

POLICIES AND PRACTICES FOR THE PREPARATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF TEACHERS IN TRANSITION ECONOMIES (ALBANIA CASE)

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ABSTRACT: On its way to becoming a contemporary, modern state wishing to reach the European teaching standards and become a significant partner of the developed countries, Albania is trying to overcome a great challenge in improving its higher education. Especially, in terms of teacher training in accordance with the teacher profession these challenges are rising every day. Once we link higher education reforms to a development agenda or strictly speaking millennium development goals, the reform process in policies and practices for the preparation and development of teachers becomes much more than a mere pro-growth strategy. The purpose of this paper is to identify ways in which the reform process in teacher preparation is aligned with the larger development agenda of the developed countries. We consider a number of issues critical for linking teacher development with the changing teacher profession and relevant teacher competences. There seems to exist in Albania and wider in the region a challenging mismatch between the kind of teacher preparation and development than can be conducive to teaching practices, as suggested in research and literature, and the kind of education and development opportunities that teachers get. In this paper, we consider how this situation could be changed by building holistic approaches to teacher preparation and development; coherent quality assurance frameworks; linking theory and practice and developing the competence of teacher educators.

This paper draws primarily on the theoretical framework. Data collection was conducted through desk research, focus groups and interviews, involving, teachers, teacher educators, student teachers and education policy makers. Relevant policy documents and legislation were studied critically. The study adopted a predominantly qualitative research methodology. The case was designed to provide a holistic, 'thick description' of the situation. Consequently the findings were produced through in-depth conversations.

The biggest challenges implemented at the higher education institutions within the Bologna Process have been: assurance of systemic opportunities for teaching practice in teacher development, quality of teacher preparation and development, match of theory and practice for teacher development, organization of curricula at teacher education and other institutions for the education of potential future teachers. In addition to these, the content and methods of the teacher education curricula are by and large out-dated and not useful for preparation of teachers.

This paper also attempts to assess the likely reforms of teacher training system related to market requirements in the future, based on the thought that the transition process to a market economy in the country has not yet been completed and transitional dynamics and other global factors will influence further evolution of this kind of training.

1. INTRODUCTION

In post-socialist Western Balkan countries, several parallel change processes make a complex contextual background for management of education systems. Transition from centrally planned to market economy, and processes of democratization and globalization create multiple schisms in values that teachers may hold. According to Cochran and Lytle (1999) the simultaneity of transforming the state, the regime and the societies in the region is similar to the experience of Central East Europe. Education, like other public spheres, and perhaps even more so, is not free of interests vested in the various agendas of state and nation building. Policy-makers in education are faced with complex policy and cultural decisions, but they lack reliable evidence that could inform such decisions (Gordon and Nicely, 1998). In this situation, the struggle for hearts and minds of future generations is too often left to competing political agendas while teachers, who mainly seem to hold to a belief that politics should stay out of public schools (Gold, 1996). In Europe, before the 17th century, when school education had not yet been formalized and was restricted to a small segment of the population, knowledge of the subject-matter taught was the only requirement for being a teacher. Anyone who could read, for example, could teach reading and set up as a schoolmaster without any other form of preparation. Clearly, teaching had not yet been organized and was defined by a random series of personal initiatives, and there were no other requirements apart from knowledge of the subject being

taught. Student groups were not large and teaching could often be conducted as a form of tutoring. Teacher training did not exist, and indeed was not required. Teachers taught as they themselves had been taught, using the centuries-old tradition of a logical progression from the simple to the complex. The new social and educational context requires recognition for the interactive nature of teaching (Tardif and Lessard 1999). Unlike specialists in a particular field (chemists or physicists, for example), general education teachers do not work with inert materials but with living and social subjects. Students today are no longer docile beings subjected to the teacher's authority; they resist the teacher's influence, and always want to do something else, or do it differently or at another time: "The teacher's knowledge no longer, in the eyes of students, gives him or her an unconditional right to exercise intellectual authority and obtain their attention, trust and obedience. Dislodged from their pedestal, teachers must, day after day, earn the credit and influence they formerly enjoyed automatically" (Joxe quoted in Lang 1999). The education system in Albania is still risking its present and future pupils for similar reasons. Schools and teacher education institutions alike seem to be unduly disconnected from the ever more multifaceted environments in which they operate. There has been an essential shift in the intellectual foundation of teaching: interpretational and procedural methods are tending to replace the prescriptive methods of the former model; psychology has even lost its status as the sole reference point outside actual practice, to multidisciplinary approaches to

practice and the development of a Teacher Training — Orientations — Professional Competencies ‘research language in a classroom setting’ ” (Lang 1999). Therefore, to achieve its ambitious objective, Albania needs to view the role of teachers and their lifelong learning and career development as key priorities. Teachers should be equipped to respond to the evolving challenges of the knowledge society, but also to participate actively in it and to prepare learners to be autonomous lifelong learners. They should, therefore, be able to reflect on the processes of learning and teaching through an ongoing engagement with subject knowledge, curriculum, content, pedagogy, innovation, research, and the social and cultural dimensions of education. Teacher education needs to be at a higher education level or its equivalent and be supported by strong partnerships between higher education and the institutions where teachers will gain employment (Cuban, 1993). Although teachers play a critical role in society, they cannot act alone. Their own high quality education needs to be supported by coherent national or regional policies that are appropriately resourced. These policies must address initial teacher education and continuing professional development, but must also be set within the broader context of education policy in general. Teacher education has an impact on the quality of learning and, therefore, it needs to be part of national or regional systems that are focused on improving and evaluating the quality of education (Schon, 1983).

A future shortage of teachers has not only raised concerns about future numbers of teachers, but also about the quality of future teachers. OECD has noted: “There are two broad concerns about the supply of teachers. One relates to teacher numbers: (...). The other concern is more qualitative, and reflects trends in the composition of the teacher workforce in terms of academic background, gender, knowledge and skills.” (p.39, OECD, 2005).

In the report “Teachers Matter: Attracting, Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers” OECD noted “that of those variables which are potentially open to policy influence, factors involving teachers and teaching are the most important influences on student learning” (p. 26, OECD, 2005).

In the EU context, education has come to play a more important role than earlier. In the so called Lisbon process, education is recognized as an important factor and through and new tools for working with education has been created.

The Lisbon European Council 2000 decided about a new strategic goal for the next decade: "to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion" (Lisbon European Council: Presidency Conclusions, Paragraph 5).

For the first time in the history of EU summits, education and training represent a major tool for implementing a strategic goal (Fredriksson, 2003). European Council in the spring in 2001” (Lisbon European Council Presidency Conclusions, paragraph 27). Following this mandate, a report on “the concrete future objectives of education systems” (Council of the European Unions, 2001) was presented to the Stockholm European Council in 2001 and a document entitled "Detailed work programme on the follow-up of the objectives of education and training systems" (Council of the European Unions, 2002) was adopted by the 2002 spring meeting of the European Council in Barcelona.

Education Ministers agreed on three major goals to be achieved by 2010:

- To improve the quality and effectiveness of EU education and training systems;
- To ensure that they are accessible to all;
- To open up education and training to the wider world.

This interest in education in the EU has also included a concern to improve the quality of teachers in Europe. Some initiatives have supported the development of policies related to teacher education through a European discussion and peer reviewing and others to search for ways to monitor the development.

During the Portuguese Presidency 2000 the European Network on Teacher Education Policies (ENTEP) was launched. ENTEP promotes cooperation among European Union Member States regarding their teacher education policies and has since 2000 organized 17 conferences to discuss different subjects related to teacher education (ENTEP, 2006). The first report of the working group focused on two issues: the changing role of teachers and trends in teacher education policies. The report identified “the changing dimensions in the role of teachers in a knowledge society” (p. 7, European Commission, 2003). A number of such competencies were listed: promotion of new learning outcomes, restructuring of work in the classroom, work “beyond the classroom”: with the wider community and social partners, integration of ICT in formal learning situations and in all areas of professional practice, growing professionalisation and increased individual responsibility for professional development (p. 9 European Commission, 2003). In the area of teacher education policies the report evinced trends in four areas: “Defining a professional profile in order to ensure that teachers acquire the skills to respond to the challenges of their changing role and acquire the appropriate competencies” (p. 11, European Commission, 2003); partnerships between teacher education and schools; research-based teacher education and quality control.

The second report focused among other things on guiding principles for developing a common European framework. The working group identified a number of general principles which should be taken into account in the development of a framework. A common European Framework was described as “references and principles and aimed at supporting and encouraging national policies as well as providing an opportunity for system convergence where appropriate” (p. 7, European Commission, 2004b). A conference was organized in Brussels on June 20 – 21, 2005 to test the ideas about common European principles for teacher competencies and qualifications. A draft document “Common European Principles for Teacher Competences and Qualifications” was presented. The conference agreed on the proposed recommendation, but suggested some changes. The draft recommendation (European Commission, 2005b) identifies four common principles:

- A well qualified profession - the need that all teachers are graduates from higher education institutions;
- A profession within the context of lifelong learning - that teacher should be supported in order to continue their professional development throughout their careers;
- A mobile profession - that mobility should be a central part of initial and continuing teacher education programme;
- A profession based on partnership - the need for institutions providing teacher education to work in partnership

with school and other relevant institutions (p. 9 – 10, European Commission, 2005b).

The recommendation also emphasizes that a teacher should have the competence to work with others, nurture the potential of every learner; work with knowledge, technology and information, with a variety of types of knowledge, build and manage learning environments as well as contribute to preparing learners to be globally responsible in the roles as EU citizens (p. 10, European Commission, 2005b). In order to get information about the extent to which the education of teachers is improved in Europe it is necessary to find indicators that measure development in teacher education also.

To implement policies in line with these Common European principles, the following recommendations are made to those responsible for policy-making at national or regional levels:

1. Teachers should be graduates from a higher education institution or equivalent.
2. Teacher education programme should be delivered in all three cycles of higher education in order to ensure their place in the European higher education area and to increase the opportunity for advancement and mobility within the profession.
3. The contribution of research and evidence-based practice to the development of new knowledge about education and training should be promoted.
4. Partnerships among institutions, where teachers will be employed, industry, training providers and higher education institutions should be encouraged to support high quality training and effective practice, and to develop networks of innovation at local and regional levels.
5. Coherent and adequately resourced lifelong learning strategies, covering formal and non-formal development activities are needed to deliver continuous professional development for teachers. These activities, which include subject based and pedagogical training, should be available throughout their careers and be recognized appropriately.
6. The content of initial and continuous professional development programmes should reflect the importance of interdisciplinary and collaborative approaches to learning.
7. Mobility projects for teachers should be facilitated and promoted as an integral part of initial and continuous professional development programmes.
8. Initial and continuous professional development programmes should ensure that teachers have the knowledge and experience of European co-operation to enable them to value and respect cultural diversity and to educate learners to become EU citizens.
9. Opportunities to study European languages, including the use of specialized vocabulary, during initial teacher education and in continuous professional development programmes should be available and promoted.
10. Priority should be given to developing greater trust and transparency of teacher qualifications within Europe to allow for mutual recognition and increased mobility.

In 1999, Ministries from 29 European countries signed the Bologna declaration which aims to establish a European area of higher education. This introduced the two-cycle degree system. The Berlin Conference in 2003 extended this to 45 countries

and introduced a third cycle for degree programmes at doctorate level.

2. STUDY METHODOLOGY

This article presents the results of 45 semi-structured in-depth interviews with 45 student teachers, teachers, teacher educators and education policy makers. The interviews were collected by using the technique of snowball, following a semi-structured format by giving to the respondents' full allowance for discussion. All interviews were in Albanian. Some of the people interviewed did not like to be taped during the process of their interviewing, so we wrote down the main points of our conversation with them. The other interview-transcripts have been registered and then taped.

They have been collected by a technique of non-representative sampling which tried to capture the diversity of experiences and perspectives of student teachers, teachers, teacher educators and education policy makers. Research for this paper was carried out from October 2010 to January 2011 in Albania. We interviewed 10 teachers, 18 student teachers, 11 teacher educators and 6 education policy makers. We also conducted 2 focus groups; 1 student teachers and 1 with teachers. Interviews were conducted following a snowball recruitment strategy, although various 'entry points' were followed, such as personal contacts and others given by other researchers, The ages of the student teachers ranged from 20 to 22 years, teachers average age was 35, policy makers average age was 45 and teacher educators 50 years old. All the interviews are made in Durres and Tirana, two main and larger cities of Albania. Students were studying in public universities and teachers graduated from public universities too.

The names of the interviewees were changed. Interviews lasted about an hour; those with student teachers and teachers were longer than the others.

3. ANALYSIS OF STUDY FINDINGS

It is estimated that every year 800 Albanians students enroll in teacher grades offered by higher education institutions and almost 600 get graduated also (AIIS, 2005).

The semi-structured interviews conducted on student teachers and teachers were divided into 3 sessions:

The first session aimed at gathering information about the reasons why the interviewed people have decided to continue studying the teacher profession;

The second session included questions about these peoples' perceptions for the teaching standards and competences;

The third session's purpose was to identify their aspirations about teacher profession and teacher training and the reforms should be taken for having these two concepts in accordance and to have a view about the reforms should be taken in preparation of teachers and changing teacher profession in Albania as a country in transition.

3.1. Analysis of the first session findings

According to the respondents' answers it is obvious that two are the main reasons why they have decided to study teaching: Firstly, because they hope to find a secure job that doesn't require a lot of working hours. Secondly, because many of the participants to the interview have tried to obtain another university degree, but their high school average and matura exam point was not enough for that.

After I graduated from a high school in Tirana with not excellent results, I entered matura exam and my points were enough just for literature teaching. (M.M. 32 years old, Tirana)

I'm a woman and I wanted to have a lot of time to care about my family. So I chose teaching as a profession which doesn't require long working hours. (H.F. 41 years old, Durres)

According to the interviews results, studying teaching for many young people in Albania means having a comfortable and not threatened profession. The main reasons the interviewed people listed about studying teaching in general are: (a) They hope to acquire a contemporary know-how, a global way of thinking and another working ethics; (b) Having a teaching degree, people hope to get more chances for a secure working position in Albania, with a good salary. Teaching especially has been chosen by the interviewed people because:

Firstly, they knew that studying teaching is easier than other study fields.

Secondly, teaching profession is universal and can be done everywhere.

Thirdly, because the country will always need teachers.

3.2. Analysis of the second session findings

As mentioned above the second session of the semi-structured interview contained questions about the perceptions of perception of standards and competencies of teaching profession.

According to the answers of the interviewed people we classified the target group in two categories.

1. The first group is composed people who did not know exactly what should be the teacher competencies and the teaching profession standards. The interviewed people of this category answered "No" to the question "Are you aware of your profession competencies and standards?"

Part of this group, 7 people graduated a first degree and a professional masters degree.

Mostly, these group confirmed that they are in profession just for earning money and do not care about the competencies and standards. ON the first opportunity they would change this profession.

2. The second group is composed mostly of teachers who attended Scientific Master but even of doctorate students. They aspired to work as teachers, because they believe in this profession. This category of students answered "No" to the question "Do you think that teacher training in Albania is going on based on clear policies?". They listed a lot of reasons why they do not think so.

Some of these reasons are: (a) the Albanian political and social instability (b) low salaries and low standard of living in Albania (c) low work ethics in teaching profession in Albania (d) the unclearness of training teachers' policies (e) not settled teaching standards (f) high level corruption for finding a job (g) personal reasons.

It is very difficult to have a clear vision about the teacher training in Albania. Nobody has a clear idea about what the state expects from teachers and what are the criteria for teacher assessment. I have na MA degree in teaching Literature and I wondered if this qualification is really needed for a teacher in Albania. No more salary for this qualification and some more credits needed from Ministry of Education and Science. I really

want my country to have a clear policy about the teacher development process (A.I. male, 36).

3.3. Analysis of the third session findings

The purpose of the third session was to identify the teachers' aspirations about teacher profession and teacher training and the reforms that should be taken for harmonizing these two concepts and to have a view about the reforms that should be taken in preparation of teachers and changing teacher profession in Albania as a country in transition. According to the teachers' response we identify that for all the interviewed teachers, the most important problem is the lack of qualifications. People considered this issue as more needed for improving their teaching profession and that allow them to be in contact with the global world.

They suggest having a clear training programme according to teaching profiles in some cases.

3.4. Analysis of teacher educators and education policy makers interviews

By teacher educator we mean professors who teach [in a teaching branch] in a university and by education policy makers the people that work in Ministry of Education and Science and Regional Education Directories in the cities under the authority of the Ministry.

Almost all professors (8 of them) consider that the education process in the university represents the curriculum needed to prepare and have qualified teachers that are aware of teaching competencies, can be mobile.

"I have been a professor in this university for 12 years. I think that we really prepare teachers who can be competitive in any European school". (A.H. 50 years old).

But some other young professors (3 of them), think that Albanian university curriculum must be really improved to have the chance to survive in the European area.

"I have studied abroad for a teaching degree. I see that my colleagues teaching style and information is really out of fashion. The curriculum still includes very outdated courses that nowadays do not longer exist in European universities. I think that we still want to have classic teachers and classic pupils." (A.T. 30 years old).

Also according to education policy makers, the situation in pre- and in-service teacher training is getting better. They confirm that some steps that will force the pre- and in-service teacher to get more qualifications are being taken. Generally speaking, these categories of interviewed people speak in a general language that represents the states politics related to the matter.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The survey reveals that Albanian higher education system must be improved especially in teacher training faculties.

Teacher training in university does not really fit to teaching profession competencies and this is a real challenge that should be overcome. Albanian teacher training universities should reconsider European teaching standards and competencies to have a compatible teacher picture in the country. This theory should also be linked to practice in teacher training curricula.

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