

IN-SERVICE TEACHER TRAINING PROGRAM – THE FUNCTIONING AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract

In 2006 the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, in accordance with the Law on Primary and Secondary Education, requested that all teachers in Kosovo should continue further qualifications. This meant that every teacher in Kosovo must have a four-year university qualification, in order to work as a teacher. For this reason, the *In-service Teacher Training program* (formal program) was established within the University of Prishtina, respectively the Faculty of Education. The aim of this paper is to reflect on the functioning of the *In-service Teacher Training program*, during the two phases of the program (including subject teacher programs) and the process of the courses progress. During the analysis we focused our study on the program rules, frameworks of the drafted syllabuses, reports from the program managerial Board meetings etc. Additionally, our findings are based on literature review, theoretical methods of analysis, and pedagogical documentations. We found that the program offers qualitative courses and it is the only existing program for professional development of all teachers in Kosova, in accordance to the standards of the Bologna Process. The program focuses its activities on teachers that are active in teaching practices, teachers that want to develop professionally and want to be qualified in accordance with set standards of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology. It was also found that the courses within the program provide the most advanced methodologies of teaching and learning. This study concludes that the program is very useful and its quality leads toward gaining new knowledge and professional development of all teachers in Kosovo.

Keywords: *Teachers, Kosovo, In-service Teacher Training Program, Adult education.*

Introduction

Since 2001, when the implementation of the Canadian Kosovo Educator Development Project (KEDP) was initiated in Kosovo, the need for teacher advancement and training program was reinforced. In this context, the aim of this program would be the implementation of the new approaches to student-centered teaching and learning. Such program was needed even more when the Council for Teacher Training Review, within the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST) had approved the new Standards of Teacher Preparation Programs, in 2004. The new standards anticipated four year university studies, and therefore a new approach for advancement was in need for every teacher with a degree from the two year Higher Pedagogical School (HPS). As such, the need for additional qualifications of teachers in Kosovo arose, and in addition the initiation of a program which would help in advancing the in service teacher qualifications as well as for bettering the quality of teaching (Rexhaj, 2011). Such program, would have to differ from other in-service teacher training programs organized by the non-governmental organizations, therefore would have to be offered in institutional level, and it should belong to formal education.

In-service Teacher Training program - In accordance with the need for teacher qualifications, in 2006 the In-service Teacher Training program operating in four centers of the Faculty of Education, in Prishtina, Gjilan, Gjakova and in Prizren was initiated. It was the first and the only program in Kosovo, which has implemented the concept and philosophy of lifelong education. The program resulted from the institutional cooperation between the University of Prishtina (UP) and MEST, who signed a Memorandum of Understanding. The students of the program would receive the title Bachelor of Education, and at the end of the program, they would have to collect 240 credits (ECTS) (Rexhaj, 2011). So far, the total number of students involved in the program, during the first phase, amounted to approximately 650 students, and they graduated in September 2009.

Since then, besides many difficulties, the program managed to survive with much success, primarily due to the enthusiasm of Kosovo teachers, and thanks to the commitment and work of academic staff and management of the program.

In June 2010, MEST and UP, signed a cooperation agreement for the continuation of the program with the aim of the qualification equivalence and promotion of qualified Kosova teachers, and in the meantime complementing the Bologna Process objectives.

Research Methodology

The aim of the research is to reflect on the functioning of the two phases of the In-service Teacher Training program, to analyze mechanisms for quality assurance, to see how the students have benefited and to identify the role and the importance of continuing the functioning of the program.

Research methods: For an efficient research, the following research methods were applied:

- a) Method of Pedagogical Documentation - that means support mostly on the analysis of pedagogical documents, such as Regulations of the program, the program managerial Board decisions, minutes, program reports prepared for MEST etc.
- b) Quantitative Method - summary of the results of a modest survey conducted with the students of the program, presented in tabular and graphical way, to analyze and compare them with previously established hypotheses.

Research hypothesis: While observing and analyzing the In - service Teacher Training program, these hypotheses have been raised, the main one:

- *In-service Teacher Training program operates in accordance with the standards of the Bologna Process*

and two others are ancillary:

- *The program includes mechanisms for increasing quality, with the help of teaching advanced methodologies*
- *The program has a positive impact on increasing the quality of teaching in schools*

Questions from the questionnaire: The following are questions from the questionnaire:

Question 1. Do you think that the In-service Teacher Training program provides qualitative studies?

Question 2. Do you consider the courses valuable for your professional advancement?

Question 3. Does the program have positive impact in increasing the quality of your work in school?

Functioning and program policies

As of the 2010 the In-service Teacher Training program offered also the subject teacher training, something differed from the previous years, where only preschool and elementary program were offered. Another important difference was that of the offered courses for the participants. Previously the program offered methodological and professional courses, whereas after 2010 the courses were mainly academic courses. Initially, the In-service Teacher Training program operated with 5 programs, including Turkish and Bosnian community in the center of Prizren, expanding to 10 programs, similar to all of the programs which were also offered in pre-service teacher programs within the Faculty of Education (FE).

Based on the Memorandum of Understanding signed between MEST and UP (June 2010), and according to the MEST administrative guidances,16/2005, concerning the standards for teacher preparation programs, the program continued serving towards the realization of the principles and guidelines of the National Curriculum Framework. This program, helps to ensure the advancement of teachers with the two year HPS, to Bachelor of Education with profilization in the field of study. To achieve the title, teachers must fulfill 240 ECTS, equivalent to the pre-service programs in the Faculty of Education. Therefore, the enrolled teachers in the program, who previously earned 120 credits from HPS, those credits would be recognized, and for them to get the title Bachelor of Education, they needed the other 120 ECTS. (Grapci, 2011)

Although, according to the Memorandum of Understanding, the program will be implemented by the University of Prishtina, in collaboration with all academic units. The major responsibility for

implementation of the program falls under the Faculty of Education, operating in four centers of the Faculty. Yet, to implement one of the Memorandums criteria, In-service Teacher Training program continued collaboration with other academic units of the University of Prishtina, in regards to the teaching process, the premises of some of the Faculties, such as the Faculty of Philosophy, Faculty of Philology, and the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences. (Grapci, 2012) In the center of Prizren, it was impossible to use the premises of the Faculty of Education, so that the high school "John Buzuku" is used, while in the two other centers, Gjakova and Gjilan, the FE premises are used. (Grapci, 2011)

The first phase of the In-service Teacher Training program

The implementation of the first phase of the In-service Teacher Training program began in November 2010.

The program was implemented and operated according to these performances:

- The policies were set by the programs managerial board (consisting of UP, MEST and FE representatives),
- The teaching and learning process is managed by the coordinators and the programs director,
- The curriculum review is conducted by the group of experts,
- The program review continued,
- Advertisement for the need to hire academic staff (on the website of the University),
- Deadline for assignment preparation and submission of the syllabus from the selected professors by the In-service Teacher Training program,
- Determining the mechanisms for quality assurance,
- Connecting all the links for ensuring quality assurance and progress of the learning process, in cooperation with the coordinators of the four centers;

All decisions made by members of the programs managerial board, were in support of the Memorandum of Understanding. Furthermore, the managerial board drafted the rules and procedures, as well as the rules of studies in the program referring to the MEST administrative guidance 16/2005, based on which the program functioned until the rules and procedures document was drafted. (Grapci, 2011) In order to have a clear view on the functioning of the in service teacher training program, in the following some of the relevant criteria based on the rules of procedures are mentioned.

Criteria for selecting commitment of teaching staff: The selection of the academic staff was done in accordance with the University of Prishtina Statute. The procedures of teaching staff commitments were also compatible with those of the UP. According to the announcement in the University of Prishtina website, the teachers had the opportunities to apply and then they were selected by the programs board members. The staff of the Faculty of Education had hiring priorities.

Criteria for students selection: As the program was funded by the MEST, the selection of candidates was also made by the MEST authorities. The MEST also had established their criteria for student selection. Therefore, the Ministry of Education officers responsible for the In-service Teacher Training, in collaboration with the Municipal Departments of Education, selected the students. After selection the publication of the selected candidates is done in the four centers of the In-service Teacher Training program offices. Further, the Central Administration of UP, mainly the student service office, continued with the process by registering all of the new students and equipping them with indexes. The student number in the In-service Teacher Training program has increased over the years, reflecting on a positive implementation of the program. In the previous program, the selection of students was made by the managerial board members, via application procedures announced by the University of Prishtina.

Monitoring of the learning process: Among procedures for quality assurance within the program. Regular monitoring of the learning process was conducted by the members of the program managerial board. Furthermore, at the end of the fifth semester of the first phase of teaching, the In-service Teacher Training program was externally monitored by the Office of Academic Development at the University of Prishtina. The program assessment results show that the whole process of the program is developed and implemented with full seriousness (including four centers), and the evaluation of the teachers by the students reached approximately 90% satisfaction. (Grapci, 2012) The teachers are evaluated in terms of qualitative work, usage of the new methods of interactive teaching, regular participation in teaching and learning etc.

Internal monitoring is applied in order to:

- Control and report the quality standards of teaching and student attendance,
- Identifying the strengths and weaknesses while also helping to improve them,
- Ensure proper activities for compensation of lost classes,
- Build an information system that is necessary for periodical evaluation of the program,
- Identify and spread best practices;

Monitoring procedure has gone through the following steps:

- Weekly monitoring was the obligation of all the members of the ,managerial board of the In-service Teacher Training program,
- According to the reports presented by the coordinators, twenty five (25) courses and six (6) programs were monitored.
- While monitoring a form was filed, this was then signed by the program coordinators of each respective center of the Faculty of Education.
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The learning process

Classes are organized according to students' status, based on their credit (ECTS) needs. If a student had the 120 ECTS from the previous schooling in HPS, then he/she needed another 120 ECTS to meet the 240 required ECTS, and also qualify for teaching (ECTS calculation is in accordance with the Declaration of Bologna and with those of the University of Prishtina). To achieve these credits, the teaching was organized within three semesters, with total 14-15 weeks,

5 courses with three teaching hours (total 42 hours) per semester, and in the last semester (fourth) the student needs to prepare the diploma thesis.

Evaluation:

The final exams are organized at the end of course completion., For intermediate knowledge assessment the summative testing are anticipated, while formative assessments are applied throughout the process of teaching and learning, continuously.

At the end of the course the students got the final grade based on the points accumulated from: the summative tests, the formative assessments, and the student participation in learning, The exam pass rate reached 80%.

The offered programs:

According to Memorandum of Understanding the program will offer 30% of educational courses. The rest of the courses to be offered are academic courses, based on the teacher needs for professional development. (Grapci, 2012)

The offered program of the In-service teacher training (previously accredited by the Accreditation Agency), are developed based on the previous HPS program (two years) and the current programs offered by the Faculty of Education, The program was always in accordance with the Administrative Instruction 16/2005 of the Ministry of Education, for preparation of teachers. In the first phase of the program, in the academic year 2010-11, the following programs are offered:

- Preschool education program (only in Gjilan),
- Primary education program,
- Mathematics – Informatics program,
- Technology – Informatics program,
- Albanian Language and Literature program,
- English Language program

The number of students, involved in the first phase of Teacher Training program, was 1069. (Grapci, 2011) At this stage these students have graduated in June-July 2012.

The second phase of the In–service Teacher Training program

The second phase of the program, with the same procedure, has started on the 10th of March, of an academic year 2011/2012. The only difference from the first phase was the growth of the number of programs offered (with 4 other programs), as follows:

- Physics – Chemistry program,
- Biology – Chemistry program,
- History – Civic education program,
- Geography – Civic education program,

The number of students at this phase was 1970 (AKM, 2012). It should be mentioned that the students of the second phase of the program are in the study process, which means they have not graduated yet.

According to the documentations and data of the program office, the total number of graduated students from the start of program implementation, arrives to 2620. According to the information from the In-service teacher training office at the MEST, the number of teachers who will be involved in the program in the future is 1828.

Results from the questionnaires - quantitative analysis

For this paper we have used modest questionnaires to study the student’s attitude in regards to the advantages of the program.

In the figures below we present the results from the questionnaire data:



Figure 1. The Quality of studies on In-service Teacher Training program

Figure 1 analyzing the 25 students opinion on the quality of the In-service Teacher Training program, from which we can notice that only 17 responded positively, 6 of them have been skeptical, and 2 student participants were fully convinced that the program is not qualitative.

The negative responses to the quality of the In-service Teacher Training program resulting as a consequence of the involvement of many students without their willingness in the program.

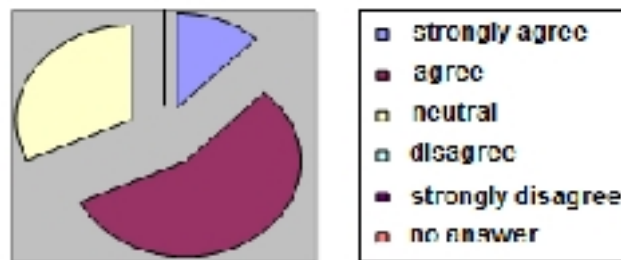


Figure 2. The validity of courses for professional advancement

In figure 2, we see that most of the survey participants (25 students) gave positive responses, which means that 14 of them have the answer 'agree' and 3 'strongly agree'. The rest, or 8 of them, have given the answer 'neutral' which means that there is a dose of uncertainty among the participants, in terms of the benefit from the program, considering sufficiently prior knowledge.



Figure 3. The impact of program on raising the quality at school

Regarding the third question whether the program has a positive impact on raising the quality of the work, most of the responses were positive. Exactly 18 participants have given positive response and 6 of them have given the 'neutral' answer and one participant did not respond at all.

So, responses of the third question fully support the second auxiliary hypothesis, which assumes that the program has a positive impact on raising the quality of teaching in schools.

Conclusions

We found that the In-service Teacher Training program is the only professional development program for all teachers in Kosovo, in accordance with the Bologna standards, which verifies the main hypothesis. In general terms the program functioning we can say that it operates in accordance with the MEST Administrative Instruction 16/2005, UP statute and the program rules and procedures. We found that the teaching quality of the program is distinguished by special mechanisms for engagement of academic staff and ensures teaching quality, thus consistently confirming with the first auxiliary hypothesis. In regards to the quality of the courses offered, we can say that the program offers courses of advanced methodologies of teaching and learning. Thus, a program like the In-service Teacher Training program, leads to the new knowledge acquisition and professional development of all teachers in Kosovo. From the above mentioned results, we can conclude that the knowledge and skills the teachers achieve in the program lead to high academic standards in areas where they work, by positively influencing the quality of teaching at school and so being in accordance with the second auxiliary hypothesis. Furthermore, there is a very constructive and transparent cooperation between the In-service Teacher Training program and the Faculty of Education in favor of the professional development of teachers and their success in their workplace.

Considering the offered contribution by the teaching staff involved in the program, as well as the management staff and the group of policies drafting (the managerial board), program quality functioning and great student benefits both in absorption of new knowledge, but also in the

reflection in their classrooms is expected. The reflection of the positive impact from their experience in the In-service Teacher Training program is expected immediately after completion of the program.

Recommendations

- To create conditions for continuing the functioning of program, so that all of the remaining teacher will attend the requalification program;
- To continue the cooperation with the Faculty of Education;
- To develop a survey for teachers who have completed the studies regarding the impact the program had in teaching and learning in their workplace;
- To investigate about the quality of teaching offered in the program and level of courses offered;
- To develop a research with students on the importance and benefits and weaknesses of the program;
- To make possible the involvement in the program for teachers who have completed HPS but who do not work in the education institution

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