, they are not used for programme evaluations in Hungary, but the idea should be considered as well as the full transition to electronic portfolios (e-portfolio). Currently, only a few universities have made this transition, most teacher education institutions still require that the portfolios are submitted in the form of hard copies and CD/DVDs.

There are numerous types of portfolios, the relevant national literature essentially uses the demonstrational-developmental portfolio and the evaluation portfolio terms (in few cases the developmental learning portfolio term is also used). The demonstrational portfolio gathers the various documents and products developed by the student throughout his/her teacher education, and the evaluation portfolio is mostly prepared for the final examination, and it is validated by a professional discussion.

Although the concept and types of portfolios are extensively discussed in the literature, research focusing on their efficiency or methodology are rather rare in the Hungarian context (Hofmann, et al., 2016). The available data concerning portfolios mostly focus on student opinions and the structure of the documents. These data show that some of the biggest challenges of portfolios in ITE are the compilation of the documents, especially the reflections and self-assessments (Buda, 2015; Mrázik, 2014; Molnár, 2014); therefore, a significant responsibility of ITE is the development of the reflective, conscious and critical approach and critical thinking.

Today, the portfolio constitutes an integral part of teacher education; student teachers build them from the beginning of their education by following the curve

of work portfolios, demonstrational portfolios, and evaluation portfolios. The requirements and assessment practices of the evaluation portfolios at the endpoint of ITE might differ in every HEI; however, most of the content elements are the same. All institutions define compulsory and optional elements, but their proportion may also vary. Some of the common elements regardless of institutions are the following: teaching practice-related documents, lesson plans, mentor teachers' evaluations, peer evaluations, as well as documents illustrating non-teaching related activities, contact with other partners involved, school organization and student reports. It is expected that most of the documents are followed by student reflections since this can make student teachers' professional competence development visible (Czető & Lénárd, 2016). Besides these most institutions expect documents related to research or inquiry conducted by student teachers, but the possible forms and genre of these are diverse.

4. Innovative Practices in ITE

4.1. Research in ITE

Strengthening the cooperation between educational research actors has become a significant topic of the international discourse concerning the failure to produce knowledge based on research results that is relevant for the teaching practice (Snoek, 2011; Kálmán & Rapos, 2007; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2000; OECD, 2003). The tags that are commonly used to describe the present, such as the age of information, knowledge of society, the era of twenty-first century skills, etc. all resonate with the everchanging nature of challenges that teachers face daily, and that it is irresponsible to assume that ITE is accountable for preparing student teachers for the entirety of their career. The concept of teachers as researchers has gained influence as a possible answer to the above-mentioned challenges of the constant reinterpretation of the goals and responsibilities of teacher education and the teaching profession, as well as the gap between research and practice (e.g. Gray & Campbell-Evans, 2002; Loughran, 2002; Smith & Sela, 2005; Ulvik, 2014). This concept requires an open mind and some distancing from the traditional and scholarly rigorous understanding of research, but one may think of teacher-researchers as "those practitioners who attempt to better understand their practice, and its impact on their students, by researching the relationship between teaching and learning in their world of work" (Loughran, 2002, p. 1.). These general issues and trends can be channelled into the design of ITE programmes (e.g. Munthe & Rogne, 2015) and are strongly reflected in the paradigms of teaching as described by Menter, et al. (2010). Is ITE preparing students to become effective, reflective, enquiring, or transformative teachers?

Student teachers are explicitly expected to conduct research-related activities as a part of fulfilling the final requirements for graduation; according to the 8/2013. (I.30.) Decree of the Ministry of Human Capacities (8/2013 Decree, 2013) the

preparation of a final thesis is mandatory and is accounted for 8 ECTS. The thesis shall present research or development related to methodology, pedagogy, psychology or one of the chosen disciplinary fields and shall be conducted by the student teacher. Unfortunately, there is no available, openly accessible data on the distribution of thesis topics among the four choices.

Since research appears at the endpoint of ITE as a requirement in the form of a thesis, and at some HEIs in the portfolios, it is indispensable to examine the path leading to this point – is ITE preparing student teachers to conduct research, an inquiry into teaching practice at its broadest, concessive interpretation? There has not been any systematic study in the Hungarian context on the national level to answer this question, but small-scale, often institutional-level data has revealed, that strengthening reflection (which is a stepping stone to practitioner inquiry) is highly emphasised in teacher education programmes. Moreover, studying the Training and Outcome Requirements of ITE (8/2013 Decree, 2013), it becomes obvious that research-related competence elements occur in knowledge, skills and attitude components as an expectation; however, the analysis of a teacher education programme has proved that although the development of these research-related competences also appears in the pedagogical-psychological course descriptions, the course contents, student activities and methods suggest that ITE supports student teachers to become consumers not producers of research (Pesti, 2019). To resonate this with the teaching paradigms defined by Menter et al. (2010), ITE in Hungary seems to be stationed at the paradigms of effective and reflective teachers not the inquiring or transformative teachers.

Another factor that hinders student teachers in conducting practice-oriented research during their teaching practice is that public education, in general, is not supporting the development of research-related attitudes although the highest stage of the teacher career model is the so-called “research teacher” title; due to the excessive workload of the public education system, research (in hand with numerous other innovative practices) seems to struggle to be present in the everyday practice of teaching within the walls of schools.

4.2. Information-Communication Technologies in ITE

As teacher education is expected to prepare student teachers for the future with the knowledge, strategies, methods and tools of the present; the role of information-communication technologies (ICT) in ITE is one of the most challenging and significant issues in the professional discourse concerning teacher knowledge. Although there is a general agreement that the main role of teacher education is not to prepare ICT experts (similarly to the concept of teachers as researchers where the aim is not to prepare academic researchers); however, the vast potential that lies in using ICT in teaching and learning processes cannot be left out of sight in the twenty-first century. The recent shock caused by the COVID-19 pandemic that resulted in

the rapid digitalization of education all around the world drew even more attention to ICT in education and teacher preparation.

Aligning the Training and Outcome Requirements (8/2013 Decree, 2013) of teacher education with the recent trends, ICT can be traced in three competence fields, and these are subject knowledge, planning of the pedagogical process, supporting and managing learning. The other competence fields do not contain explicit mentions of ICT, and this is particularly concerning with the competence fields of assessment, communication, and collaboration. Moreover, the identified ICT-related competences are of a knowledge and skill type only, and it seems that the attitude aspect of information-communication technologies is not emphasised in the Hungarian policy context.

Although there are numerous studies concerning ICT in public education, exploring its situation in teacher education is somewhat out of the scope of Hungarian researchers. However, a recent study of teacher educators' ICT-related indicators has revealed that despite their openness and competence level, their ICT-activities remain rather low: an underlying explanation based on the overall results might be that teacher educators suffer from a methodological deficit (Dringó-Horváth, 2018).

4.3. Reflection as an Integral Pillar of ITE

The changes of socio-cultural and economic processes resonate in the theoretical frameworks used for ITE programme development: Menter et al. summarised these in four paradigms including the effective, the reflective, the enquiring and the transformative teacher (2010). The order of these paradigms is somewhat chronological not only with regards to the development of teacher education from a general, historical point of view, but even on an individual level of student teachers: being reflective is a prerequisite to an enquiring approach, and having an enquiring approach is a prerequisite to becoming transformative. This line of thought implies that reflection plays a fundamental role in teacher education. A study focusing on teacher education programmes in the 2000s found that 75% of the involved programmes were based on the reflective teacher paradigm (Kopp & Kálmán, 2015). About 20 years later, in the context of Hungarian ITE reflection is still one of the central themes in programme development (Pesti, 2019).

Reflection and self-reflection are deeply embedded in the structure and processes of teacher preparation: they appear in both pedagogical-psychological and methodological courses, they are an integral part of teaching practices, and last but not least student teachers' portfolios at the conclusion of their studies must also include several reflections to support their development and professional socialization.

Although focusing on teacher autonomy and responsibility but still in connection with reflection, a study analysing 137 course descriptions from 8 HEIs offering ITE in Hungary has revealed that competence-wise, the learning outcomes

mostly focus on reflective attitudes (59.04%), while skills and knowledge needed for a reflective approach are less dominant (skills being at 30.12%, while knowledge only at 10.84%) (Nagy, et al., 2018).

Despite this duality (reflection is an integral part of teacher education, especially for practice, but its development is mostly restricted to attitude formation); reflection has been, is and for a presumably long time will be a founding pillar of ITE. In this premise, teacher educators shall support student teachers in reaching to higher levels of reflection, which enables future teachers to seek and analyse teaching and learning strategies and pedagogical theories and their relations in their particular context (Szivák, 2014).

Conclusions

The system of ITE has faced two major reforms in the past two decades: firstly, the introduction of the two-cycled, Bologna-type teacher education in 2006 brought new elements into the system (e.g. mentoring), but after a considerably short period, in 2013 this system was abandoned, and ITE was restored to the so-called undivided system. Some of the reasons behind this restoration were a significant reduction in the number of student teachers, poorer student performance, and dissatisfaction with the ratio of disciplinary and pedagogical-psychological modules. However, the introduction of the undivided system (which is the current one) just partially remedied these criticisms.

The system of ITE cannot cope with the most urgent challenges, such as teacher shortage due to the deep societal embeddedness of these phenomena. The rigorously regulated nature of teacher education hinders the rapid response to the local requirements (e.g. becoming research-based, strengthening the innovation potential, and adapting new methods). However, this regulated nature resonates with the centralized nature of public education. Higher education institutions (HEI) offering teacher education attempt to establish and maintain an innovative approach within this framework (e.g. by doing lesson studies).

Although ITE is rather unified on the national level with regards to content of the teaching process and requirements as described in the Training and Outcome Requirements, there are institutional particularities in assessment methods and processes (e.g. who evaluates the portfolios: university- or school-based teacher educators) and approaches.

Despite the professional discourse regarding the gap between theory and practice, teacher education programmes are still rather delimited: disciplinary, pedagogical-psychological and practice modules are somewhat separated, and there is little connection between them. The harmonization of the internal content and requirements of ITE is the challenge of the coming period; closer discourse between

the involved actors requires strong mediation, in which all teacher educators shall be sufficiently cooperative. However, there is no doubt that teacher education in Hungary has undergone great deal of development since the introduction of the Bologna-type system, and hopefully, the positive elements and good practices in the system can offset the problems arising from the environment. Truly lasting quality in teacher education can only be guaranteed if teacher education becomes a key priority for both universities and education policy.

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