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INITIAL PROFESSIONAL TRAINING OF SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS FOR THE EDUCATIONAL COUNSELING OF THIRD-AGE PERSONS

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List of abbreviations

RM – Republic of Moldova

AS – Social Work

ANACEC – National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Research

GE - experimental group

GC - control group

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CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE RESEARCH

The topicality and importance of the research topic derive from the accelerated dynamics of the process of demographic ageing, which has emerged as one of the most significant socio-demographic transformations of the 21st century. Population ageing no longer represents an isolated phenomenon or one specific to certain regions, but a global reality, with a major impact on economic structures, social protection systems, medical services and educational models. In the space of the *European Union,* as well as in *Romania* and the *Republic of Moldova,* the share of third-age persons is registering a constant increase, against the background of declining birth rates and increasing life expectancy. This evolution determines not only pressures on pension and health systems, but also the need to redefine the concept of ageing from an active, participatory perspective centered on quality of life [44, pp.15-28].

In this context, it becomes essential to rethink the educational and social interventions addressed to elderly persons, as well as to consolidate the competences of the professionals involved in working with this category of population. Social workers are called upon to respond to complex needs – of a *psychological, social, relational and educational* nature – in a framework characterized by diversity, vulnerability and rapid changes.

Thus, the addressed topic acquires a particular relevance through the need to develop a coherent theoretical and applied framework, capable of supporting the adequate professional training of specialists and of contributing to the promotion of a model of active, dignified and inclusive ageing. The study and deepening of this problem represent an essential condition for adapting the social work system to contemporary demographic realities and for ensuring a professional, empathetic intervention oriented towards valuing the potential of third-age persons.

At the same time, approaching ageing in an active, participatory and integrative manner implies extending the support offered to the elderly beyond physical care and social protection, including dimensions such as *continuing education, psychosocial counseling and the promotion of personal autonomy***.** From this perspective, *educational counseling becomes an emerging form of intervention,* with a role in combating isolation, maintaining self-esteem, developing digital skills and consolidating the sense of social belonging. Thus, in the context of global demographic transformations, characterized by the accelerated ageing of the population, the development of professional practices adapted to the needs of elderly persons is necessarily required. Among these, *educational counseling* represents an essential dimension, often neglected, but with a significant potential in promoting social inclusion, active participation and the quality of life of third-age persons.

In other words, the topicality of the topic is also closely linked to the *need to adapt the initial professional training of students in social work,* which must explicitly include the development of competences for the counseling of third-age persons. At present, there is still a discrepancy between social requirements and the actual training offered by the university system, especially with regard to the educational component of social intervention among the elderly.

The importance of the addressed topic therefore lies in its interdisciplinary and innovative character: it proposes a reflection on the way in which the training of future social workers can contribute to the development of socio-educational services adapted to the elderly.

Understanding the process of ageing requires a multidisciplinary perspective. The bio-psycho-socio-cultural view, correlated with the cycles of life, highlights the most significant aspects of the ageing process. Changes occur at the level of the following factors:

- *interpersonal* (the social network, the social environment in which the individual lives and the skills of behavior and interpersonal communication);
- *intra-personal* (personal characteristics of functioning: age, sex, heredity, nervous system, personality, intelligence, motor skills, sensory-motor system, etc.);
- *biological and physical* (the influences of certain chronic diseases, disabilities, cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, cancer, Alzheimer's disease, which affects approximately 10% of the population over 65 years of age, etc.);
- *the cycles of life,* seen in relation to the historical moment of the socio-cultural system [46, p.420].

The initial professional training of social work students must reflect this emerging reality, through the development of specific educational counseling competences, adapted to the psychosocial needs of

elderly persons. However, in many academic curricula, this component is treated superficially or integrated in a fragmentary manner, without a systematic and interdisciplinary approach. Precisely for this reason, the proposed research targets a topical field, situated at the intersection of social policies, adult education and social gerontology.

The importance of the topic also derives from the imperative of training professionals capable of addressing in a complex manner the needs of this category of population, in accordance with the principles of dignity, autonomy and active participation. By focusing on educational counseling, the topic opens an innovative research direction, which supports the reconceptualization of the role of the social worker as an educational agent, not only an interventional or supportive one.

The topicality and importance of the research lie in the existence of a series of reasons that currently generate the need for professional conduct in social work, among which we will note the following: **a)** the loss of positive value and moral orientations in contemporary society cannot fail to also affect the moral profile of particular social workers as members of the society in which they work and in which all these things happen; **b)** the persons who hold the position of social worker do not always have professional training carried out in specialized institutions. Moreover, not rarely, random people enter the social protection system, who are only looking for a job, a salary, a source of livelihood, without knowing the mission of this activity, its principles, values and moral norms; **c)** social workers cannot always fully cope with the system of requirements and values imposed by external institutions.

Thus, the duty of the social worker is, under all conditions, to demonstrate professionalism and high moral qualities, to make sustained efforts to put into practice the fundamental values, principles and ethical standards of the profession, helping the beneficiary to realize all their rights to a decent life.

The interest in this topic is also determined by the topicality of the issue in the Republic of Moldova, where the process of population ageing is becoming increasingly evident, and the social work system faces major challenges in adapting services to the specific needs of third-age persons. Moreover, in the absence of well-structured non-formal education programs for elderly persons, the educational counseling offered by well-trained social workers could represent a vital resource in supporting social participation, personal development and reducing the risk of marginalization. This research thus becomes not only scientifically relevant, but also necessary from a social and institutional point of view, proposing concrete solutions for the training of a generation of social workers sensitive to the educational needs of seniors.

Description of the situation in the research field and identification of the research problem.

The analysis of the specialized literature and of previous research highlights the fact that the topic of training social workers for the educational counseling of elderly persons is relatively new and insufficiently explored directly; however, relevant convergences can be identified in three major research directions:

Studies and research in the field of social work:

- *West:* M. Payne [87]; M. Lymbery [83]; C.-J., Marc, D. Makai, C. Bacter [84]; M. L. Savickas [88]; J. Seden [89]; C. Zastrow [91]; M. A. Zimmerman [92], [93].
- *Romania:* C. Bocancea, G. Neamţu [3], [7]; D. Buzducea [14], [15], [16]; D. Cojocaru [19]; G. Neamţu [48]; C. Zamfir [72]; B. Zani, A. Palmonari [73].
- *Russia:* И.Г. Кузина [94], Е. Н. Приступы [95].
- *Republic of Moldova:* M. Bulgaru [8], [9]; [10], [11]; M. Bulgaru, M. Dilion [12]; N. Sali, T. Gribincea [13]; T. Cernat [18]; M. Diţa [27].

Studies and research on the dimension of active ageing of third-age persons:

- *West:* J. Cavanaugh, F. Blanchard-Fields [77]; G. Egan [78]; M. Formosa [79]; S.-B. Merriam, L.-L.Bierema [85]; J. Mezirow [86].
- *Romania:* R. Fontaine [35]; D.Gal [36]; F. Golu [37]; M. Marshali [43]; I. Mărginean [44]; A. Muntean [46], [47]; S. Rădulescu [54]; E.-A. Stănilă, [64]; A. Teodorescu [68].
- *Republic of Moldova:* L. Cuzneţov, C. Calaraş, C. Eţco [24]; E. Losîi [42]; A. Oceretnîi [49]; N. Romanda [56]; L. Salcuţan [58]; I. Simcenco [63].

Studies and research in promoting the educational counseling of elderly persons:

- *West:* M.-K. Krogsrud, M. O'Melia,, B. Du Bois [41]; A. Bandura [74]; P. Burnard [76]; J. Fox [80]; K. Fund, [81]; S. Vincent [90].
- *Romania:* A. Băban [1]; A. Bălan [2]; D.-C..Bodi [5]; S.-I. Bodogai [6]; M. Boteanu [7]; M. Cozărescu [21]; I. Dafinoiu, J.-L. Vargha [25]; H. Dumitraşcu [29]; T.-E.Dumitriu [30]; C. Enăchescu [31], [32], [33]; I. Holdevici [38], [39]; D. Ilişoi, A. Lesenciuc [40].
- *Republic of Moldova:* C. Calaraş [17]; E. Davidescu [26]; L. Cuzneţov [23]; L. Cuzneţov, C. Calaraş, C. Eţco [24]; Z. Micleuşanu, L. Cuzneţov [45]; S. Rusnac [57]; N. Silistraru [60], [61].

Thus, numerous studies have addressed the importance of the initial training of social workers in relation to the needs of contemporary society. Authors such as M. Payne [87] and S. Banks [75] have emphasized the need to integrate ethical, communication and adaptability competences into training programs.

The research problem results from the contradictions existing between the current social requirements regarding the educational support of third-age persons and the current state of the initial professional training of future social workers. These contradictions manifest themselves as follows:

- between the growing need for educational counseling of third-age persons, determined by the promotion of active ageing, social inclusion and lifelong learning, and the insufficient level of professional training of social work students for carrying out this activity;
- between the necessity of developing professional competences specific to the educational counseling of third-age persons and the insufficient grounding and curricular valorization of pedagogical models that would ensure the systematic development of these competences in the initial training of future social workers.

These contradictions generate the research problem, which consists in the insufficient theoretical-methodological and practical grounding of the process of initial professional training of social work students for the educational counseling of third-age persons**.**

Solving the research problem involves determining the theoretical, methodological and praxiological landmarks of training social work students for the educational counseling of third-age persons and elaborating a pedagogical model oriented towards developing the professional competences necessary for the efficient performance of this activity.

The aim of the research consists in the theoretical and methodological grounding of the development of professional competences of social work students for the educational counseling of third-age persons.

The objectives of the research include:

1. determining the theoretical landmarks regarding active ageing, the educational counseling of third-age persons and the development of professional competences in social work;
2. identifying and structuring the professional competences necessary for social workers to carry out the educational counseling of third-age persons, with reference to the cognitive, relational, ethical and methodological dimensions;
3. investigating the way in which the educational counseling of third-age persons is integrated into the curriculum of professional training programs in social work in the Republic of Moldova and Germany;
4. establishing the initial level of development of the professional competences of social work students necessary for carrying out the educational counseling of third-age persons;
5. grounding and elaborating a **Pedagogical Model for developing the professional competences of social work students for the educational counseling of third-age persons**;
6. elaborating and experimentally validating the approach for developing the professional competences of social work students, based on the elaborated Pedagogical Model;
7. formulating conclusions and recommendations regarding the optimization of the process of initial professional training of future social workers with a view to carrying out the educational counseling of third-age persons.

General hypothesis. Starting from the premise that the students of the Social Work study program present a partially developed and differentiated level of the professional competences necessary for the educational counseling of elderly persons, we assume that the application of a structured educational approach, theoretically and methodologically grounded, will lead to the significant development of these competences, reflected through the improvement of the professional competences of educational counseling of third-age persons.

The methodology of scientific research reflects various types of research (fundamental, methodological and operational), carried out through *research methods:*

a) theoretical investigation, analysis and comparison, systematization and generalization;

c) empirical, experimental: the pedagogical experiment, questioning, psychodiagnostic techniques;

d) mathematical analysis for data processing.

In the ascertaining experiment and in the control experiment, three research instruments were applied, described in the annexes of the thesis: *1.Self-assessment questionnaire; 2. The test Are You an Assertive Person?; 3. Empathy Questionnaire (TORONTO).*

The scientific novelty and originality of the results lie in grounding an integrative approach to the initial professional training of social work students for the educational counseling of third-age persons. The

research brings contributions through: 1. the conceptualization of educational counseling as a dimension of the social worker's intervention in working with elderly persons; 2. the identification and structuring of the professional competences necessary for carrying out this activity; 3. the comparative analysis of university training in social work in the Republic of Moldova and Germany and the valorization of relevant good practices; 4. the grounding and elaboration of a Pedagogical Model for developing the professional competences of social work students for the educational counseling of third-age persons, structured on interdependent components – objectives, contents, principles, forms, methods, technologies and assessment – and oriented towards the integrated development of the cognitive, relational, ethical and methodological competences necessary for carrying out educational counseling; 5. the experimental validation of the efficiency of the elaborated Pedagogical Model in developing the professional competences of social work students for the educational counseling of third-age persons.

The scientific problem solved in the research consists in the theoretical-methodological grounding and validation of an approach to the initial professional training of social work students for the educational counseling of third-age persons. Its solution was achieved through the conceptualization of educational counseling in the context of social work, the identification of the necessary professional competences, the valorization of the results of the comparative analysis of university training in the Republic of Moldova and Germany and the elaboration of a Pedagogical Model that ensures the correlation of finalities, contents, formative strategies and assessment. The experimental validation of the Pedagogical Model confirmed its functionality and applicability in developing the professional competences of future social workers and created premises for integrating the educational counseling of third-age persons into the university curriculum.

The theoretical significance of the research consists in grounding the concept of educational counseling of third-age persons from the interdisciplinary perspective of pedagogy, social work, educational gerontology and person-centered counseling; delimiting the dimensions and components of the professional competences necessary for social work students to carry out this activity; as well as grounding and elaborating a Pedagogical Model that explains, structures and guides the process of developing the professional competences necessary for the educational counseling of third-age persons.

The applied value consists in the possibility of valorizing the Pedagogical Model for developing the professional competences of social work students for the educational counseling of third-age persons, as well as the elaborated instruments and formative approach, within university courses, internships and continuing training programs. The Model and the research results can be used by teaching staff, internship coordinators and trainers in the field of social work for designing, organizing and assessing professional training activities oriented towards preparing future social workers for the educational counseling of third-age persons.

The main scientific results obtained within the research concern the theoretical, methodological and applied grounding of the process of initial professional training of social work students for carrying out the educational counseling of third-age persons. A first result is the conceptual analysis of educational counseling in the context of social work with elderly persons, carried out by integrating interdisciplinary perspectives from the fields of education, psychology, gerontology and social work. This approach allows the delimitation and grounding of educational counseling as a relevant dimension of the social worker's professional intervention and offers landmarks for designing the process of initial training.

Another result is the identification and structuring of the professional competences necessary for social work students for the efficient performance of the educational counseling activity addressed to third-age persons. The identified competences, related to the cognitive, relational, ethical and methodological dimensions, constitute landmarks for selecting and organizing the training contents, for elaborating didactic strategies and for establishing the criteria and indicators for assessing the level of professional preparation.

The research also made it possible to establish differences and convergences between the professional training programs for social workers in the Republic of Moldova and Germany, highlighting relevant curricular models and practices. The result of the comparative analysis offers the possibility of valorizing international experiences and adapting them to the particularities and needs of the professional training system in the Republic of Moldova, thus contributing to the contextualization and modernization of the university curriculum in the field of social work.

A central scientific result of the research is the elaboration and theoretical-applied grounding of the Pedagogical Model for developing the professional competences of social work students for the educational counseling of third-age persons. The Model integrates and correlates the essential components of the training process – finalities, competences, contents, principles, forms of organization, didactic methods and technologies, as well as assessment modalities – into a coherent and functional structure. From this perspective, the Pedagogical Model has the role of guiding and organizing the process of initial professional

training, offering an applied framework for the systemic development of the competences necessary for the educational counseling of elderly persons. At the same time, it allows the correlation of the theoretical dimension of training with practical experiences and with the real requirements of the professional activity of the future social worker.

The functionality of the Pedagogical Model is supported by experimental validation, carried out through the application of research instruments and the analysis of the data obtained. The validation made it possible to assess the efficiency of the formative approach and to identify the changes produced in the level of students' professional competences, offering empirical support for the applicability of the Model in the process of initial professional training. Thus, the Model is not only a theoretical construction, but an applicable pedagogical instrument, oriented towards developing the professional competences necessary for carrying out the educational counseling of third-age persons.

Based on the research results, recommendations were formulated regarding the integration and valorization of the topic of educational counseling of third-age persons in the curriculum of university training programs in social work. The recommendations concern updating curricular contents, diversifying training strategies and consolidating the practical dimension of students' preparation. Overall, the results obtained contribute to the modernization and contextualization of the initial professional training of future social workers, by orienting it towards the new social requirements generated by population ageing, the promotion of active ageing, social inclusion and lifelong learning.

The implementation of the scientific results was carried out at the theoretical level through publication in specialized scientific journals and in collections of the materials of scientific conferences. 9 scientific papers were published, of which: 3 articles in journals from the National Register of specialized journals included in the List of databases accepted by ANACEC, 6 articles in the proceedings of international and national conferences.

Approval and validation of the scientific results. The main results of the research are highlighted in the published scientific articles and in the communications presented at scientific conferences.

Volume and structure of the thesis. The content of the thesis comprises: annotation (in Romanian and English), list of tables, list of figures, list of abbreviations, introduction, 3 chapters, general conclusions and recommendations, bibliographic sources (200 titles) and 10 annexes. The thesis is presented on 150 pages of main text, including 48 tables and 21 figures. The results obtained are published in 9 scientific papers.

Keywords: students, social workers, elderly persons, ageing, old age, senescence, senility, "advanced age", "the elderly person", elderly person, social worker, counseling, educational counseling, educational counseling of third-age persons.

CONTENT OF THE THESIS

In the **Introduction** the topicality of the research topic, the aim and objectives of the research are argued, the research problem is formulated, the general hypothesis and the working hypotheses are elaborated, and the research methods are specified.

Chapter 1 - Theoretical approaches to educational counseling in social work with third-age persons provides the conceptual and epistemological basis of the scientific approach, delimiting and defining the key concepts of the research, with emphasis on educational counseling in the context of ageing and social work. The chapter addresses an interdisciplinary perspective on the issue, integrating elements from psychology, pedagogy, gerontology and social sciences. The specific roles and attributions of the social worker in the process of educational counseling are analyzed, emphasizing the complexity of intervention in working with elderly persons. At the same time, the essential stages and techniques used in educational counseling are presented, adapted to the particularities of third-age persons, aspects that are essential for the professional training of future practitioners.

At the scientific level, the concept of *counseling* acquired shape and theoretical consistency once it was integrated into the language of the psycho-socio-educational professions. *L. Şoitu* emphasizes the fact that the term was adopted in this field as a borrowing from English (*counselling*), reflecting the development of a distinct professional practice, theoretically and methodologically grounded. This terminological adoption marks the transition from the common meaning of "advice" to a *structured intervention, based on competences, ethical principles and scientifically validated methods* [66, p.253].

Thus, *counseling,* in its contemporary meaning, can no longer be reduced to simple advising, but represents a *complex process of facilitating personal, educational and social development*, centered on autonomy, empowerment and the valorization of individual resources. In the educational and social context, counseling becomes an instrument of support in managing problematic situations, in clarifying learning pathways and in optimizing adaptation to the requirements of the environment

Some of the difficulties in understanding *counseling* - as theory and practice - come from the history of this field, from the less inspired models provided by some practices in other countries, but also from the extension of the concept to areas less close to the social field (legal, marketing, etc.).

The evolution of counseling as a practice and field of reflection cannot be separated from the historical course of philosophical thought. The selection and accumulation of knowledge from multiple spheres of human activity – science, technology, religion, art, morality and life experience – constituted the foundation of the first works of philosophy.

The ideas of the great ancient philosophers, such as *Socrates, Cicero, Seneca* or *Confucius*, emphasized dialogue, self-knowledge, character formation and inner balance. Later, the reflections of *Michel de Montaigne, Francis Bacon, Blaise Pascal, Immanuel Kant, Arthur Schopenhauer* and *Leo Tolstoy* deepened the moral, existential and rational dimensions of human behavior, consolidating the idea that the support given to the individual in the process of reflection and choice has old roots in European and universal culture.

According to *V. Pascaru-Goncear*, the selection and accumulation of knowledge from various fields underlay the constitution of the first philosophical reflections on counseling [50, p.33].

Referring to this historical evolution, *D. Şoitu* emphasizes the fact that psychoanalysis was initially marginalized, but in the first two decades of the 20th century it expanded enthusiastically in American society, marking a decisive moment in the affirmation of psychological intervention as a distinct profession [67, p.582].

Counseling is the interpersonal relationship of communication between a specialized person (the counselor) and a person who needs specialized assistance and, possibly, explicitly requests it (the counselee), who are not in the classic sender-receiver relationship, but in the position of actors of an interaction.

As emphasized by *D. Ilişoi* and *A. Lesenciuc*, the counselor helps the counselee to help himself/herself, the emphasis being placed on the development of personal autonomy and responsibility. Therefore, counseling does not represent an act of directly offering solutions, but a process of facilitating self-knowledge and self-regulation, in which communication becomes the main instrument of inner transformation [40, p.54].

G. Tomşa defined *counseling* as "an action aimed at suggesting the way of proceeding or the way of behaving that must be adopted in a given situation, or, in general, in everyday life and activity", and the counselor as the person who "aims, through the methods and techniques used, to offer support to his client so that he adapts as efficiently as possible both to his own personality and to the social reality in which he lives" [69].

According to *V. Enea*, counseling implies an integrated approach, which correlates the educational dimension with the psychological and social one. The intervention must be adapted to the specific context of each institution and to the particularities of the beneficiaries, avoiding the rigid application of standardized models [34, p.533].

In fact, *counseling* represents the process by which a specialized person called a counselor offers support, within a well-defined methodological framework, to another person (client), who is thus supported in adopting decisions regarding his/her own personal and professional life. In this sense, *A.-M. Szilagyi* emphasizes that the career counseling approach implies an integrative perspective, oriented towards optimizing the global functioning of the person and supporting him/her in the process of self-knowledge and decision-making [65, p.15].

In this sense, *M. Ploșca* and *A. Mois* highlight the fact that the counseling process is not limited to the punctual solving of a difficulty, but favors a cognitive-emotional restructuring that supports personal growth and maturation [52, p.10].

In the specialized literature, the concept of **counseling** is approached from various perspectives, highlighting its educational, psychological, relational and formative dimensions. Below are presented a series of definitions of counseling, selected and systematized by C. Enăchescu in the work *Tratat de psihanaliză și psihoterapie* [32, p.324-325].

Thus, *C. Enăchescu* emphasizes the fact that counseling facilitates a positive evolution of the subject, by supporting him/her in the process of adaptation and reorganization of personal experience. Thus, counseling is defined as an educational method and a method of supporting persons in critical situations, which require the immediate and rapid solving of the problems that have arisen [32, p. 324]. In another perspective, it is considered a form of psychological support, similar to psychotherapy, intended for normal persons confronted with "life problems" [F. C. Thorne, apud 32, p. 324).

Counseling is also viewed as a modality of support for persons who wish to reach a higher level of life, to overcome certain obstacles and to build personal life strategies, with reference to the maturation of personality, personal integration and the assumption of responsibility [F. P. Robinson, apud 32, p. 324].

From the perspective of the helping relationship, counseling represents a complex process, which implies specialized professional training and describes the interpersonal helping relationship between the counselor and the person requesting specialized assistance [G. Egan, apud 32, p. 324].

Another approach highlights the role of counseling in exploring and understanding one's own identity, developing problem-solving strategies and decision-making, delimiting crisis intervention, ameliorative intervention, prevention and formative and developmental intervention [C. Myrck, apud 32, p. 324].

Counseling is also conceived as a supportive relationship oriented towards self-knowledge, emotional self-acceptance, maturation and the optimal development of personal and professional resources [Asociația B.C., apud 32, p. 324). In the same perspective, counseling aims to support the person in understanding himself/herself, clarifying the relation to his/her own living space and to the environment, identifying possibilities and solving emotional and interpersonal problems [M. Burks, B. Stefflre, apud 32, p. 325].

The relational dimension is highlighted by defining counseling as a dialogue in which one person helps another person who encounters significant difficulties [J. Wallis, apud 32, p. 325]. In a person-centered approach, counseling is understood as a relationship through which the individual is supported to explore his/her thoughts, emotions and behaviors, to identify his/her resources and to use them in order to cope as efficiently as possible with life situations [F. Inskip, R. Johns, apud 32, p. 325].

In a psychological perspective, counseling is conceived as a professional relationship based on the application of psychological theories and communication skills, oriented predominantly towards facilitating the process of self-knowledge and change, rather than towards offering advice or exercising constraint [D. Feltham, apud 32, p. 325].

Overall, the analyzed definitions highlight the **multidimensional, relational, formative character of counseling, oriented towards the development of the person's resources**. These perspectives offer conceptual landmarks for delimiting educational counseling and for grounding its role in the professional training of future social workers.

By inventorying these definitions, several essential common elements emerge: *the professional and structured character of the intervention; the relational nature of the process; the emphasis on autonomy and responsibility; the orientation towards development and prevention; the ethical grounding and confidentiality.*

Social work is defined as a professional activity oriented towards supporting individuals, groups and communities in order to increase, valorize or restore social functioning. Its fundamental aim consists in creating favorable conditions for achieving the personal and social objectives of the beneficiaries, through interventions that facilitate adaptation, integration and active participation in community life.

The practice of social work is materialized in the application of the values, principles and methods specific to the field, oriented towards achieving essential objectives: supporting persons in accessing resources and services, counseling and psychological support of individuals and microgroups, implementing or improving community health services, as well as participating in the elaboration and promotion of social legislation. In this sense, *C. Bocancea* and *G. Neamțu* highlight the complex and multidimensional character of social work practice, emphasizing the fact that it implies both direct intervention and involvement in the process of developing and reforming social systems [4, p.69].

Thus, *E. Zamfir* outlines the image of the social worker as an agent of social change, who investigates systemic dysfunctions, designs and implements adequate interventions, facilitates communication and mobilizes community resources. This view emphasizes the educational, organizational and relational dimension of the profession, going beyond the strictly administrative or charitable framework [71, p.2].

In this perspective, *Ch. Zastrow* places social work within the broader framework of "social welfare" activities, considering it an essential component of the systems meant to support social balance and human development [91, p.10].

In this sense, *C.-G. Rentea* emphasizes that social work has the role of intervening in support of persons affected by social and economic vulnerability, contributing to the reduction of inequalities and to the promotion of social inclusion [55, p.20].

Through this perspective, social work goes beyond punctual intervention, being configured as a complex approach of social transformation and support of human dignity [82].

The described profile is particularly relevant for the field of *educational counseling*, where the social worker combines the role of facilitator of personal development with that of mediator between the person and the social support systems.

In this perspective, *C. Bocancea* and *G. Neamțu* emphasize the fact that the social worker conceives strategic interventions that go beyond simple direct help, involving the coordination of resources, interdisciplinary collaboration and the articulation of social services in a coherent and efficient manner. This approach highlights the strategic and systemic character of social work practice [3, p.83].

This view is relevant for the field of *educational counseling*, especially in working with third-age persons, where the intervention requires the integration of psychological, educational and social dimensions into a complex strategy of support and development.

The professional roles (figure 1.) performed by the social worker are associated with the functions of the social worker and explain the nature of the interaction between beneficiaries and social workers in systems at various levels.

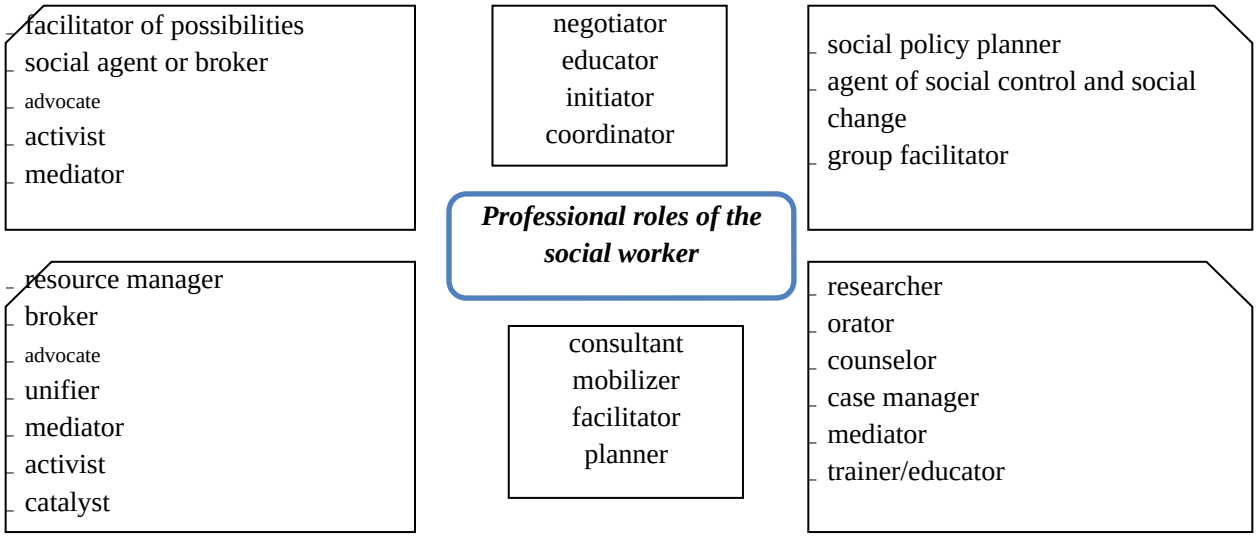


Figure 1. Professional roles of the social worker (elaborated by the author)

Thus, the flexibility of professional roles constitutes an essential condition for the efficiency of intervention and for adaptation to the diversity of social situations encountered in practice.

Applied to the field of intervention with elderly persons, these roles reflect the complex character of the profession. For example, in situations of forced retirement or chronic illness, the social worker can simultaneously be a counselor (emotional support), a broker (facilitating access to medical and social services) and an advocate of the beneficiary's rights [10, p.248].

The science that studies the process of ageing and the issues specific to this stage is called *gerontology*. The researcher *E. Losîi*, mentions that *gerontology* has as its object of research ageing in all its dimensions: biological (morphological and functional), medical (normal and pathological, somatic and mental, clinical and paraclinical), psychological, social and economic, historical and demographic [42, p.137].

This *interdisciplinary approach* emphasizes the complex character of the phenomenon of ageing, which cannot be reduced exclusively to biological decline or social vulnerability. On the contrary, gerontological analysis integrates the medical perspective with the psychological and social one, highlighting the interdependence between physical health, emotional balance, social status and economic conditions.

From this perspective, *the educational counseling of third-age persons* falls within the sphere of modern gerontological interventions, contributing to the maintenance of cognitive functioning, to the support of identity and to the facilitation of active social participation. The gerontological understanding of old age thus offers a solid scientific foundation for the development of educational and social programs intended for this category of population.

According to *E. Popescu*, the contemporary image of the population about elderly persons is still strongly influenced by social prejudices and stereotypes. In the work *Pedagogia socială în faţa problemelor şomajului şi ale populaţiei vârstnice*, the author highlights the fact that the old person is frequently perceived

as being “unadaptable to changes”, conservative, excessively critical, dominated by outdated mentalities and, sometimes, considered a burden for society [53, p.83].

For these reasons, ageing can be understood as a multidimensional phenomenon, manifested simultaneously at the biological, social and psychological level. A systematic analysis of these dimensions is proposed by *R. Fontaine* in the work *Psihologia îmbătrânirii* [35, p.11].

From a *biological* perspective, ageing is marked by progressive changes of the organism, reflected through the increasing incidence of diseases, transformations of physical appearance, changes in mobility and the appearance of visible signs of senescence, such as wrinkles or the diminution of muscle tone. These changes are the most evident and often the first associated, at the level of social perception, with the idea of old age.

From a *social* point of view, the ageing process is closely linked to the change of status and social roles, especially through withdrawal from professional activity upon retirement. This transition implies the redefinition of social identity and adaptation to new forms of participation or, in certain situations, to roles of a passive or compensatory character.

At the *psychological* level, ageing implies changes in intellectual activities, motivations and affective dynamics. Although certain cognitive functions may experience a decline, accumulated experience, the capacity for reflection and emotional maturity can constitute valuable resources in this stage of life.

R. Fontaine emphasizes that the ensemble of these transformations – biological, social and psychological – constitutes the object of study of gerontology, confirming the integrative character of this science. In this sense, the multidimensional approach to ageing offers a solid conceptual framework for grounding the educational and counseling interventions addressed to third-age persons [ibidem, 35, p.11].

In the context of *interdisciplinarity*, the issue of the third age is situated at the intersection of sociology, social work, theology and psychology. Each of these fields offers a valid explanatory framework: sociology analyzes integration and social roles, social work targets the mechanisms of support and protection, theology explores the meaning of existence and the dignity of the person, and psychology investigates the cognitive, affective and motivational processes specific to this stage of life.

The analysis of the importance of interdisciplinarity in the envisaged investigative approach allowed us to elaborate a theoretical framework for exploring it, which includes interdisciplinarity (Figure 2.)

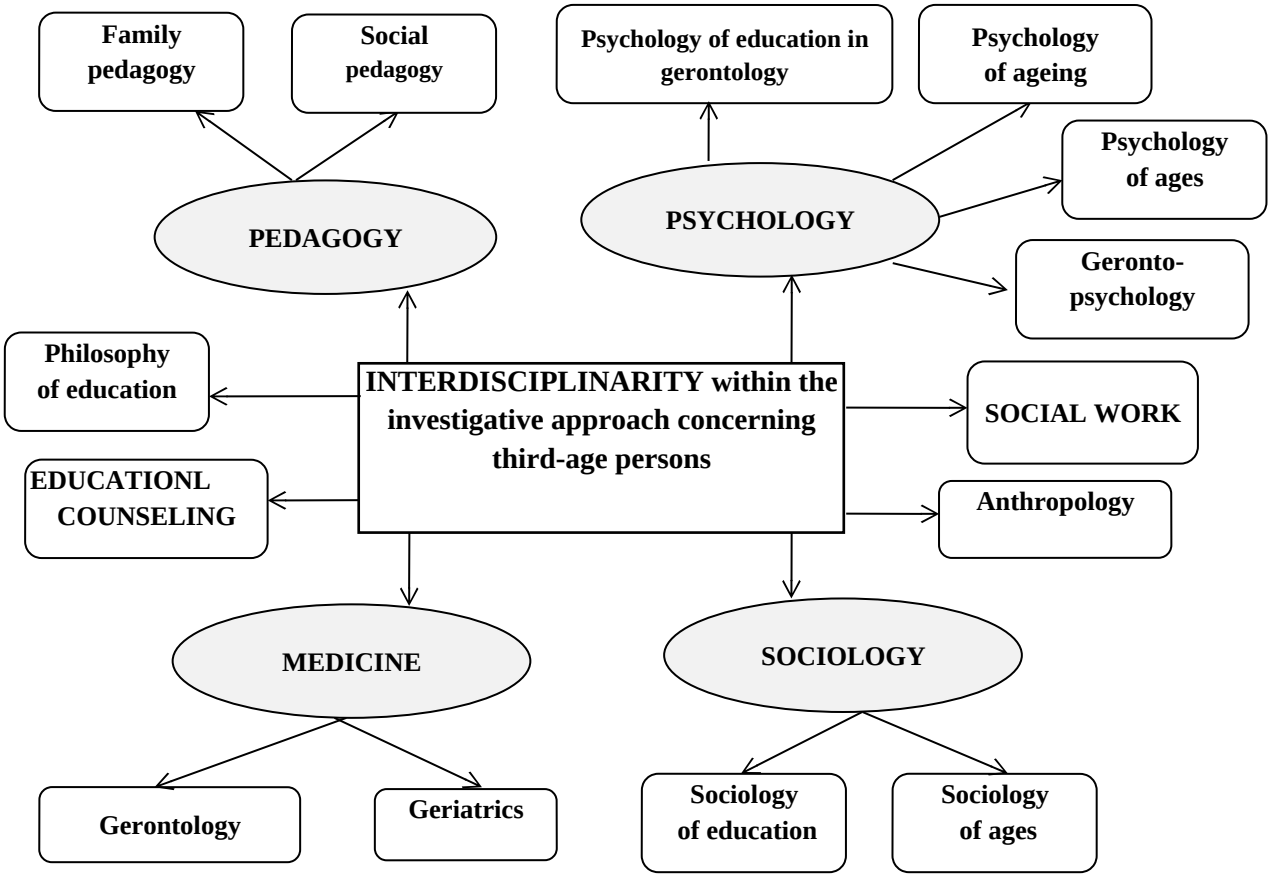


Figure 2. Theoretical framework for exploring interdisciplinarity within the investigative approach concerning third-age persons (elaborated by the author) [28].

In the analysis of the ageing process, its delimitation from chronic pathology represents an essential aspect for the correct understanding of the phenomenon. In the textbook *Asistenţa socială a grupurilor de risc*, D. Buzducea highlights the importance of a rigorous definition of ageing, emphasizing that it must not be confused with illness or with pathological decline [14, p.282].

Therefore, the study of the third age has a profoundly interdisciplinary character, involving *medical, psychological, social and educational* fields. The complexity of the ageing process requires an integrated approach, which correlates the biological, psychological and social dimensions of human existence.

According to *E.-A. Stănilă*, the development of this field created the premises for researching and identifying strategies, methods and techniques capable of facilitating the formation and development of elderly persons on multiple levels of life – cognitive, emotional, social and value-related. Thus, a new conceptual framework emerged – *the psychology of education in gerontology*, a discipline that naturally fits into the evolution of contemporary society and into the dynamics of lifelong learning [64, p.283].

The analysis carried out in the first chapter allowed the outlining of the conceptual and theoretical landmarks regarding the educational counseling of third-age persons, highlighting its interdisciplinary character and its relevance for social work practice. At the same time, the main dimensions of counseling and the premises for developing the professional competences necessary for future social workers were identified.

Chapter 2 - Methodological landmarks regarding the initial professional training of social work students for the educational counseling of elderly persons focuses on the identification and analysis of the professional competences necessary for social workers to carry out educational counseling activities among the elderly. According to *D. Cristea,* adopting a professional conduct implies going through complex processes of a *psycho-individual* (formation of professional identity, internalization of values); *psycho-social* (integration into professional groups, assumption of roles); *socio-cultural* order (relating to the norms and expectations of society) [22, p. 951].

Initial professional training is not limited to the accumulation of theoretical knowledge, but implies the development of reflective competences, ethical responsibility and the capacity to adapt to various contexts.

Professional standards refer to the roles of the social worker, depending on the specificity and objective of the respective standard. There is no fixed boundary between them, since, in various professional circumstances, a social worker can simultaneously perform several professional roles.

In order to rigorously ground and design the educational counseling competence of future social workers, it is necessary to analyze the **Qualification Standard "Bachelor in Social Work" (2023),** as a normative reference document for initial professional training. The Standard allows the correlation of the finalities of the study program with the requirements of practicing the profession, through learning outcomes, the level of professional autonomy and responsibility, as well as through the general and specific competences provided for graduates.

Table 1. Correspondence between the professional competences provided for by the Qualification Standard and the components of the educational counseling competence (elaborated by the author)

Landmarks from the Qualification Standard	Significance for educational counseling	Designed competence
Knowledge and understanding of the particularities of beneficiaries	Allows the identification of educational and social needs	*Cognitive competence*
Assessment of the beneficiary's needs, problems and resources	Grounds the diagnosis and individualization of the intervention	*Methodological competence*
Professional communication and interaction	Supports the helping relationship, active listening and dialogue	*Relational competence*
Designing and carrying out social intervention	Allows the structuring of the educational counseling approach	*Methodological competence*
Informing, guiding and supporting the beneficiary	Supports decision-making, autonomy and access to resources	*Cognitive-methodological competence*
Collaboration with the family, the community and other specialists	Ensures the integrated character of the intervention	*Relational competence*
Observance of professional norms and values	Protects the dignity, autonomy and rights of the beneficiary	*Ethical competence*
Monitoring and assessment of the	Allows the appreciation of results and the	*Methodological*

intervention	adjustment of the approach	*competence*

The analysis of the Standard aims to identify those learning outcomes and professional competences that can ground educational counseling as a dimension of the social worker's activity. Particular attention is given to the competences concerning the assessment of the beneficiary's needs, professional communication and relationship, the design and implementation of social intervention, informing and guiding beneficiaries, mobilizing personal and community resources, interdisciplinary collaboration, observance of ethical principles, monitoring and assessment of the intervention. Thus, we find that the premises of the educational counseling competence are found transversally in the learning outcomes and in the professional competences associated with the qualification. Even if it is not necessarily delimited as an autonomous professional competence, its components are found in the assessment of the beneficiary's needs, professional communication, informing and guiding, designing the intervention, mobilizing resources, interdisciplinary collaboration and observance of ethical principles. Therefore, the educational counseling competence can be grounded as an integrative construct, resulting from the articulation of the cognitive, relational, methodological and ethical dimensions of the social worker's professional training.

In the case of *training social work students for the educational counseling of elderly persons,* this perspective is particularly relevant. The professional must acquire not only technical competences, but also relational maturity, cultural sensitivity and the capacity to integrate the bio-psycho-social dimensions of ageing into a coherent and ethical intervention.

The initial training of students is a complex process in which the alternation between theory and practice is essential for consolidating competences. In the educational counseling of third-age persons, this combination helps students integrate theoretical knowledge about the educational process with the ability to adapt interventions to the real needs of beneficiaries in practical contexts. Thus, the authors *A. Vilbrod* and *I. Ionescu* propose an in-depth analysis of the way in which the fundamental terms of social work – such as solidarity, social intervention, social justice and professional learning – are reinterpreted in a changing context [70, p.213].

In the context of the professional training of social work students for the educational counseling of third-age persons, the structure of the work *Consiliere și orientare în carieră* by *M. Copăceanu* offers a valuable operational model for organizing the counseling process, grounded on the sequence: *assessment – analysis – intervention – reflection* [20, p.45].

N. Silistraru and *S. Golubiţchi,* in the methodological guide *Pedagogia învăţământului superior,* approach the university didactic process from a systemic and formative perspective, emphasizing that the contemporary university must focus on the development of competences and on the authentic professional training of students. The authors propose a modern view of university pedagogy, in which the emphasis shifts from the transmission of information to the organization of active, reflective and applied learning experiences [62, p.70].

The counselor-counselee relationship represents a profoundly human relationship, whose success is doubly determined: on the one hand by the characteristics of the personalities involved, and on the other hand by the quality of the communication achieved between them. According to *D. Ilișoi* and *A. Lesenciuc*, the psychological support of the counseling relationship is the fundamental need to communicate, which activates both communication competences and the psychological availability to enter into an authentic dialogue [40, p.38].

A theoretical framework frequently used in the training of counselors is the model developed by *G. Egan,* detailed by Francesca Inskipp and presented by *H. Dumitrașcu*. The model proposes a structuring of the helping process into three stages, each implying the development of specific skills [78, p.52]:

- **Stage 1 –** *Building the relationship and exploring the problem.* At this stage, the helper develops a warm and secure relationship, which allows the client to explore the problem from his/her own perspective. Necessary skills: *attention and active listening; clear communication and client-centeredness; empathic understanding and non-critical acceptance; authenticity; paraphrasing and reflecting feelings; summarizing; supporting the client to become specific in expression.*
- **Stage 2 –** *Developing new understandings*. The aim is to deepen understanding and restructure the perspective on the problem. In addition to the skills of the first stage, the following are necessary: *communicating a deep understanding; identifying recurring themes and inconsistencies; offering relevant information; selective sharing of the counselor's experiences or reactions; prompt and adequate reactions; the capacity to select and formulate goals.*
- **Stage 3 –** *Action and change*. The social worker supports the beneficiary to consider several modalities of action and to develop a concrete plan. In addition to the previous competences, the following are

necessary: *creative thinking and brainstorming; problem solving and decision-making; using learning theories for action planning; assessing and monitoring progress.*

The interaction of these levels leads to the development of integrated professional competences, necessary for the efficient exercise of the role of *social worker in the educational counseling of elderly persons.*

According to *A. Sandu,* the efficiency of the counseling process is supported by the observance of fundamental rules, which structure the professional relationship and ensure the quality of the intervention. This activity implies the observance of certain rules, presented in table 2.

Table 2. Rules of the efficiency of the counseling process [59, p.60]

Efficiency of the counseling process	
Confidentiality	represents an essential condition, implying the guarantee of the private character of the counseling process and the non-disclosure of the information obtained without the client's consent (except for the situations provided by law). As a rule, the confidential character of the discussion is specified from the beginning of the interview.
Avoiding preconceived constructions and conclusions	The counselor does not have the role of offering advice or imposing solutions, but of facilitating the revaluation of the client's experience and the identification of alternatives. Incongruences between the counselor's value system and that of the client may affect the professional relationship if inadequate judgments or value assessments are formulated.
Unconditionally positive attitude towards the client	implies the sincere acceptance of the client as a person, without judgment or labeling. This attitude is possible only under the conditions of the counselor's authentic self-acceptance, who thus conveys a climate of respect and valorization.
Empathic reaction	expresses the counselor's authentic intention to understand the client in the complexity of his/her inner universe and of the social contexts in which he/she is involved. Empathy goes beyond the level of a simple intellectual understanding, aiming at the deep comprehension of the motivational and social structures that underlie the client's behavior.

According to *D. Șoitu,* the concern for the beneficiary has remained constantly central in the evolution of counseling, beyond the diversity and sometimes the controversy of theoretical orientations. In this context, a set of principles with a major impact on the theory and practice of modern counseling is attributed to F. Biestek. These principles include: *individualization* – recognizing the uniqueness of each beneficiary; *awareness of the expression of feelings* – facilitating the verbalization of emotions; *controlling the emotions involved* – adequate management of affective reactions within the professional relationship; *acceptance and non-judgmental attitude* – avoiding moral or critical evaluations; *self-determination of the beneficiary* – respecting his/her right to make his/her own decisions; as well as *confidentiality*, considered a fundamental principle, except for certain minimal limitations provided by law [67, p.604].

In table 3., based on several criteria, we present synthetically and comparatively a comparative analysis *Moldova – Romania – Germany,* centered on the integration of the educational counseling of third-age persons into the training of social workers. The comparative analysis of professional training systems in the field of social work highlights significant differences regarding the integration of the educational counseling of third-age persons into the university curriculum and into professional practice. These differences are determined by historical, institutional, political and cultural factors, as well as by the level of development of social protection systems and of policies on active ageing.

Table 3. Comparative analysis of the development of competences for the educational counseling of third-age persons (Republic of Moldova – Romania – Germany) (elaborated by the author)

Criterion of analysis	Republic of Moldova	Romania	Germany
Integration into the curriculum	The educational counseling of the elderly is approached in a fragmentary manner, within the general disciplines of social work	Partially present in courses of social gerontology or social work with elderly persons	Systematically integrated into modules of gerontology, adult education and social management
Status of the discipline	Optional or integrated topic	As a rule, an optional discipline / specialization component	Part of the specializations in Sozialarbeit / Gerontologie
Pedagogical orientation	Predominantly theoretical emphasis	Balance between theory and practice	Strong emphasis on applied learning and supervised practice
Professional practice	Limited practice in centers for the elderly	Practice in social institutions and NGOs	Extended compulsory practice, with structured professional supervision
Multidisciplinary approach	Limited interdisciplinary collaboration	Moderate collaboration (psychologists, physicians, social workers)	Well-consolidated interdisciplinary model (Sozialpädagogik, Gerontologie, Psychologie)
Continuing training in	In development; requires	Available through	Well-developed system of

the field	institutional consolidation	postgraduate courses and continuing training	Weiterbildung (certified continuing training)
Normative framework and public policies	Policies in the process of adapting to demographic dynamics	Correlated with European strategies on active ageing	Consolidated policies on active ageing and social inclusion
Orientation towards active ageing	In conceptual development	Growing, correlated with EU policies	Systemically integrated into education and social services
Level of professionalization of educational counseling for the elderly	Medium – requires curricular development	Medium to high	High – clear standards and specialized training

Germany presents an advanced level of curricular integration, counseling and intervention in the gerontological field being part of distinct specializations within the programs of Sozialarbeit or Sozialpädagogik. The German system places emphasis on specialized training, and adult education and gerontology are consolidated fields, coherently integrated into university curricula.

From a pedagogical point of view, the Republic of Moldova shows a predominantly theoretical orientation, with a smaller volume of supervised practice specific to educational work with elderly persons. Professional practice is present within the training programs, but it is not always explicitly focused on the educational counseling of third-age persons.

In Romania, a relative balance between the theoretical and the applied dimension is observed. Students benefit from internships in social institutions, centers for the elderly or non-governmental organizations, which facilitates direct contact with beneficiaries and the application of the acquired competences.

The Pedagogical Model for developing the professional competences of social work students for the educational counseling of third-age persons (figure 3) starts from anchoring the social work profession within the helping professions, thus outlining the complex, interdisciplinary and collaborative character of social intervention.

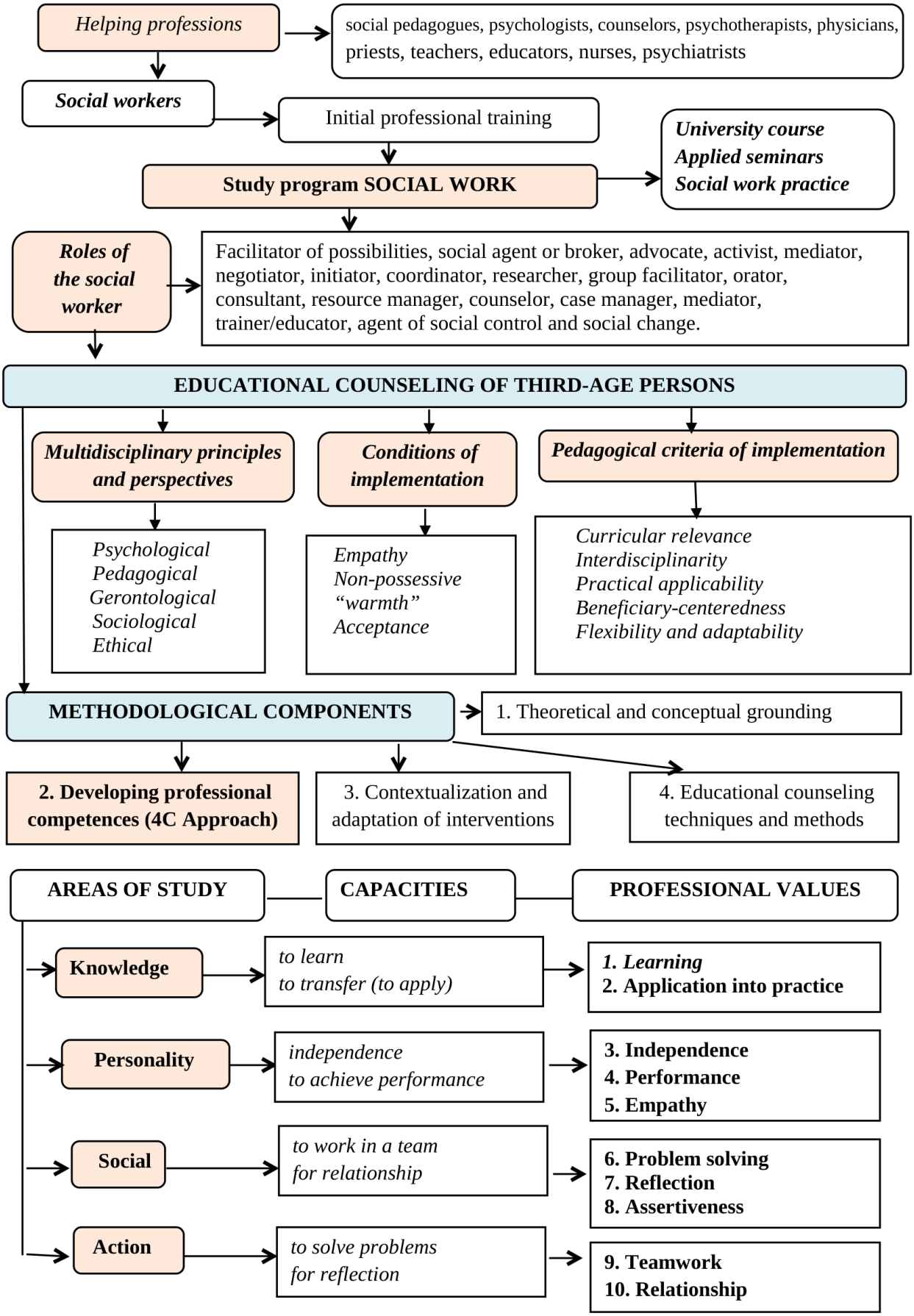


Figure 3. Pedagogical model for developing the professional competences of social work students for the educational counseling of third-age persons (elaborated by the author)

The Pedagogical Model for developing the professional competences of social work students for the educational counseling of third-age persons **represents a theoretical-applied construct that offers a**

coherent framework for developing the competences necessary for educational intervention in the gerontological field.

The social worker, as a professional within these fields, follows an initial professional training structured on the study program *Social Work*, which integrates university courses, applied seminars and social work practice. This model is based on solid pedagogical principles, which combine theoretical knowledge with practical application, promoting a complex and personalized training. The implementation of this model contributes to increasing the quality of social services intended for seniors, facilitating their social integration and promoting active and dignified ageing.

The elaborated model reflects a systemic and interconnected view of the helping profession, in which *social work* is positioned in an interdisciplinary context with other fields such as *psychology, psychiatry, education* and *medicine.*

In this context, social work students, in the stage of initial professional training, travel through a complex and challenging space – that of educational counseling dedicated to third-age persons, which means more than an academic path – it is a journey of maturation, of refining the vocation and of affirming the values of solidarity, respect and human dignity.

In the Republic of Moldova, the educational counseling of elderly persons is approached predominantly indirectly, through the general disciplines of social work or social gerontology. Although the topic of ageing is present in university programs, there is, in most cases, no distinct and compulsory discipline dedicated to the educational counseling of the elderly. This situation reflects a stage of development in which the emphasis is still on the generalist approach to social work, without a clearly outlined specialization in the field of education in the third age

In Romania, the integration of educational counseling for elderly persons is more visible, especially through optional disciplines or specialization modules in social gerontology. In some universities, the topic of active ageing is correlated with European strategies and national social policies, which leads to a more systematic approach, although not yet uniform at the national level.

The level of self-knowledge and personal responsibility constitutes the foundation of professional identity; the belief in one's own capacity to manage complex situations supports performance and perseverance; and psychological empowerment facilitates the integration of competences into practice, through active participation and positive influence in the social environment.

The theoretical grounding carried out in the previous chapters allowed the delimitation of the basic concepts, the identification of the professional competences necessary for future social workers for the educational counseling of third-age persons and the outlining of the landmarks necessary for designing the formative approach. In this context, the empirical verification of the formulated theoretical landmarks and the determination of the efficiency of the proposed approach are required.

Further, the research focuses on the experimental dimension, oriented towards diagnosing the initial level of development of professional competences, elaborating and implementing the Pedagogical Model and experimentally validating its efficiency in the initial professional preparation of social work students for the educational counseling of third-age persons. The following chapter presents the research methodology, the characteristics of the sample, the investigation instruments, the stages of the experiment and the results obtained.

Chapter 3 - Experimental framework for the assessment and development of the professional competences of social work students for the educational counseling of elderly persons valorizes the applied and formative dimension of the research, highlighting the way in which the elaborated pedagogical model was implemented and validated within an experimental approach.

The research has an experimental-formative character, being structured in three main stages: the ascertaining stage (initial diagnosis); the formative stage (implementation of the pedagogical model); the control stage (final assessment and validation).

The planning of interventions and the establishment of the duration of the experiment are an integral part of the research plan and aim to assess the efficiency of the pedagogical model applied in developing the professional competences necessary for the educational counseling of third-age persons, in the context of the initial training process of social work students.

The ascertaining stage of the experiment was started in the academic year 2022–2023, a period in which the participants were selected and the questionnaires necessary for obtaining the empirical data were applied. The research sample (table 4.) consisted of students enrolled in the social work specialty at universities in the Republic of Moldova, organized into two distinct groups: experimental (GE) and control (GC).

In order to ensure the validity of the results, both groups were formed observing the criterion of homogeneity, having similar characteristics regarding the level of preparation and age.

Table 4. Research sample

Higher education institutions	**"Ion Creangă" SPU** "Ion Creangă" State Pedagogical University	**ULIM** Free International University of Moldova
Number of subjects	54 subjects Year II students Department of Social Work	47 subjects Year II students Department of Social Work
ASCERTAINING EXPERIMENT	**101 students, Social Work Specialty, year II**	
	Experimental group (GE)	**Control group (GC)**
Number of subjects	50 subjects Year III students (promoted year II) Department of Social Work	47 subjects Year III students (promoted year II) Department of Social Work
FORMATIVE EXPERIMENT	**97 students, Social Work Specialty, year III (promoted year II)**	

Table 4. reflects the structure of the experimental design of the research carried out within two higher education institutions in the Republic of Moldova: the "Ion Creangă" State Pedagogical University of Chişinău and the Free International University of Moldova. The subjects of the investigation were students of the Social Work specialty.

At the stage of the ascertaining experiment, the research included a total sample of 101 2nd year students, of whom 54 students belong to the "Ion Creangă" State Pedagogical University, and 47 students to the Free International University of Moldova. This stage aimed to determine the initial level of the investigated variables and to establish the actual state of the analyzed phenomenon, constituting the starting point for the subsequent experimental intervention.

At the stage of the formative experiment, the research subjects were organized into an experimental group (GE) and a control group (GC), including 97 3rd year students who had promoted the 2nd year. *The experimental group* consisted of 50 students, on whom the formative program elaborated within the research was applied, while 47 students were included in *the control group*, continuing the training process according to the usual academic curriculum.

The organization of the sample into the two groups allowed a comparative analysis of the results obtained and the assessment of the efficiency of the proposed formative intervention. By relating the results obtained in the experimental group to those of the control group, the aim was to highlight the impact of the formative program on the development of the investigated variables.

The research instruments used within the ascertaining and control stages of the subjects' results were selected according to the aim of the research and in order to collect data on the efficiency of the psycho-pedagogical model for developing professional competences at the stage of initial training of social work students.

Table 5. Correlation of professional competence areas with research instruments and variables

Areas of study of professional competences	**RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS**			**Research variables/ Behavioral values**
	Self-assessment questionnaire of professional competences	*The test are you an assertive person?*	*Empathy questionnaire (Toronto)*	
1. KNOWLEDGE	• The capacity to learn • The capacity to transfer (to apply) into practice			*1. Learning* *2. Application into practice*
2. PERSONALITY	• Independence • The capacity to achieve performance		Empathy	*3. Independence* *4. Performance* *5. Empathy*
3. SOCIAL	• The capacity to work in a team • The capacity for			*6. Teamwork (Cooperation)* *7. Relationship*

	relationship			*8. Assertiveness*
4. ACTION	• The capacity to solve problems • The capacity for reflection	Assertiveness		*9. Problem solving* *10. Reflection*

Within the research carried out, we aimed to explore the professional competences of social workers by reference to four essential areas: *knowledge, personality traits, the social dimension and the capacity for action.* In order to capture these dimensions, three research instruments were used, each contributing to outlining as complete a perspective as possible on the professional profile. The variables measured in the research refer to several aspects of professional competences that can contribute to identifying the aspects in which intervention is possible for the educational counseling of third-age persons, the latter being synthesized into 4 areas of study:

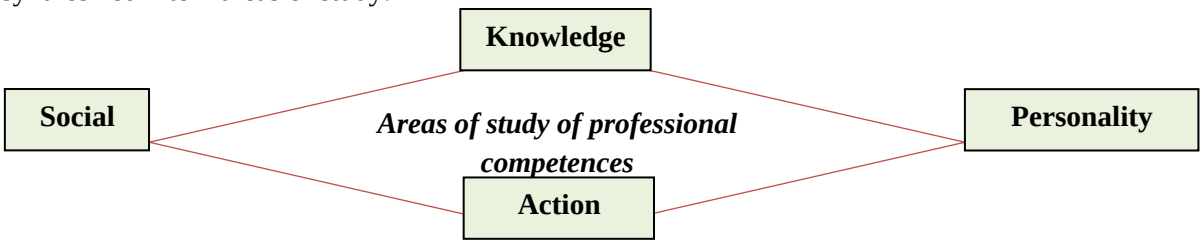


Figure 4. Areas of study of professional competences (elaborated by the author)

This approach allows a clear and coherent organization of the data, facilitating the analysis and interpretation of the results. Each dimension reflects an essential aspect of the competence of learning to learn and covers different relevant behaviors and skills.

Table 6. Descriptive statistics – Dimension "Knowledge"

Descriptive statistics			
Knowledge	Minimum	Maximum	M ± SD
Learning	18.00	36.00	30.02 ± 5.19
Application into practice	18.00	39.00	28.54 ± 3.35

In the descriptive analysis of the quantitative data, the two relevant variables from the area of competences that reflect knowledge and its assimilation were examined: the capacity to learn and the capacity to apply the accumulated knowledge into practice.

For the variable "learning", the scores obtained by participants range between a minimum of 18 and a maximum of 36, with an arithmetic mean (M) of 30.02 and a standard deviation (SD) of ± 5.19. These results indicate a high level of learning capacity among participants, most subjects being above the theoretical mean of the scale. The relatively high value of the standard deviation suggests, however, a moderate dispersion of scores, which indicates the existence of significant differences between individuals regarding the way in which they assimilate information.

Regarding the variable "application into practice", the scores range between 18 and 39, with a mean of 28.04 and a standard deviation of ± 3.85. The mean obtained is also relatively high, which reflects the fact that most participants consider that they can efficiently transpose theoretical knowledge into practice. However, compared to the variable "learning", this dimension presents a smaller standard deviation, which indicates a greater homogeneity of responses.

The results highlight the fact that the study participants show a good level of theoretical preparation, but also an adequate capacity to operationalize this knowledge in the practical context of professional activity. These competences are fundamental for the activity of the social worker involved in the educational counseling of third-age persons, since they imply not only continuing professional training, but also the capacity to adapt interventions to the specific needs of this category of beneficiaries, in varied and often sensitive contexts.

Table 7. Descriptive statistics – Dimension "Personality"

Descriptive statistics

Personality	Minimum	Maximum	M ± SD
Independence	18.00	32.00	25.76 ± 3.48
Performance	28.00	42.00	39.58 ± 2.49
Empathy	24.00	64.00	47.88 ± 7.88

In the descriptive analysis of the assessed personality traits, the scores for ***Independence, Performance and Empathy*** were examined. For each of them, the minimum and maximum values, as well as the mean (M) and the standard deviation (SD), were calculated, thus offering an overview of the distribution of scores in the investigated sample.

Independence presents a minimum score of 18 and a maximum score of 32, with a mean of 25.76 and a standard deviation of 3.48. This suggests that participants tend to show a relatively high level of independence, and the variation between individuals is moderate.

Performance registered values between 28 and 42, with a mean of 39.58 and a standard deviation of 2.49. The high mean indicates a strong orientation towards performance among respondents, and the moderate dispersion suggests a relatively balanced differentiation between them.

Regarding ***Empathy***, the scores varied between 24 and 64, with a mean of 47.88 and a standard deviation of 7.88. This dimension presents the greatest variation between participants, which may indicate significant differences in the level of empathy shown. The data describe a profile of participants characterized by high levels of independence, performance and empathy, with notable variations especially regarding the empathic component.

Table 8. offers a descriptive analysis of three relevant social dimensions: ***Teamwork, Relationship and Assertiveness***, each reflecting essential aspects of the participants' interpersonal competences. The calculated statistical indicators (minimum value, maximum value, mean and standard deviation) allow a more nuanced understanding of the distribution of these characteristics within the sample.

Table 8. Descriptive statistics – Dimension "Social"

Descriptive statistics			
Social	Minimum	Maximum	M ± SD
Teamwork	26.00	44.00	36.68 ± 4.55
Relationship	24.00	44.00	35.72 ± 3.5
Assertiveness	100.00	200.00	147.88 ± 18.95

Teamwork registered scores between 26 and 44, with a mean of 36.68 and a standard deviation of 4.55. This result indicates a general positive tendency of participants to collaborate efficiently in collective contexts, with a moderate variation between individuals.

Relationship presented values between 24 and 44, having a mean of 35.72 and a standard deviation of 3.50. These values suggest that, on average, participants demonstrate good social interaction skills, maintaining functional relationships with those around them, within a range of variability comparable to that observed in the case of teamwork. Regarding ***Assertiveness***, the scores varied within a much wider range, between 100 and 200, with a mean of 147.88 and a standard deviation of 18.95. This dimension presents the greatest dispersion, suggesting marked differences between participants regarding the capacity to express their opinions and needs in a direct and balanced manner. The data highlight a generally high level of social competences among respondents, with a relatively good coherence in teamwork and relationship, but with a pronounced variability regarding assertive expression.

Table 9. Descriptive statistics – Dimension "Action"

Descriptive statistics			
Action	Minimum	Maximum	M ± SD
Problem solving	18.00	36.00	27.84 ± 4.12
Reflection	19.00	36.00	27.70 ± 3.85

The descriptive analysis of the dimensions in the category ***Action – Problem solving*** and ***Reflection*** – offers a valuable perspective on the way in which participants approach situations that require critical thinking, planning and evaluation.

The experimental design adopted is of the pretest–retest type, with the measurement of the level of professional competences before and after the application of the pedagogical intervention.

The research sample consisted of students of the Social Work study program, selected on criteria of academic relevance and availability to participate in the experimental approach.

The corroboration of the data obtained at the post-intervention assessment stage offers a coherent picture of the efficiency of the formative approach. The results confirm the general hypothesis of the research and validate the proposed pedagogical model as an efficient instrument for developing the professional competences necessary for the educational counseling of third-age persons.

For the dimension ***Problem solving***, the scores obtained are between 18 and 36, with a mean of 27.84 and a standard deviation of 4.12. This result indicates a moderate to high level of competence in identifying, analyzing and solving problematic situations. Although there is a certain variability between respondents, the dispersion is relatively balanced, suggesting a general coherence in solving skills.

In the case of the dimension ***Reflection***, the scores range from 19 to 36, the mean being 27.7, with the same standard deviation of 3.85. This proximity to the mean of the scores for ***Problem solving*** indicates a possible association between the capacity to reflect critically on one's own actions and the ability to manage challenges efficiently. The moderate level of the standard deviation suggests a relatively uniform distribution of responses.

We can conclude that participants show a balance between solution-oriented thinking and self-analysis, essential traits in adopting adaptive and efficient behaviors in complex situations.

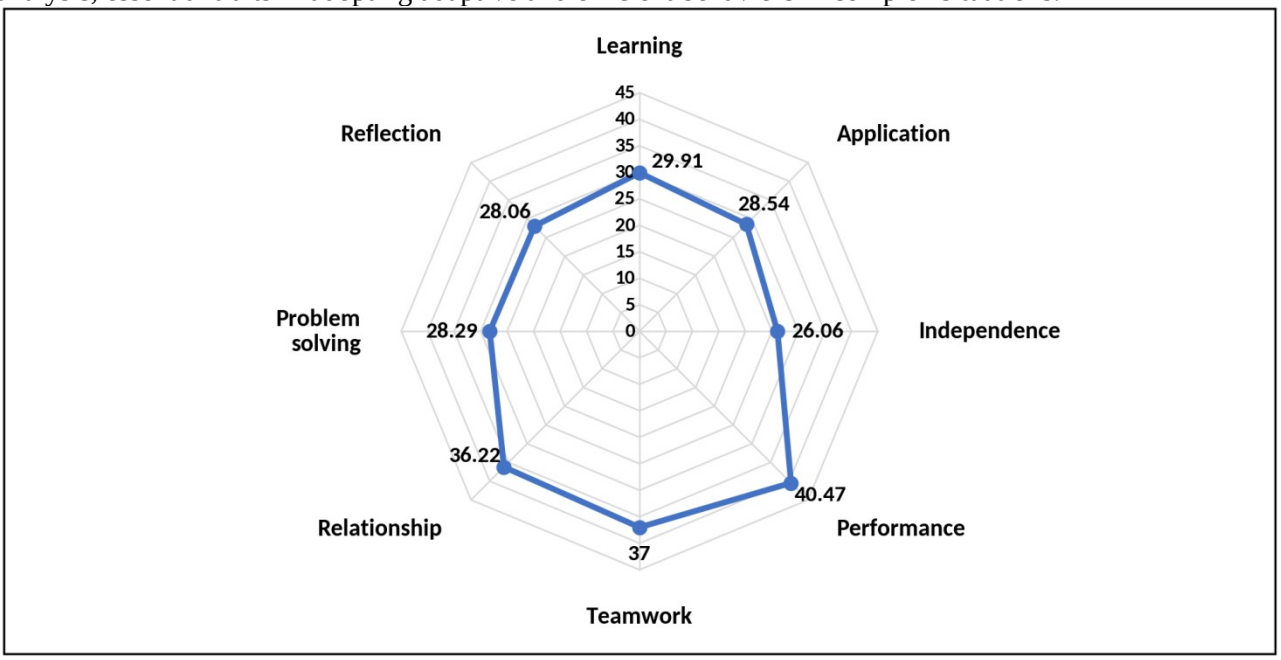


Figure 5. Distribution of mean values for professional competences (radar chart)

Figure 5. illustrates the distribution of the mean values of the set of professional competences, which reflects both psychosocial and cognitive dimensions, in a graphical representation, which allows an integrated visualization of the participants' profile in relation to the measured competences.

It is observed that the highest mean scores are registered in the case of Performance (M = 39.58) and Learning (M = 30.02), indicating a pronounced orientation towards efficiency, productivity and personal development among students who are at the stage of initial professional training. These traits are followed by Teamwork (M = 36.68) and Relationship (M = 35.72), suggesting good social integration and capacity for cooperation.

In contrast, dimensions such as Independence (M = 25.76), Reflection (M = 27.7), and Problem solving (M = 27.84) present lower mean values, which may indicate a less autonomous and analytical approach in managing complex situations or in individual decision-making.

The Application dimension (M = 28.04) has a moderate value, suggesting a capacity to implement knowledge that does not stand out significantly in relation to the other dimensions, but is not deficient either.

The general shape of the polygon described in the diagram outlines a profile with emphasis on performance, learning and relationship, while traits such as reflection and independence are less pronounced.

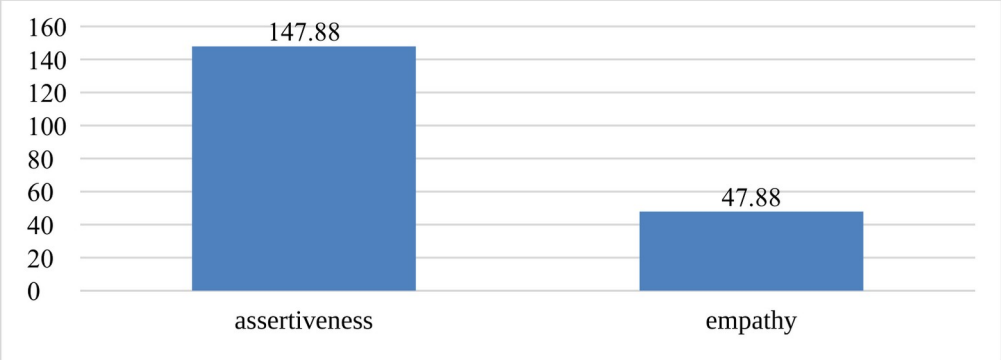


Figure 6. Comparison of mean scores between Empathy and Assertiveness

Figure 6. presents the mean scores obtained for the variables Empathy and Assertiveness, offering a clear perspective on the differences in the mean levels of these two interpersonal traits.

The results indicate a substantial difference between the two dimensions: the mean score for Assertiveness is (M = 147.88) compared to that of Empathy (M = 47.88). This discrepancy can be explained, to a large extent, by the different structure and scaling of the two measurement instruments.

The analysis of the descriptive statistics and of the graphical representations offers a clear and coherent picture of the psychosocial and cognitive profile of the participants. The data sets targeted personality traits, social behaviors and dimensions of cognitive action, completed by two illustrative figures.

Overall, we can mention that the psychosocial profile outlined through this analysis is an active, cooperative and performance-oriented one, but one that could benefit from a consolidation of the reflective and relational-emotional dimensions for a complete and harmonious adaptation.

The statistical analysis of the correlations between the investigated variables reveals a series of significant links, most of them positive, between the analyzed dimensions. The correlations were assessed using **the Pearson coefficient**, and the levels of statistical significance indicate the validity of the identified associations.

First of all, the existence of strong and significant correlations between the variables ***relationship***, ***teamwork*** and ***performance*** is noted. Thus, the correlation between relationship and teamwork is $r = .721$ ($p < 0.01$), which suggests a very close link between the capacity of individuals to relate efficiently and their predisposition to collaborate within groups. Also, relationship correlates significantly and positively with ***performance*** ($r = .672$, $p < 0.01$), which indicates that favorable interpersonal relationships can contribute to increasing individual performance.

Another set of relevant correlations concerns the relationship between ***reflection***, ***application into practice*** and ***problem solving***. The correlation between reflection and problem solving is $r = .647$ ($p < 0.01$), which highlights the importance of the reflective capacity in approaching and solving problematic situations. Also, ***reflection*** correlates positively with ***application into practice*** ($r = .632$, $p < 0.01$), suggesting that persons who reflect on the acquired knowledge tend to integrate it more efficiently in applied contexts.

Independence presents significant correlations with most of the other variables, especially with ***relationship*** ($r = .637$, $p < 0.01$), ***performance*** ($r = .558$, $p < 0.01$) and ***problem solving*** ($r = .573$, $p < 0.01$). These results indicate that a high level of autonomy is not incompatible with collaboration or efficiency in activity, but on the contrary, it can contribute to overall performance.

In contrast, the existence of some negative correlations, although weak, is also observed. We find that between the variable ***teamwork*** and ***learning*** there is a statistically significant negative correlation ($r = -.219$, $p < 0.05$), which could suggest that, in certain contexts, individual learning could be affected by group activities or by collaborative dynamics. Also, ***empathy*** correlates negatively with ***performance*** ($r = -.226$, $p < 0.05$), which may indicate a tension between the affective component of interaction and efficiency in carrying out tasks.

In conclusion, we can mention that the results highlight a complex network of inter-relations between the analyzed variables, in which social competences (such as relationship and teamwork), together with cognitive skills (reflection, problem solving) and individual characteristics (independence), contribute in a significant manner to shaping performance. These conclusions support the idea that the development of transversal competences, both social and knowledge-related, is essential for optimizing the learning process and for increasing efficiency in practical activities.

Figure 7. highlights the distribution of the low, medium and high levels for all 10 psychosocial and cognitive dimensions analyzed. A clear tendency of concentration of respondents in the high-level zone is

observed for most variables, especially in the case of those concerning learning (68%), performance (75.3%), teamwork (71.1%), and relationship (69.1%).

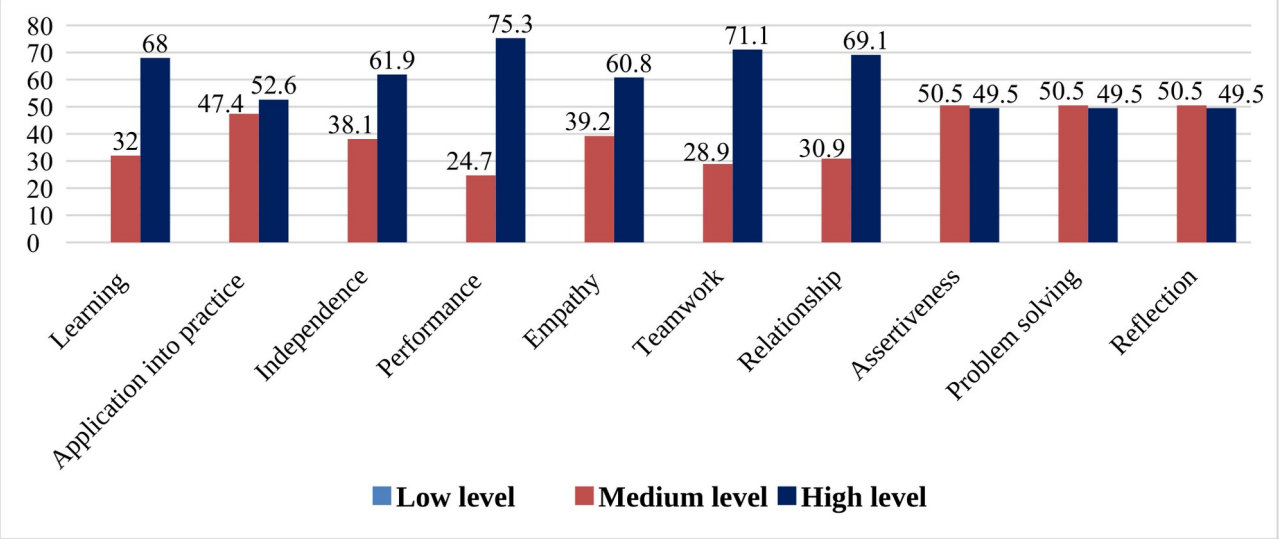


Figure 7. Distribution of levels (low, medium, high) for the 10 competence dimensions

Significantly, the low level is absent for all variables, which confirms a general positive and well-developed profile at the level of the studied sample.

Variables such as assertiveness, problem solving and reflection have a balanced distribution between the medium and the high level (approximately 50%), which suggests that while part of the respondents show solid competences in these fields, there is also a similar proportion with potential for further development. Also, application into practice and empathy are situated at a medium-upper threshold (52.6% and 60.8%, respectively, in the high-level zone), which shows a good capacity to transpose knowledge into actions and a reasonable emotional openness, but not as dominant as in the case of other traits.

In conclusion, the analyzed data outline a positive and balanced psychosocial profile of the participants at the ascertaining stage of the empirical research. Most respondents are situated at high levels regarding dimensions such as performance, learning, teamwork and relationship, indicating a strong orientation towards success, cooperation and continuous development.

The aim of the educational approach consists in developing the professional competences of social work students, with a view to carrying out the educational counseling of third-age persons, focused on practical applicability, critical/self-critical reflection and empathic and assertive development.

Formative objectives:

- *Developing empathic and assertive communication skills* in interaction with third-age persons, in educational counseling contexts.
- *Developing the capacity to analyze the educational needs* of third-age persons, from a social, cognitive and affective perspective.
- *Practicing the competences of planning, organizing and implementing* educational counseling activities adapted to the specificity of the educational counseling of third-age persons.
- *Stimulating critical and reflective thinking*, through the use of modern formative methods (e.g. case study, simulation, reflective portfolio).
- *Consolidating an ethical and inclusive professional attitude*, by promoting the respect, dignity and active participation of third-age persons in the educational act.
- *Increasing self-confidence and professional autonomy* in assuming the role of educational counselor in real socio-educational contexts.

Duration of the formative educational approach: 12 weeks (3 months)

Types of activities:

- Theoretical activities: 20 hours
- Practical activities (applications, case studies, projects): 30 hours
- Self-assessment and reflection activities: 10 hours.

At the end of the formative educational approach, the students were able to:

- Analyze the psychosocial specificity of elderly persons and their educational needs;
- Apply educational counseling methods and techniques in real or simulated contexts;
- Design and implement educational activities for the elderly;
- Reflect critically on their own professional activity and improve their intervention;

- Collaborate efficiently in teams;
- Show professional competences applicable in the counseling of elderly persons.

Table 10. Structure of the training program (by weeks)

Weeks	Training sessions	Essential contents	Types of activities	Methods and techniques
Week 1	Introduction to educational counseling	‒ Counseling and the delimitation of related concepts ‒ Educational counseling: concepts and typologies	Interactive lecture	Interactive presentation (PowerPoint/ short video)
Week 2	Particularities of elderly persons	‒ Active ageing: the role of education in senescence ‒ Educational policies for seniors	Document analysis	Brainstorming Debate
Week 3	The educational needs of seniors. Motivation for learning in the third age	‒ Empathic and assertive communication in the educational counseling of third-age persons	Text analysis	Guided reflection Simulations and feedback in pairs
Week 4	Empathic communication and the counselor–elderly beneficiary relationship	‒ The relationship competence of the social worker ‒ Efficiency indicators	Role plays	Active listening exercises
Week 5	Theoretical foundations of educational counseling for the elderly	‒ The specificity of counseling third-age persons	Case studies Assisted intervention	Experiential learning
Week 6	The axiological dimension of counseling	‒ Values and attitudes in working with elderly persons ‒ Ethics of the counseling relationship	Guided reflection	Role play Guided discussions
Week 7	Educational counseling methods	‒ The interview, group counseling, participatory methods, non-formal education activities	Practical workshops, counseling micro-sessions	Simulations Workshop methodological
Week 8	Specific educational counseling techniques applicable to the elderly	‒ Techniques applied in educational counseling	Practice workshop Simulations of counseling	Counseling exercises Paraphrasing Summarizing
Week 9	Communication and relationship competences	‒ Nonverbal communication ‒ Adapting the message ‒ Communication barriers	Simulation exercises	Active listening
Week 10	Designing the educational intervention	The stages of planning an intervention; identifying needs; formulating objectives; assessing results	Elaborating educational projects for the elderly, teamwork	Case studies Learning based on problems, feedback in pairs
Week 11	Educational intervention in day centers, nursing homes or communities	The role of the counselor in facilitating active participation and preventing isolation	Documentation visit, interviews with specialists	Interview Teamwork Personal reflection
Week 12	Reflective practice Final assessment. Self-assessment and metacognition	‒ Self-assessment of competences; ‒ Analysis of the intervention ‒ Active participation in community projects	Reflective portfolio, Collective feedback sessions	Discussion forum Reflective learning;

Complementary activities:

- *Individual reflective portfolio:* completed weekly, containing reflections on learning, difficulties and personal progress;
- *Practical supervision:* feedback sessions with the coordinating professor and professionals in the field;
- *Work in interdisciplinary teams* (where possible): collaboration with students in psychology, pedagogy.

In order to verify the initial homogeneity of the two groups involved in the research – experimental and control – a comparative analysis of the scores at the pretest stage was carried out for the variables

performance, learning, assertiveness and empathy, by applying the t-test for independent samples. Beforehand, the homogeneity of variances was also verified with the help of Levene's test.

The results of Levene's test indicate unequal variance for the variables performance (F = 4.647, p = 0.036) and learning (F = 4.732, p = 0.035), which suggests a slight heterogeneity of variances between the two groups for these dimensions. Nevertheless, the values of the t-test did not reveal statistically significant differences between the groups. Thus, for performance t = -0.626, p = 0.534 was obtained, and for learning t = -0.570, p = 0.571. The mean differences (-0.57 and -0.84) are minor, and the confidence intervals include the value zero, which supports the absence of statistical significance.

In the case of the variable assertiveness, Levene's test (F = 1.822, p = 0.183) indicates homogeneous variances between the groups, and the t-test confirms the absence of a significant difference: t = -1.632, p = 0.109. Although the registered mean difference (-8.63) might seem numerically substantial, from a statistical point of view it is not significant at the significance level of 0.05.

For empathy, both Levene's test (F = 0.425, p = 0.517) and the t-test (t = -1.018, p = 0.314) indicate the lack of relevant differences between the two groups. The mean difference (-2.27) is also small and statistically non-significant.

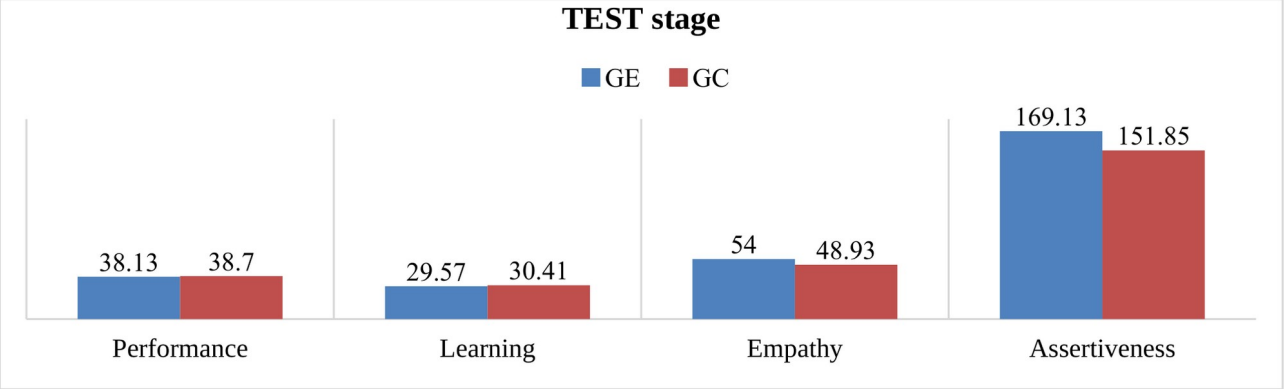


Figure 8. Comparison of test scores between the experimental group and the control group

We can mention that the comparative analysis of the pretest scores indicates the absence of statistically significant differences between the experimental group and the control group regarding the investigated variables. This result confirms the initial homogeneity of the samples and their equivalence from the perspective of the level of development of the analyzed competences before the application of the formative intervention.

Table 11. Retest descriptive statistics – Experimental and control groups

Group descriptive statistics				
Retest scores	**group**	**N**	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**
Performance	upsc_GE	50	40.61	1.44
	upsc_GC	47	38.70	2.87
Learning	upsc_GE	50	35.09	3.09
	upsc_GC	47	30.41	5.83
Assertiveness	upsc_GE	50	169.13	15.15
	upsc_GC	47	151.85	16.59
Empathy	upsc_GE	50	54.00	6.52
	upsc_GC	47	48.93	6.88

Establishing this initial balance constitutes an essential methodological condition for ensuring the internal validity of the research, since it allows the changes found at the posttest stage to be attributed exclusively to the intervention applied in the experimental group. Consequently, the significant differences registered subsequently can be interpreted as direct effects of the implemented formative program, and not as results of initial pre-existing variations between the groups.

Following the implementation of the intervention program, a new assessment of the participants was carried out, using the same instruments as at the pretest stage. The aim of this stage was to identify the possible significant changes registered in the experimental group (GE), compared to the control group (GC), which did not benefit from the formative intervention. The descriptive analysis of the retest scores highlights a consistent increase of the mean values for all the analyzed variables in the case of the experimental group, while in the control group the registered variations are minimal or non-significant. This tendency suggests a

positive effect of the applied program on the development of the targeted competences, indicating a favorable evolution of the participants included in the intervention.

Regarding the variable performance, the mean score of the experimental group increased from 38.13 to 40.61, with a reduced standard deviation (SD = 1.44), suggesting a clear improvement and a greater homogeneity of responses. In contrast, the control group remained constant at the mean of 38.70 (SD = 2.87), which indicates the lack of significant progress in the absence of the formative intervention. This evolution supports the hypothesis according to which the applied program had a positive effect on the performance of the participants in the experimental group.

For the variable learning, the differences between the two groups become even more evident. The experimental group registered a mean of 35.09 (SD = 3.09), increasing compared to the initial mean (29.57), while the control group remained at the pretest level (30.41). This substantial increase suggests the fact that the formative intervention contributed significantly to the development of learning competences among the participants in the GE. Similarly, the scores for assertiveness changed significantly: the mean of the experimental group increased from 143.22 to 169.13, registering a relatively small standard deviation (SD = 15.15). The control group remained at the mean of 151.85, unchanged compared to the initial stage. This difference indicates a clear improvement of assertive behavior among the students who participated in the formative program. In the case of the variable empathy, the mean score of the experimental group increased from 46.65 to 54.00 (SD = 6.52), while the mean of the control group remained constant at 48.93. This evolution shows an increase in the capacity to understand and respond to the emotions of others – an essential component of socio-emotional competences – only in the case of the group exposed to the formative intervention.

Overall, the descriptive analysis of the data obtained at the post-intervention stage (Figure 9) supports the efficiency of the applied formative program, highlighting consistent differences in favor of the experimental group at the level of all four analyzed variables, actively integrated into the structure of the intervention. The increase of the mean values registered by the participants in the experimental group, compared to the relative stability of the scores of the control group, indicates a positive impact of the applied approach on the targeted competence dimensions.

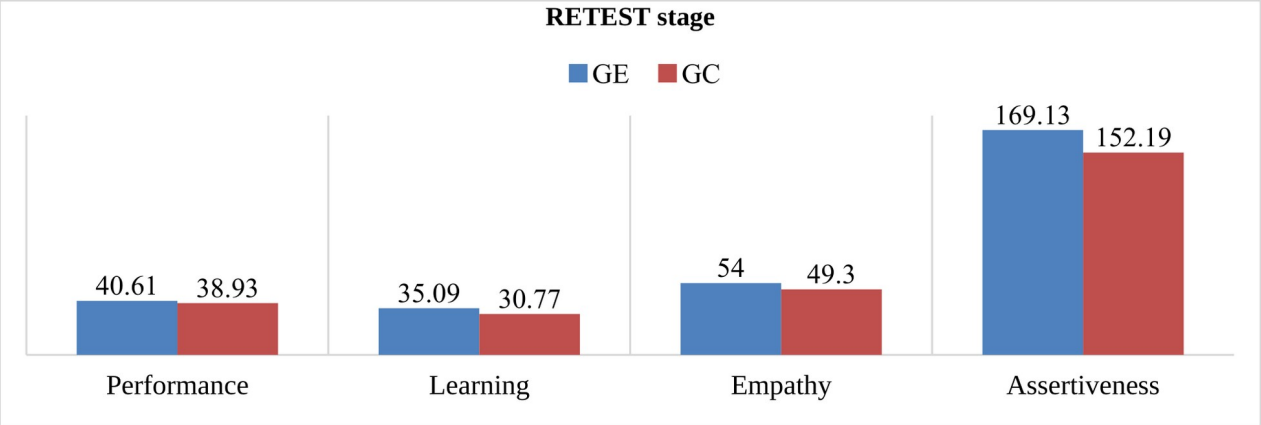


Figure 9. Comparison of retest scores between the experimental group and the control group

These preliminary findings consolidate the research hypothesis and offer empirical support for assessing the efficacy of the implemented pedagogical model, the inferential statistical analysis being subsequently to confirm the significance of the observed differences and to validate the results from a methodological perspective.

Table 12. Comparison of variables at the retest stage – t-test for independent samples

Comparison of independent variables at the retest stage

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					
								95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Lower	Upper
1.	Performance	1.587	.214	2.890	48	.006	1.90	.58	3.23
2.	Learning	16.155	.000	3.454	48	.001	4.68	1.96	7.40
3.	Assertiveness	.037	.849	3.818	48	.000	17.28	8.18	26.38
4.	Empathy	.005	.947	2.663	48	.011	5.07	1.24	8.90

The significant increase of the mean values, corroborated with the reduction of the standard deviations, indicates both individual progress and a greater coherence within the experimental group. Comparatively, the stagnation of the scores in the control group confirms the fact that the observed improvements are not due to natural evolution or to other external factors, but represent the direct effect of the implemented formative program.

Therefore, the results obtained consolidate the internal validity of the research and confirm the efficacy of the formative approach in developing the targeted professional competences.

In order to assess the impact of the intervention on the experimental group, the t-test for independent samples was applied, with the aim of comparing the final (retest) scores between the experimental group and the control group. Before applying the t-test, the homogeneity of variances was verified through Levene's test, in order to determine whether the use of the adjusted variant of the t-test is required.

For the variable Performance, the results show a statistically significant difference between the two groups, with $t = 2.890$, $p = 0.006$. The mean difference of 1.90 points (95% confidence interval: 0.58 – 3.23) indicates a clear improvement of performance among the participants in the experimental group. Also, Levene's test ($F = 1.587$, $p = 0.214$) suggests that the variances are homogeneous, which validates the standard applicability of the t-test.

The differences between the two groups for the variable Learning are even more pronounced, where $t = 3.454$, $p = 0.001$ was obtained. The mean difference is 4.68 points (95% CI: 1.96 – 7.40), in favor of the experimental group. In this case, Levene's test indicates unequal variances ($F = 16.155$, $p < 0.001$), which justifies the use of the adjusted variant of the t-test.

However, despite possible minor variations or methodological limitations inherent to any experimental approach, the significance of the results obtained remains clear and robust. The consistency of the differences found, the convergence of the statistical indicators and the coherence of the evolution of the analyzed variables support the validity of the formulated conclusions and confirm the positive impact of the intervention on the experimental group.

This stability of the results consolidates the reliable character of the applied approach and offers additional arguments in favor of the efficacy of the implemented pedagogical model, highlighting its relevance for optimizing the process of professional training of social work students.

For the variable assertiveness, the differences are considerable and statistically significant: $t = 3.818$, $p < 0.001$, with a mean difference of 17.28 points (95% CI: 8.18 – 26.38). Levene's test ($F = 0.037$, $p = 0.849$) confirms the homogeneity of variances. These results suggest a high efficiency of the intervention program in developing assertive behavior among the participants in the GE.

Also in the case of empathy, the differences are significant: $t(48) = 2.663$, $p = 0.011$, with a mean difference of 5.07 points (95% CI: 1.24 – 8.90). Levene's test ($F = 0.005$, $p = 0.947$) also indicates equal variances. These results confirm the fact that the intervention program also had a positive impact on the affective dimension of empathy.

The results of the inferential analysis highlight the fact that all four investigated variables – performance, level of learning, assertiveness and empathy – registered statistically significant differences between the experimental group and the control group, in favor of the participants who benefited from the

formative intervention. These differences confirm the positive impact of the applied program on the targeted competence and psycho-social dimensions.

The social worker is conceived as a genuine agent of change, whose intervention takes place in complex and dynamic social contexts. His/her role is not limited to providing a certain type of punctual support, but implies the elaboration and application of combined strategies, adapted to the particularities of each situation and, in certain cases, integrated at the micro, mezzo and macro level.

In all the professional contexts in which they carry out their activity, social workers maintain a dual focus: on the one hand, they support persons with a view to improving their well-being and social functioning, and on the other hand, they identify and address external problems – of a systemic or structural nature – which may affect this well-being or may generate inequality, injustice and discrimination. This dual orientation highlights the complex character of social intervention, which combines individual support with action on the social environment.

The findings obtained validate the efficacy of the implemented pedagogical approach, demonstrating its capacity to generate relevant improvements both at the cognitive level (performance and learning) and at the behavioral and affective level (assertiveness and empathy). Consequently, *the research hypothesis* is confirmed, the formative intervention producing significant and consistent changes in the development of the professional competences of social work students.

Therefore, the empirical data support the applied value and scientific validity of the proposed pedagogical model, highlighting its contribution to optimizing the process of initial training in the field of educational counseling of third-age persons.

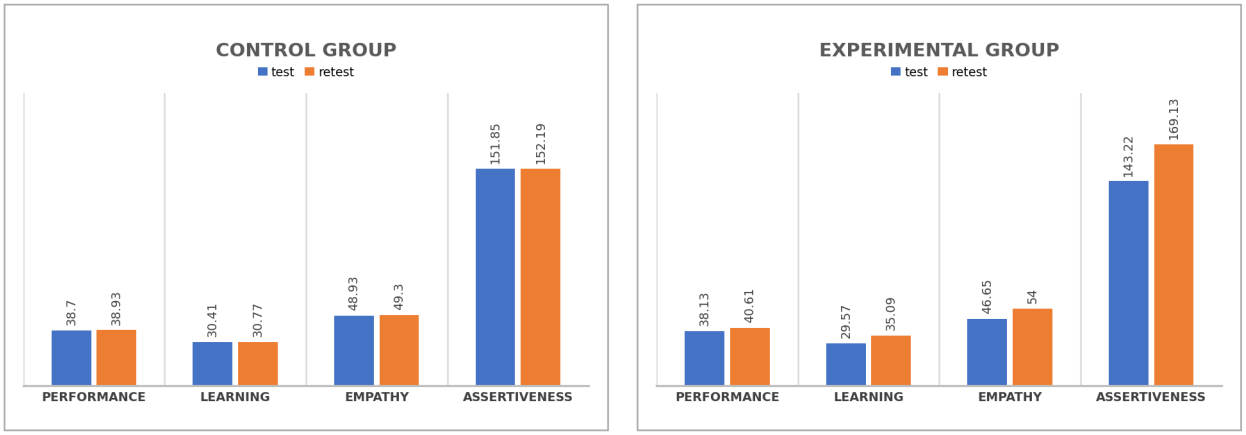


Figure 10. Evolution of test–retest mean scores for the variables measured in the control and experimental groups

Figure 10. visualizes the evolution of the mean scores for the four psycho-behavioral dimensions – performance, learning, empathy and assertiveness – registered at two measurement moments (test and retest), for two groups: control and experimental.

In the control group, the values obtained at retest are very close to the initial ones, indicating a stability of the measured levels; they did not undergo significant variations, which suggests the absence of significant intervening factors in the period between the two measurements.

In contrast to the relative stability of the results registered at the level of the control group, the experimental group showed substantial increases between the pretest stage and the posttest stage for all four analyzed dimensions. The mean values of the scores increased significantly at the level of performance, learning, assertiveness and empathy, reflecting a positive and coherent evolution of the participants included in the formative intervention.

These changes confirm the efficacy of the intervention applied to the experimental group, suggesting that the implemented program contributed directly to the development of the assessed competences. The registered increases cannot be explained by random variations or external factors, but indicate the specific impact of the pedagogical approach on the investigated cognitive, behavioral and affective areas.

Therefore, the differences found between test and retest within the experimental group support the validity of the proposed formative model and its relevance for optimizing professional training in the field of educational counseling.

The comparative analysis highlights the fact that only the experimental group benefited from a significant increase of the scores at retest, which suggests that the applied intervention had a positive impact on the measured variables, while the control group did not show relevant changes in its absence.

A brief synthesis allows us to conclude that the comparative analysis of the pretest and posttest data highlighted a significant evolution within the experimental group, as a result of the application of the psycho-pedagogical intervention program. At the initial stage, the results did not indicate significant differences between the experimental group and the control group for any of the analyzed variables – performance, learning, assertiveness and empathy –, which confirmed the homogeneity of the groups and the validity of the experimental design. Subsequently, at the retest stage, the descriptive scores showed significant increases in the case of the experimental group, while the control group maintained constant values. The inferential analysis through the t-test for independent samples confirmed the existence of statistically significant differences in favor of the experimental group for all four variables. These findings support the efficiency of the intervention and its positive impact on the development of the professional and socio-emotional competences of the participants.

Assessing the efficiency of the formative program, we determined the differences between the scores obtained at the test stage and at the retest stage for the experimental group through repeated assessment, applying the assessment instruments.

Figure 11. illustrates the comparison of the mean scores obtained at the test and retest stage for four dimensions: *performance, learning, assertiveness and empathy*, for the experimental group (GE).

An increase of the mean values at the retest stage is observed for all analyzed dimensions, which suggests a positive evolution of the participants between the two assessment moments.

Specifically, for the dimension performance, the mean score increases from 38.44 to 39.58, indicating a slight improvement of the level of performance. In the case of the variable learning, an increase from 30.02 to 32.56 is found, suggesting a development of the capacities of acquiring and processing information.

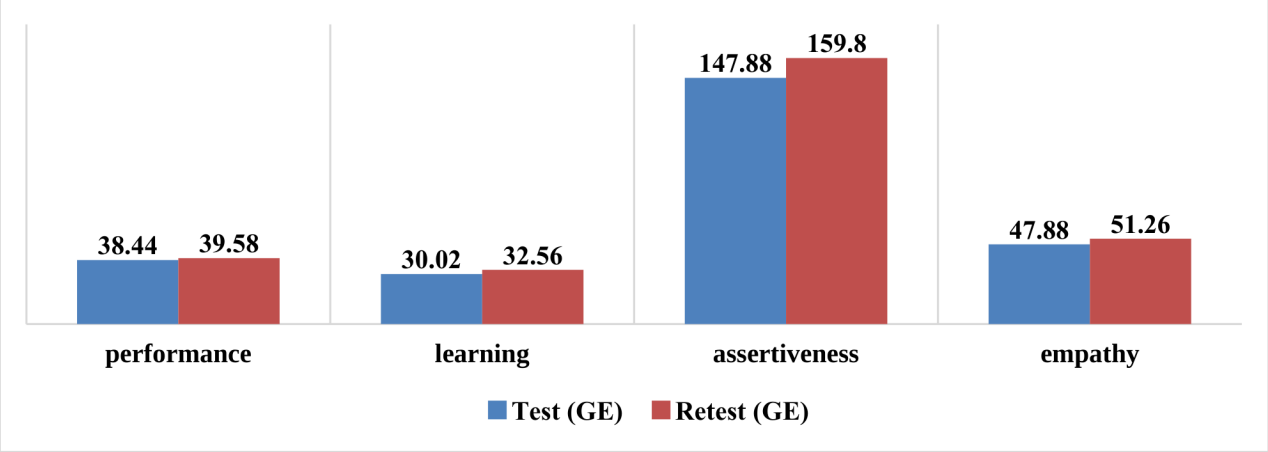


Figure 11. Scores obtained at the test stage and at the retest stage for the experimental group through repeated assessment

The dimension assertiveness registers the greatest increase, from 147.88 to 159.8, which indicates a significant improvement of the skills of expression and personal affirmation. For the variable empathy, the scores increase from 47.88 to 51.26, suggesting a development of the capacity for understanding and interpersonal relationship.

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The research carried out confirms the topicality and relevance of the topic regarding the development of the professional competences of social work students for the educational counseling of third-age persons, in the context of demographic transformations and of the need to adapt educational and social systems to the accelerated process of population ageing.

In accordance with the aim of the research and with the designed objectives, the theoretical and experimental results allow the formulation of the following general conclusions:

1. **The theoretical landmarks were determined** regarding active ageing, the educational counseling of third-age persons and the development of professional competences in social work, which allowed the conceptual grounding of the research and the delimitation of educational counseling as a dimension of the social worker's professional intervention. It can be approached as a component of social intervention oriented towards supporting autonomy, social participation, adaptation to age-specific changes and lifelong learning. In this context, the preparation of the social worker implies the articulation of knowledge from pedagogy, social work, educational gerontology and person-centered counseling.
2. **The professional competences were identified and structured** necessary for social workers to carry out the educational counseling of third-age persons, by highlighting the cognitive, relational, ethical and

methodological dimensions, these serving as landmarks for designing the contents, the training strategies and the assessment of professional preparation. The cognitive dimension targets knowledge of the particularities of the ageing process and of the principles of educational counseling; the relational one – communication, empathy and building the professional relationship; the ethical one – respect for the dignity, autonomy and rights of the person; and the methodological one – designing, carrying out and assessing educational counseling interventions. Together, these configure the competence profile necessary for the future social worker in working with elderly persons.

3. **The modalities of integrating the educational counseling of third-age persons into the curriculum of professional training programs were investigated** in social work in the Republic of Moldova and Germany, identifying differences, convergences and practices relevant for the contextualization and modernization of university training in the field of social work. The comparative perspective allows highlighting transferable good practices and grounding curricular development directions adapted to the context of the initial training of social workers in the Republic of Moldova.
4. **The initial level of development of the professional competences was established** of social work students necessary for carrying out the educational counseling of third-age persons, the results of the diagnosis offering the empirical basis for designing and organizing the formative approach. Relating the results to the cognitive, relational, ethical and methodological dimensions allows the identification of existing resources and training needs, justifying the necessity of a systematic preparation for the educational counseling of third-age persons.
5. **The Pedagogical Model for developing the professional competences was grounded and elaborated** of social work students for the educational counseling of third-age persons. The functionality of the Pedagogical Model consists in the correlation of finalities, competences, contents, principles, formative strategies and assessment modalities, offering a coherent framework for organizing the process of initial professional training. The Model structures the formative process by relating the finalities, contents, didactic strategies, practical activities and assessment modalities to the targeted professional competences.
6. **The training approach was elaborated and experimentally validated** grounded on the Pedagogical Model, and the results obtained highlighted its efficiency in developing the professional competences of social work students for carrying out the educational counseling of third-age persons. The application of the approach confirms the possibility of valorizing the Pedagogical Model in the process of initial professional training.
7. **Conclusions and recommendations were formulated** regarding the optimization of the process of initial professional training of future social workers, through the integration of the educational counseling of third-age persons into the university curriculum, practical activities and continuing training programs, contributing to the adaptation of professional preparation to current social requirements.

In most training programs in social work, counseling is approached as an important component of professional preparation, with predominant emphasis on psychosocial counseling, support in crisis situations and social intervention. In this context, educational counseling intended for third-age persons is insufficiently represented in the curricular contents, which highlights the need to consolidate the educational dimension of the preparation of future social workers.

With a view to developing specific professional competences, it is recommended to introduce or integrate into the university curriculum courses or thematic modules, such as:

- *Educational counseling of third-age persons*;
- *Learning techniques and methods in gerontology*;
- *Non-formal education in working with third-age persons*;
- *Educational interventions in communities of third-age persons*.

The integration of these contents would contribute to extending the professional role of the social worker by valorizing the educational dimension of intervention, as well as to developing the competences necessary for designing, carrying out and assessing educational counseling activities intended for third-age persons. At the same time, such a curricular orientation would favor the correlation of theoretical preparation with practical experiences and the adaptation of professional training to demographic dynamics and to the educational and social needs of contemporary society.

In the Republic of Moldova, the approach to the educational counseling of third-age persons within professional training programs in social work is, in general, integrated into the broader framework of counseling and social intervention, with an insufficient delimitation of the contents and competences specific to educational work with this category of beneficiaries. A limited representation of specialized modules and

a reduced orientation of practical experiences towards the educational and gerontological dimension of intervention are found.

In Germany, professional training presents a more pronounced diversification of the contents and learning experiences associated with working with third-age persons, through the valorization of gerontology courses and contents, inter-university collaborations and interdisciplinary projects that offer students opportunities for direct interaction with elderly persons in educational and social contexts. The comparative analysis thus highlights landmarks that can be valorized, adapted and contextualized in the process of curricular development in the Republic of Moldova, in relation to the particularities of the national training system and to contemporary demographic requirements.

Carrying out educational counseling implies specific professional preparation and the development of relational competences, which allow the social worker to build and maintain a professional relationship based on respect, trust and acceptance. In this process, it is important that the future social worker becomes aware of his/her own values, attitudes and beliefs and understands the way in which they can influence the professional relationship and the intervention on the beneficiary. At the same time, knowledge of human behavior, understanding of the relationship between the social environment and the cognitive, emotional and behavioral manifestations of the beneficiary, as well as relating the intervention to professional values and to his/her individual needs constitute important premises of efficient counseling.

The research results demonstrated the partially developed and differentiated character of the students' professional competences at the initial stage, which justified the need for a structured and scientifically grounded formative approach. The comparison of the results obtained at the pretest and posttest stages highlighted significant increases in the level of professional competences in the experimental group, while in the control group the changes were minimal or non-significant.

The functionality of the elaborated Pedagogical Model was confirmed by its capacity to systematically organize and guide the process of developing the professional competences necessary for the educational counseling of third-age persons. The results of the experiment highlighted progress at the level of performance, learning, assertiveness and empathy, as well as of the students' capacity to apply educational counseling techniques, of relational competences and of reflective maturity.

The experimental validation confirmed the efficacy of the Pedagogical Model and highlighted its functionality in correlating theoretical preparation with practical experiences, in the integrated development of the cognitive, relational, ethical and methodological dimensions of professional competences. In this sense, the integration of the 4C Model offers a systemic, applied and reflective framework for the initial training of social work students.

The results obtained support the need for the systematic integration of the educational counseling of third-age persons into the university curriculum of social work, by correlating theoretical contents with authentic professional situations, using applied formative strategies and assessing competences through specific indicators. Thus, the research results offer landmarks for optimizing initial professional training and for preparing social workers capable of responding adequately to the educational, relational and social needs of third-age persons.

In conclusion, the research demonstrates that the structured and theoretically-methodologically grounded formative approach has a positive and significant impact on the development of the professional competences of future social workers for carrying out the educational counseling of third-age persons. The experimental results confirm the efficiency of the proposed Pedagogical Model and offer arguments for its valorization in the process of initial professional training.

The Pedagogical Model proves functional through its integrative, systemic and applied character, ensuring the correlation of training finalities with the development of the cognitive, relational, ethical and methodological competences necessary for professional practice. Through theoretical grounding, the structuring of formative components and experimental validation, the Pedagogical Model offers an operational framework for organizing and carrying out the process of training social work students and creates premises for integrating the educational counseling of third-age persons into the university curriculum.

Empathy represents one of the fundamental competences of the counseling process. It implies the social worker's capacity to understand the beneficiary's experience from his/her perspective and to adequately reflect the feelings and meanings expressed, without total identification with them and while maintaining professional boundaries. In the case of third-age persons, empathy facilitates building a counseling relationship based on valuing life experience, respecting autonomy and identifying the beneficiary's personal, educational and social resources.

Therefore, the comparative analysis and the delimitation of the necessary competences highlight the need to consolidate the educational and gerontological dimension in the initial training of future social workers, as well as the need for formative experiences that integrate theoretical knowledge, the practice of relational competences and their application in authentic professional situations.

The research brings a theoretical contribution through the systematization and grounding of the concepts regarding the professional competences necessary for the educational counseling of third-age persons and an applied contribution through the elaboration and validation of a Pedagogical Model adapted to the requirements of initial professional training and to contemporary demographic realities. The functionality of the Pedagogical Model is reflected in its capacity to organize and guide the formative process, by correlating the finalities, contents, training strategies and the assessment of professional competences.

At the same time, the results obtained open perspectives for developing extended formative programs, deepening international comparative research and integrating the educational counseling of third-age persons into the curriculum of professional training programs in social work.

In conclusion, **the objectives of the research were achieved, and the general hypothesis was confirmed**, demonstrating that a structured and scientifically grounded formative approach contributes significantly to the development of the professional competences of future social workers and to their preparation for carrying out efficient, ethical interventions adapted to the particularities and needs of third-age persons.

Practical recommendations

Based on the research results, the validation of the pedagogical model and the conclusions drawn from the case studies and field observations, the following recommendations are formulated, oriented towards consolidating initial training and professional practice in the field of educational counseling of third-age persons:

Recommendations at the curricular and institutional level

- Developing a national curricular framework that includes the educational counseling of elderly persons as a compulsory discipline in the training programs of social workers.
- Revising the standards of professional competence by explicitly integrating the competences necessary for educational work with third-age persons.
- Introducing modules dedicated to active ageing, social gerontology and adult education into university curricula.

Recommendations for developing educational services for the elderly

- Institutionalizing educational programs for elderly persons within social, cultural and community centers.
- Creating partnerships between universities and the institutions that offer services to elderly persons, in order to facilitate applied professional practice.
- Promoting intergenerational educational activities, meant to stimulate active participation and social inclusion.

Recommendations for ensuring the quality of intervention

- Systematic supervision of practitioners involved in the educational counseling of elderly persons, for maintaining professional standards and preventing emotional burnout.
- Elaborating methodological guides and instruments for assessing the quality of educational intervention.
- Monitoring the impact of the implemented programs on beneficiaries and on the competences of the professionals involved.

Recommendations for continuing training and research

- Promoting a culture of continuous learning, both for students and for professionals in the social field, through continuing training courses, workshops and professional development programs.
- Extending research on the impact of educational interventions among elderly persons, including through longitudinal studies.
- Developing comparative research at the national and international level regarding models of competence development in the field of educational counseling.

Recommendations for professional practice

- Adopting a person-centered approach, based on respect, empathy and valuing the life experience of elderly persons.
- Integrating the principles of empowerment and active ageing into educational interventions.
- Consolidating the competences of interdisciplinary collaboration and continuous professional reflection.

Overall, these recommendations support the need for a systemic and sustainable approach to professional training and educational intervention in working with third-age persons, contributing to increasing the quality of social services and to promoting active, dignified and participatory ageing.

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Diwo Veronica. Formarea profesională inițială a studenților asistenți sociali pentru consilierea educațională a persoanelor de vârstă a treia. Chișinău, 2026.

Structura tezei: lucrarea conține adnotări în limbile română, rusă și engleză, introducere, 3 capitole, concluzii generale și recomandări, bibliografie din 200 titluri, 10 anexe, 194 pagini de text de bază, 21 figuri și 48 tabele. Rezultatele obținute sunt publicate în 9 lucrări științifice.

Cuvinte cheie: studenți, asistenți sociali, persoane vârstnice, formare profesională inițială, asistență socială, consiliere educațională, persoane de vârsta a trei, competențe profesionale, educație gerontologică, curriculum universitar.

Scopul cercetării constă în funtamentarea teoretică și metodologică a formării competențelor profesionale ale studenților asistenți sociali pentru consilierea educațională a persoanelor de vârstă a treia.

Obiectivele cercetării includ: 1. determinarea reperelor teoretice privind îmbătrânirea activă, consilierea educațională a persoanelor de vârstă a treia și formarea competențelor profesionale în asistența socială; 2. identificarea și structurarea competențelor profesionale necesare asistenților sociali pentru realizarea consilierii educaționale a persoanelor de vârstă a treia, cu referire la dimensiunile cognitive, relaționale, etice și metodologice; 3. investigarea modului de integrare a consilierii educaționale a persoanelor de vârstă a treia în curriculumul programelor de formare profesională în asistență socială din Republica Moldova și Germania; 4. stabilirea nivelului inițial de formare a competențelor profesionale ale studenților asistenți sociali necesare pentru realizarea consilierii educaționale a persoanelor de vârstă a treia; 5. fundamentarea și elaborarea unui **Model pedagogic de formare a competențelor profesionale ale studenților asistenți sociali pentru consilierea educațională a persoanelor de vârstă a treia**; 6. elaborarea și validarea experimentală a demersului de formare a competențelor profesionale ale studenților asistenți sociali, în baza Modelului pedagogic elaborat; 7. formularea concluziilor și recomandărilor privind optimizarea procesului de formare profesională inițială a viitorilor asistenți sociali în vederea realizării consilierii educaționale a persoanelor de vârstă a treia.

Noutatea și originalitatea științifică a rezultatelor rezidă în fundamentarea unei abordări integrative a formării profesionale inițiale a studenților asistenți sociali pentru consilierea educațională a persoanelor de vârsta a treia. Cercetarea aduce contribuții prin: 1. conceptualizarea consilierii educaționale ca dimensiune a intervenției asistentului social în lucrul cu persoanele vârstnice; 2. identificarea și structurarea competențelor profesionale necesare realizării acestei activități; 3. analiza comparativă a formării universitare în asistență socială din Republica Moldova și Germania și valorificarea bunelor practici relevante; 4. fundamentarea și elaborarea unui Model pedagogic de formare a competențelor profesionale ale studenților asistenți sociali pentru consilierea educațională a persoanelor de vârstă a treia, structurat pe componente interdependente – obiective, conținuturi, principii, forme, metode, tehnologii și evaluare – și orientat spre dezvoltarea integrată a competențelor cognitive, relaționale, etice și metodologice necesare realizării consilierii educaționale; 5. validarea experimentală a eficienței Modelului pedagogic elaborat în formarea competențelor profesionale ale studenților asistenți sociali pentru consilierea educațională a persoanelor de vârstă a treia.

Rezultatele obținute care contribuie la soluționarea problemei științifice: Un prim rezultat îl constituie analiza conceptuală a consilierii educaționale în contextul asistenței sociale a persoanelor vârstnice, realizată prin integrarea perspectivelor interdisciplinare din domeniul educației, psihologiei, gerontologiei și asistenței sociale. Această abordare permite delimitarea și fundamentarea consilierii educaționale ca dimensiune relevantă a intervenției profesionale a asistentului social și oferă repere pentru proiectarea procesului de formare inițială.

Un alt rezultat îl reprezintă identificarea și structurarea competențelor profesionale necesare studenților asistenți sociali pentru desfășurarea eficientă a activității de consiliere educațională adresate persoanelor de vârsta a treia. Competențele identificate, raportate la dimensiunile cognitivă, relațională, etică și metodologică, constituie repere pentru selectarea și organizarea conținuturilor formării, pentru elaborarea strategiilor didactice și pentru stabilirea criteriilor și indicatorilor de evaluare a nivelului de pregătire profesională.

Un rezultat științific central al cercetării îl constituie elaborarea și fundamentarea teoretico-aplicativă a Modelului pedagogic de formare a competențelor profesionale ale studenților asistenți sociali pentru consilierea educațională a persoanelor de vârsta a treia. Modelul integrează și corelează componentele esențiale ale procesului de formare – finalități, competențe, conținuturi, principii, forme de organizare, metode și tehnologii didactice, precum și modalități de evaluare – într-o structură coerentă și funcțională. Din această perspectivă, Modelul pedagogic are rolul de a orienta și organiza procesul de formare profesională inițială, oferind un cadru aplicativ pentru dezvoltarea sistemică a competențelor necesare consilierii educaționale a persoanelor vârstnice. Totodată, acesta permite corelarea dimensiunii teoretice a pregătirii cu experiențele practice și cu cerințele reale ale activității profesionale a viitorului asistent social.

Funcționalitatea Modelului pedagogic este susținută prin validarea experimentală, realizată prin aplicarea instrumentelor de cercetare și analiza datelor obținute. Validarea a permis aprecierea eficienței demersului formativ și identificarea modificărilor produse în nivelul competențelor profesionale ale studenților, oferind suport empiric pentru aplicabilitatea Modelului în procesul de formare profesională inițială. Astfel, Modelul nu reprezintă doar o construcție teoretică, ci un instrument pedagogic aplicabil, orientat spre dezvoltarea competențelor profesionale necesare realizării consilierii educaționale a persoanelor de vârsta a treia.

Semnificația teoretică a cercetării constă în fundamentarea conceptului de consiliere educațională a persoanelor de vârsta a treia din perspectiva interdisciplinară a pedagogiei, asistenței sociale, gerontologiei educaționale și consilierii centrate pe persoană; delimitarea dimensiunilor și componentelor competențelor profesionale necesare studenților asistenți sociali pentru realizarea acestei activități; precum și fundamentarea și elaborarea unui Model pedagogic care explică, structurează și orientează procesul de formare a competențelor profesionale necesare consilierii educaționale a persoanelor de vârsta a treia.

Valoarea aplicativă constă în posibilitatea valorificării Modelului pedagogic de formare a competențelor profesionale ale studenților asistenți sociali pentru consilierea educațională a persoanelor de vârsta a treia, precum și a instrumentelor și demersului formativ elaborate, în cadrul cursurilor universitare, stagiilor de practică și programelor de formare continuă. Modelul și rezultatele cercetării pot fi utilizate de cadrele didactice, coordonatorii de practică și formatorii din domeniul asistenței sociale pentru proiectarea, organizarea și evaluarea activităților de formare profesională, orientate spre pregătirea viitorilor asistenți sociali pentru consilierea educațională a persoanelor de vârsta a treia.

Implementarea rezultatelor științifice: publicarea articolelor științifice în reviste de specialitate și participarea în cadrul conferințelor științifice naționale și internaționale; în activitatea didactică de pregătire și formare a studenților (UPSC și ULIM).

ANNOTATION

Diwo Veronica. The Initial Professional Training of Social Work Students for the Educational Counseling of Elderly Persons Place and Year: Chișinău 2026.

Structure of the thesis: the paper includes abstracts in Romanian Russian and English an introduction 3 chapters general conclusions and recommendations a bibliography of 200 titles 10 appendices 194 pages of main text 21 figures and 48 tables the results obtained are published in 9 scientific papers.

Keywords: students, social workers, older adults, initial professional training social work educational counseling elderly persons professional competences gerontological education university curriculum.

The aim of the research is to provide a theoretical and methodological foundation for the development of professional competencies among social work students in educational counseling for older adults.

The research objectives include: 1. identifying the theoretical foundations concerning active ageing, educational counseling of older adults, and the development of professional competences in social work; 2. identifying and structuring the professional competences required by social workers to conduct educational counseling for older adults, with reference to cognitive, relational, ethical, and methodological dimensions; 3. investigating how educational counseling of older adults is integrated into the curricula of social work professional training programs in the Republic of Moldova and Germany; 4. determining the initial level of development of the professional competences of social work students required for conducting educational counseling of older adults; 5. theoretically grounding and developing a Pedagogical Model for Developing the Professional Competences of Social Work Students for the Educational Counseling of Older Adults; 6. developing and experimentally validating a competence development intervention for social work students, based on the proposed Pedagogical Model; 7. formulating conclusions and recommendations for optimizing the initial professional training of future social workers for conducting educational counseling of older adults.

The scientific novelty and originality of the results lie in grounding an integrative approach to the initial professional training of social work students for the educational counseling of older adults. The research contributes through: 1. conceptualizing educational counseling as a dimension of social workers' professional intervention in working with older adults; 2. identifying and structuring the professional competences required for carrying out this activity; 3. conducting a comparative analysis of university-level social work education in the Republic of Moldova and Germany and drawing on relevant good practices; 4. theoretically grounding and developing a Pedagogical Model for Developing the Professional Competences of Social Work Students for the Educational Counseling of Older Adults, structured around interdependent components – objectives, content, principles, forms, methods, educational technologies, and assessment – and oriented toward the integrated development of the cognitive, relational, ethical, and methodological competences required for educational counseling; 5. experimentally validating the effectiveness of the proposed Pedagogical Model in developing the professional competences of social work students for the educational counseling of older adults.

Research results contributing to the solution of the scientific problem: A first major result consists in the conceptual analysis of educational counseling in the context of social work with older adults, achieved through the integration of interdisciplinary perspectives from education, psychology, gerontology, and social work. This approach enables the conceptual delimitation and theoretical grounding of educational counseling as a relevant dimension of social workers' professional intervention and provides a foundation for designing initial professional training. Another result consists in identifying and structuring the professional competences required by social work students for the effective implementation of educational counseling for older adults. The identified competences, related to the cognitive, relational, ethical, and methodological dimensions, provide benchmarks for selecting and organizing training content, developing teaching strategies, and establishing criteria and indicators for assessing the level of professional preparedness.

A central scientific result of the research is the development and theoretical-applied grounding of the Pedagogical Model for Developing the Professional Competences of Social Work Students for the Educational Counseling of Older Adults. The Model integrates and correlates the essential components of the training process – objectives, competences, content, principles, organizational forms, teaching methods and technologies, as well as assessment procedures – within a coherent and functional structure. From this perspective, the Pedagogical Model serves to guide and organize the initial professional training process, providing an applied framework for the systematic development of competences required for the educational counseling of older adults. At the same time, it enables the theoretical dimension of training to be correlated with practical experiences and with the actual requirements of the future social worker's professional activity. The functionality of the Pedagogical Model is supported by its experimental validation, carried out through the application of research instruments and the analysis of the data obtained. The validation made it possible to assess the effectiveness of the formative intervention and identify changes in the level of students' professional competences, thus providing empirical support for the applicability of the Model in initial professional training. Therefore, the Model is not merely a theoretical construct, but an applicable pedagogical instrument aimed at developing the professional competences required for conducting educational counseling of older adults.

The theoretical significance of the research consists in grounding the concept of educational counseling of older adults from the interdisciplinary perspectives of pedagogy, social work, educational gerontology, and person-centered counseling; delimiting the dimensions and components of the professional competences required by social work students to conduct this activity; and theoretically grounding and developing a Pedagogical Model that explains, structures, and guides the process of developing the professional competences required for the educational counseling of older adults.

The applied value lies in the possibility of utilizing the Pedagogical Model for Developing the Professional Competences of Social Work Students for the Educational Counseling of Older Adults, as well as the developed training instruments and formative intervention, within university courses, practical placements, and continuing professional development programs. The Model and the research findings may be used by academic staff, practice coordinators, and social work trainers to design, organize, and assess professional training activities aimed at preparing future social workers for the educational counseling of older adults.

Implementation of the scientific results: publication of scientific articles in specialized journals and participation in national and international scientific conferences; integration of the research results into teaching and student training activities at UPSC and ULIM.

DIWO VERONICA

INITIAL PROFESSIONAL TRAINING OF SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS FOR THE EDUCATIONAL COUNSELING OF THIRD-AGE PERSONS

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