

TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF TEACHERS IN THE MUNICIPALITY OF PRIZREN

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Abstract

The professional development of teachers is an important issue and a topic of discussion among relevant institutions (MEST-Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology; Municipality Directorates; higher education institutions) in Kosovo. This research paper examines the issue of integration of subjects with a pedagogical character in educational institutions in the municipality of Prizren, in Kosovo, and provides an overview of various programs (vocational training, seminars) that have been/are being implemented by local and international institutions, aiming to increase the professional development and enhance the quality of teaching among education workers in Prizren. The VQT (Vocational training and Qualification of Teachers) and VRT (Vocational training and Re-qualification of Teachers) are two programs discussed in the paper. MEST, as a legislative and supervisory body in Kosovo, plays a key role in establishing the legal framework and building the educational infrastructure, following standards comparable to those in Europe. Hence, this research paper intends to inform relevant institutions and serve as a point of reference for professional development (of teachers), and strategy-compilation processes for the municipality of Prizren.

Keywords: Teacher, Vocational Training, Qualification, Professional Development, Formal Education, Informal, Seminar, Training Course, Pedagogical Practice

Introduction

The issue of teacher training and professional development has been and remains a topic of interest and discussion for the relevant educational and social institutions, as well as for the professional education spectrum of actors, such as pedagogues, psychologists and various scholars. Qualitative vocational training and ongoing-qualification of teachers, in the era of technology and digitalization, is necessary in order to keep pace with changes in social, cultural, economic, political, and technical-technological developments.

Qualitative education, at the time of globalization and rapid technological developments, can not be imagined without the training and capacity building of the teaching staff, both theoretically, professionally - pedagogically and practically. Vocational training and qualification of teachers in Kosovo, more specifically in the municipality of Prizren, is characterized by a continuity, ranging from Normal Schools, Pedagogical Academies, LFSs, FMLs, Teaching Faculties, and recently Education Faculties. In the training and professional development of teachers, besides the formal higher education, particular importance (over the last two decades) has been given to informal educational activities, including seminars and training courses, organized by various local and international institutions, in cooperation and coordination with the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology in Pristina, and the Municipality Education Directorates.

This paper will provide an overview of the VQT (Vocational training and Qualification of Teachers) and VRT (Vocational training and Re-qualification of Teachers) which will be further discussed in the paper.

The training of teachers in Kosovo, as well as in all countries of the region and beyond, is characterized by two forms of organization:

- Pre-service training (during education), and
- In-service training (while exercising the profession of the teacher).

Training and professional qualification of teachers (during education)

The training of teachers in the Municipality of Prizren ought to be observed as part of the institutional set up that aims to professionally train and prepare teachers for the provision of quality education in Kosovo. In the past, educational institutions in Kosovo have been unique in their study programs. Their uniqueness has a tradition that dates back to 1950s, with the opening of the first Normal Schools, Pedagogical Academies, and the Higher Vocational Schools, and has been carried to the Faculty of Education in Kosovo. The First Normal School - in Kosovo, respectively in Pristina, was a normal Serbian school called “Srpska učiteljska škola”. The school opened on September 4, 1945, where classes were mainly taught in Serbian language; the school closed in 1956 (Fetahu. A., & Cunaku, M. 2011, p.13). Similar (in regards to the program) to the Normal School of Prishtina, another school opened in the city of Prizren in 1947, which was known as the first school of education "normal school" with a four-year program. Classes were taught in Serbo-Croatian language, whereas from 1956 they opened classes in Albanian and later on in Turkish language. Prizrens' Normal School conducted its activity until 1974, and due to the political situation and new educational strategies it was reformed to a Pedagogical Academy in 1974. Programs at this school were provided in two forms: *as a four-year high school*, and *as a six-year (4 + 2) school of education*. After completing the four-year program students could decide to either continue the school for two more years, or apply to an advanced program of education at the university. The normal school in Prizren ended its activity in 1979. The activity of the Pedagogical Academies in Kosovo marks their end in the 1980s. To this year, they functioned separately from the University of Pristina, then were joined and merged into the higher education system within the University of Prishtina (meaning that they no longer function separately from the University).

The 2001/02 academic years, mark the beginning of the reformation process (of the education programs) in Kosovo. Most two-year programs changed to three-year programs, meaning that graduates would receive the title of Bachelor. In this period most of the education programs in Kosovo moved towards the Bologna Process, which is also when the Faculty of Education in Prizren was opened. To increase the quality of teaching there were preconditions such as the extension of study programs from two to four years. For this purpose, on October 1st, 1997, **First Faculty of Teaching** (with a four-year program) was founded. The faculty was part of the University of Prishtina. Graduated candidates from this faculty received the title ‘classroom teacher’ (Koliqi, H., 2004). The Faculty's longevity was short, as MEST suspended its activity, and in the framework of the University of Prishtina on September 9, 2002 founded the Faculty of Education. This institution started work on November 18, 2002, with programs for the preparation of educators and teachers for lower cycle education (I-V), and from the academic year 2003/04 initiated the preparation of teachers for the lower secondary cycle (VI-IX).

An important development for the Kosovar society in general and for Kosovo's higher education in particular was the opening of the University of Prishtina in 1970, as the most populous institution with students from all parts of Kosovo (Halimi, et al., 2005). From this, it appears that a considerable number of teachers in Prizren as well as from other cities have completed their studies at the University of Prishtina. Study programs in all faculties within the UP were four (4) years until 2000/02, when the Kosovo Education System became part of the European reforms under the Bologna system of education. The implementation of the Bologna system, in addition to the minor advantages created some confusion and a lack of

clarity, especially on issues regarding employment (e.g. comparing diplomas of four-years studies with those of three-years). Such issues are well known to the Prizren MED. But, these difficulties began to be solved after graduate students were required to register master studies as well. Later, with the start of a pilot program for non-detached studies for teachers who had completed the HLA, the teachers (who were employed) with bachelor's three-year studies joined these teacher groups to complete the fourth year, so that their diplomas could become equivalent to four-year studies. Today, a considerable number of students from Prizren and the surrounding region, complete their studies and train for different professions at the University of Prishtina.

Higher education institutions which up to now have enabled the professional training and qualification of teachers in Kosovo and from the Municipality of Prizren in particular are:

- 1) Faculty of Philosophy [Prishtina]**
 - a) History;
 - b) Pedagogy- psychology;
- 2) Faculty of Mathematics-Natural Sciences [Prishtina]**
 - a) Mathematics (education); 4. Biology (education)
 - b) Physics (education); 5. Geography (education)
 - c) Chemistry (education);
- 3) Faculty of Philology [Prishtina]**
 - a) Albanian Language
 - b) Albanian Literature
 - c) English Language and Literature.
- 4) Faculty of Arts [Prishtina]**
 - a) Art Figurative
 - b) Musical Art (musical pedagogy);
- 5) Faculty of Physical Culture and Sports [Prishtina]**
- 6) Faculty of Education [Prishtina, Prizren, Gjakova and Gjilan]**
 - a) Preschool
 - b) Physics - Chemistry / Chemistry - Physics
 - c) Primary education
 - d) Mathematics - Informatics
 - e) Albanian Language and Literature
 - f) Technology – Informatics
 - g) English Language and Literature
 - h) History - Civic Education;
 - i) Biology-Chemistry / Chemistry-Biology
 - j) Geography - Civic Education (UP, 2010).

The Faculty of Education within the University "Ukshin Hoti" in Prizren started its work in the academic year 2010/11 with several study programs and a considerable number of students. Studies in this faculty are organized for a four-year term with 240 ECTS credits. The program content is divided by subjects or courses, with the basic professional components according to this percentage: 40% of the courses are academic; 40% of the courses are professional (social science applied, in the philosophy of education and methodology) the same in all programs; and 20% teaching practice with a total of 22 weeks, during the four years of study. Since the independence (from FE Prishtina), the Faculty of Education in Prizren has dealt with difficulties regarding the qualitative achievement of the program content and this is precisely due to a lack of qualified teachers (professors - lecturers). Students and local media continuously report about a lack of qualitative staff in this institution. Such comments and stances have been evaluated and we have found considerable evidence that supports the reports,

since even with the recent inspections made by the Education Inspectorate in Prizren, during February / March / April of the year 2014, there have been noted omissions and irregularities, especially in the absence of relevant teaching staff (Gajraku & Mexhuani 2008)

In-service training (while exercising the profession of the teacher)

Training of teachers without dismissal from work in Kosovo (at least in an organized manner) dates back to 2001, with Canadian CIDA, when the Kosovo Teacher Training Project (KTP) was first established. It also applied to the training of teachers in Prizren, who were regular employees. The implementation of KTP in Prizren started in 2007 with the initial (test) phase, where over 140 teachers have participated. Most teachers were from Prizren, Suhareka, Dragash, Rahovec and other regions of Kosovo (Lutfiu, B., 2012). The testing phase was on a voluntary basis where each candidate (teacher) had to pay 35 euros for every exam. The two curriculum (pre and elementary-school) programs, in which teachers were being retrained, consisted of 15 exams (for three semesters) plus a diploma course in the fourth semester. Most participants registered for the elementary-school program. Lectures were held every Saturday in the premises of the Faculty of Education, by the professors of this faculty (from early morning till evening - in the absence of teachers-lecturers).

According to participating candidates, the program caused burden and fatigue, due to the clustered lectures within one day (five lectures per day were held from 8.00 to 17.00, with a one-hour break at 13.00). Within one semester, five lectures were organized every weekend, whereas exams were held at the end of each semester. In the first phase of the program, five groups of 27-28 teachers (in Albanian) were formed, which was an indicator of a good program coordination.

The second phase of this project was implemented from October 2010. The total number of teachers registered at this stage of the project reached 264 participants. All curricular activities were organized for three semesters, plus the remaining semester, where they were to focus on their thesis. The number of courses for each program was 15, divided by five for each semester. The second phase was entirely funded by MEST [Ministry of Education, Science and Technology], which made the entire program free of charge for all teachers. The number of programs and groups was greater compared to the first phase of the program. As a result, the number of participating candidates increased by almost 100 percent. Registered candidates were mainly from Elementary and Secondary Schools of the Municipality of Prizren. Lectures were held every Saturday from 8.00-17.00 with five lessons and an hour lunch break. Besides the theoretical lectures, teachers were enrolled into practice classes within the schools where they worked. Practice classes were actively evaluated and monitored by mentor professors of respective courses. The project has been implemented in four phases; the third phase of the project started in Feb - March 2012, whereas the fourth phase in the academic year 2014/2015, with the same characteristics as the previous stages.

Professional Development of Teachers in the Municipality of Prizren

Given the need for vocational training and continuous professional development and on the basis of certain educational priorities, on April 2002, MEST drafted a strategic plan. The strategic plan included all municipalities of Kosovo setting forth the criteria for enrollment as well as all the duties and responsibilities for training providers. Technical preparations at the time were made by KEDP. They published a handbook with all the information including a list of organizations that provided training, training areas, training schedules, topics to be discussed, how-to guide for teachers and administrators, and the criteria for enrollment. The

coordination and evaluation of the program was executed by the Training Unit within MEST and KEDP.

The Kosovo Education Center (KEC) is a non-governmental organization founded by the SOROS Foundation. KEC is a specialized unit in the field of education and educational training provision for the successful implementation of contemporary teaching strategies. KEC implements a number of projects, including the Didactic Centers Project funded by donors:

- Kosovo's Open Society Fund (KFOS)
- The Culture Contact Austria
- The Ministry of Education-Austria
- Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (DEZA)

On May 25, 2001, donor support enabled the opening of the First Didactic Center in Kosovo at Abdyl Frashëri School in Prizren. This didactic center acts as a core institution where the largest number of courses and trainings for the training and professional development of teachers take place. Thanks to this didactic center, many educational projects and many training programs have been implemented. Some professional development programs, organized by local and international organizations in coordination with MEST, for teachers from Prizren are:

- **Step by Step (HPH)** - Since 2002, the Step by Step program was transferred from the Kosovo Foundation for Open Society (KFOS) to the Kosovo Education Center where it established three training centers in Kosovo: Pristina, Peja and Prizren
- **Teaching with the Student in the Center (MNQ)**, organized by KEDP, CIDA, and Calgary University, in October 2003
- **Education for the Rights of the Child (EDNJC)**, organized by KEC in September 2005;
- **Developing Reading and Writing Critical Thinking (RWCW)**, organized by KEC in cooperation with MEST, in October 2004, as the first stage, the program continued later: September-December 2006, June 2007, October 2007 etc
- **Education for Democratic Citizenship (EDC)**, organized by MEST and Kultur Kontakt Austria, in March 2005
- **Mentoring Teacher Program**, organized by KEDP, CIDA, and the collaboration of Universialias and the University of Calgary in March 2006
- **Introduction to Inclusive Education (TESFA)**, organized by MEST in cooperation with FSDEK, in April 2006
- **Gender Equality in Education**, organized by MEST, in September 2006
- **New teaching methodologies to help children with learning difficulties and attention deficit**, organized by MEST, QPEA and funded by "Training Workshops International for the Children" - USA, held in September 2006
- **New teaching and learning strategies** in 2009, KEC in cooperation with the World Bank have organized 6 modules of the RWCT program for 217 teachers from the Prizren and Mitrovica municipalities (KEC, 2016)
- **Learning Assessment** USAID's Basic Education Program project was organized in cooperation with MEST and the financial assistance of the American people in April 2011 (Abdyli, U., 2017)
- The **ECDL** course of seven modules was funded by MEST and was organized in cooperation with AUK-Prishtina. The implementation of the ECDL program started in December 2009 and has continued for four or five years, with over 70% of teachers attending.

Such professional development activities have been organized continuously since 2001/02, and continue nowadays, with some changes in module types - seminars and implementing organizations. The number of participants fluctuates based on the training: programs such

as RWCs, MGS, Step by Step, Children's Rights and ECDL were noted as highly attractive to teachers, which in turn brought a greater number of participants. There is no public data and (statistics) regarding the exact number of participants or the effects that these activities have had on their professional development, except for a research conducted in 2012 (Master's Thesis) (Gajraku & Mexhuani 2008).

From our conversations with participants and the attitudes they have regarding the benefits they have derived from these activities, we can conclude that there have been some positive aspects to these activities such as: *a)* massiveness in participation *b)* good organization (at the initial stage) *c)* the possibility of refreshing previous teachers' knowledge *d)* recognition of new teaching and learning techniques; exchange of experiences among teachers themselves *e)* regional and gender aspect *f)* ideas on reforming the teaching process especially in teaching *g)* raising the awareness of teachers for permanent professional development *h)* change in attitudes towards the "student" as the "center" of the educational process and others.

Teachers have reported and highlighted some irregularities regarding the process as well such as *a)* all participants were certified regardless of their activity and engagement *b)* certificates were issued to those that did not regularly attend or who did not attend for the most part of the training program *c)* implementation was minimal in relation to the implementation of the acquired knowledge; *d)* mentors did not assess the changes related to the knowledge that was gained or tools that they adopted *f)* some trainers were from non-professional subjects and below the professional level *g)* most classes were theoretical as opposed to bringing concrete professional practice-examples *h)* new teaching methodologies were introduced for specific teaching subjects; *i)* the formation of participating groups without any subject, class, or professional criteria *j)* favors in the appointment of attendees by school directors – failed to include all teachers in activities *k)* lack of planning for continued participation *l)* some trainings were organized during work-days *m)* lack of incentive and motivation for the participation of teachers from relevant institutions *n)* there were seminars and trainings that were formally organized to cover the donations promised to the organizers (according to some participants). Despite the above mentioned omissions and remarks it is safe to say that in general teachers have benefited from this program, specifically those who understood the importance of education reforms for professional development.

Conclusion

Qualitative training is a necessity and an imperative practice for professional development in the education sector. Primarily because it is the responsibility of relevant institutions and society to prepare children, students and our youth, in a rapidly changing world for a common economic, social and political European market, to guide them in leading a life without addiction, and increase their chances in becoming contributors to their families and to the wider society. In order to manufacture a quality education system, an urgent task is laid on top of respective state institutions for a more serious approach related to raising the bar for quality education, identifying the omissions and finding possible solutions to accomplish that.

Decades ago, although the economic, political and social conditions were more difficult than now, Kosovo has had a well-consolidated education system, from which have emerged respectful and highly professional cadres, who have made valuable contributions to society both domestically and internationally. Nowadays, even though social, economic, and other circumstances are more favorable than in the former system (in the former Yugoslavia), as well as children's access to and knowledge of technology is superlative compared to the past, their learning outcomes are lower than two decades ago. This brings us to our main question: *What are the causes of such a stagnation and such a decline in the quality of education at all levels*

of education? From my personal experience as a teacher for nearly two decades and as a regional inspector of education, I dare to conclude, with a lot of competence, that one of the major reasons why the education system in Kosovo (in the Prizren region in particular) is facing the current problems, are due to political factors and its interferences in all organizational levels. Pervasive political practices interfere with all the appointments and selections of the heads of educational institutions, ranging from university rectors to principals of pre-primary institutions, not excluding the impact on the selection of technical workers and schoolroom guards. Also, there is political impact-interference in the selection of the teaching staff in all levels of education, ranging from higher education to pre-primary education. The enigma in the Kosovar education will be solved when we as a society understand the importance of quality education in guiding students to acquire knowledge in a subordinate manner and to equip them with necessary skills in a world that is constantly changing.

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