

The situation of higher education in the Republic of Kosova

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1. Abstract

Quality and mass education entails the primary route and catalyst for the development of all spheres of the society. It reflects powerfully in the native country development, regional and global integration of all kinds and levels. This type of education is a prerequisite and aim of every development policy. It is a connecting tie towards maintaining the present knowledge, present development as well as serving as a tradition for future generations. Education along with freedom, democracy, integration, and competition entail the motive and the instrument of proper development. They represent the catalyst for overcoming the actual situation and for challenging the consequences of the lack of development among the transition countries. They prepare the citizens with skills, tradition, and with an active culture of production, services, and decision-making, for all spheres of life, for the present and the future. The quality of higher education is a fundamental factor in kosovar development and integration.

Key words: Higher Education, Kosove, European Integration, Development and Employment,
Education Quality

In the case of the Kosovar society these necessities are more specific, primarily due to the fact that there is a high percentage of youth in the population structure. Unemployment and borderline poverty, the lack of serious investments, inability to travel freely outside the country, negative phenomena in governing, delays in reforms and obstacles in approaching the integration of Kosovo etc., have exposed the youth and Kosovar society to obstacles and problems towards giving their contribution as human factors. This potential factor of economic development and prosperity is not involved in the domestic labor market, as well as in the foreign one. Also, it is not involved as much as it should in local and central decision making structures, as well as in political structures, primarily due to current phenomena in governing. Another cause of this is the delay in resolving the status of Kosovo and allowing it to approach foreign countries. The knowledge of integration processes is not in the expected scale and quality. Separately, the lack of genuine transparency, tradition, incomplete knowledge of educational process, manipulation, lack of infrastructure, poverty, etc. The level of quality in the educational process of the current education is inadequate and that challenge should be overcome. All these reflect strongly for education in general, at the highest education levels in particular.

2. Mass Education and the Academic Quality

Higher education in Kosovo includes about 49500 students. Currently, there are four public universities and 24 private colleges. The majority of students attend the public University of Prishtina (now known as Hasan Prishtina University). Mass education exists on the grounds of professional advancement in science, but also the probability for employment after the end of high school. Kosovo is currently facing extreme unemployment with about 70% of youth aged 18-28 years considered unemployed. About 21 500 students finish the end of high school every year. In addition the lack of visa liberalization disables travel abroad for study and potential employability. Youth oriented towards higher studies after studies hope to find their work easier. There are motifs and Kosovar traditions to value education in general and in particular higher education. According to statistics, in 2011 about four thousand students graduated in the Bachelor level, according to the Bologna system, while about 650 received their master degrees. On the other hand, the number of doctoral studies is small due to the lack of qualified mentors/professors as well as due to the involvement of government politics in education.

Orientation of students in private colleges was as a result of the reduction in the number of students enrolled in the public university after 2003-2004. A further reason for students choosing private institutions were the lower academic requirements as well as the flexibility in schedule, exams and teacher-student relations. Despite this however there are no visible differences in academic quality while the quality of the staff is the same. A characteristic of private colleges are the high tuition prices which vary between 1200 and 2000 Euros per year. Taking into account the current level of income and the standard of living in Kosove, these tuition fees are too high. Students rarely manage to obtain scholarships to attend these institutions. During the recent years an improvement in the implementation of information technology was noticed, especially in private colleges, but it still far from it should be. The American University of Kosove, the only one of its kind, is argued to provide better academic quality but the tuition fee reaches 6000 Euros per academic year. This high tuition fee along with the English language requirements have resulted in a low number of students.

Although, there is a considerable number of private universities and colleges there is no competition between them, particularly with regards to quality in academia. The only competition currently present among private universities is that student recruitment, a completion induced by the managers and owners of these institutions. Due to this increased emphasis on student recruitment an absence of evaluation criteria and assessment of knowledge (transfer) of students is noticed. The income of the teaching staff is rather low. In addition, these institutions are also characterized by unqualified teaching staff, part-time involvement of professors, and the lack of academic quality.

Public and private higher education institutions in Kosove lack proper management and a functional administration. Although reforms are in process and results are already noticeable, the system of public universities is characterized by rigidity, apathy, atrophy of teacher-student relations, relatively low cost of studies, and the lack of future prospective after the completion of studies. Meanwhile, private colleges, in comparison to the public ones, are characterized with flexibility, dynamics, better student-teacher interactions, high cost of studying, uncertainty regarding the future of the academic institution etc. Despite this however, the quality in both sectors is not competitive at regional, European and global level. There is little improvement in

the non-public sector in the past two years, due to the accreditation process. Accreditation has improved the formal aspects but not the quality.

Lack of competition on the quality, is pumped by the lack of real motivation for academic achievement among students themselves. The present situation is a result of the following causes: a) not valuing the quality during employment in public services, b) high unemployment levels among graduates, c) lack of private sector development, of small and large scale businesses d) their inability to travel abroad for advanced studies and employment, d) lack of local and foreign investment; e) lack of adequate guidelines and programs for the labor market, s) lack of development and regional cooperation, f), lack of productivity, trade deficit, inappropriate lending for small businesses towards the creation of new workplaces, g) negative phenomena in governing etc. Economic integration and serious investment from abroad will ensure qualitative and competitive education. High unemployment and employment in public services without quality criteria through nepotism has radically discouraged students.

Lack of quality in higher education institutions is also a result of the insufficient quality of primary and secondary education. The proper implementation of the state exams at the end of high school has ensured higher quality, accountability and stricter enrollment requirements. The lack of quality, on the other hand, is a result of the following factors: large number of students in comparison to space and infrastructure; small number of teaching staff and an even smaller number of teachers who possess proper qualifications, insufficient implementation of information technology software and communication etc. Although, the possibilities of modern information and cooperation are possible, the quality level is still rather low. Our society and the Kosova government have not yet poorly understood that a knowledge-based society is the basic condition for development and integration. Another reason is the delay of reforms and delays in the integration process of Kosovo.

Knowledge of languages with a global impact, and especially English language, is a necessity of time, especially for Kosovar youth who hopes to find work in the external labor market, or foreign corporations that may come in the future. Insufficient knowledge of Albanian language in primary and high schools is resulting in the inability to learn foreign languages at all levels at the University of Pristina. The University of Pristine has lately included a mandatory course of Albanian Language and Literature to improve language knowledge among students.

On the other hand, vague teaching of English Language and Information Technology are not preparing the youth for the internal labor market but also not of the international one. Providing schools with the necessary computer equipment will most certainly improve the situation.

3. Other negative phenomena in education

The academic process in higher education has long been followed by negative phenomena and great irresponsibility. Besides the lack of quality, nepotism is present when hiring university pedagogues; a higher percentage of academic degrees are awarded without merit and quality; political structures are involved in managing the university, private institutions have high tuition fees for students turning thus the academic activity into a mere profit gaining activity etc. These private colleges are interested to grow their annual income by increasing the number of students, regardless of academic criteria and attributes. In addition, private colleges are keeping the doors open for Kosovo influential politicians. Prosecutors, ministers, deputies and mayors continue to "teach" students of these colleges, despite their full-time involvement in the public service sector. Public society representatives imply that some Kosovo politicians are shareholders in these private schools, which generate revenues in millions. In the mean time, the family members of Kosovar officials are the first to be employed in private institutions, regardless of whether they fulfill the basic academic criteria (Veliu, 2013).

The number of pedagogues, in relation to the number of students is not enough. The public universities have a teaching staff of 13000. The majority of them teach in private institutions while many of them are involved in public service structures holding up to five jobs at the same time. Therefore, the quality and the results of their academic work are not sufficient. These professors are absent in the majority of lectures and are not available for office hours. The quality of lectures, exercises, practical and research work is insufficient. There is a lack of teaching materials in Albanian and English language. Furthermore, professors tend to be arrogant as well as tight with political structures, which makes it difficult for students and for proper internal management. Therefore, the first thing that needs to be done is to remove politicians' interventions in this sector (Pfeiffer, 2013). Private colleges are providers of teaching positions for politicians since their accreditation is heavily dependent upon their involvement with political structures. These institutions are financed by politicians and as a result they employ politicians.

This situation is a result of negative phenomena in the process of governance, noticeable in many major institutions of the country.

Negative trends in higher education are many and distorting, which should be avoided as soon as possible because the consequences are current, mid-term and long-term. Without quality education we will not have sustainable economic growth, economic development and neither development of other sectors. We will neither have quality economic life and all other service sectors, nor will we have life quality for our citizens.

4. Future perspective

Our education institutions lack quality, research work and competition. This however does not mean that there is no quality, but it means that the present quality is not enough, it is uncompetitive and with possible current and long-term negative consequences. Therefore, there is a need for rapid change in managing techniques and a different approach of government education policies in order to improve academic quality. If there is an enhance the quality and standards along with legal compliance and greater accountability there is a chance to attract donations and research funds from abroad.

Kosovo should prepare for opening to the west. Visa liberalization, integration processes, foreign investment, among others, should find us prepared with a high number well educated people who possess the a good knowledge of their profession as well as foreign languages, in accordance with the European and global labor market requirements. Teaching English as a foreign language and offering classes in English Language will ensure deeper knowledge, which is in return a determining prerequisite of the EU labor market. Educated human capital is a great value, and unfortunately this potential is still untapped if our society. However, utilizing this potential remains a hope and future possibility for our development. Only quality education and mass education can integrate Kosovo successfully in the regional and global economy. Hence, quality education in Kosovo is one among the main prospects for successful integration and development.

Essential factors of the Kosovar development are knowledge, science, information technology and health care, respectively our development is conditional upon educated, informed and healthy citizens. The human potential can advance if quality and mass education are

available to them. Conversely, the lack of quality and mass education will have hindering results in all sectors of development with long-term and hardly repairable consequences. Genuine development policy places the human in the center of the development process. Specifically the human's skills, service providing abilities, active and mindful participation in political, social and decision-making processes" (Shala, 2012; f. 151). The educational process in general and the higher education in particular contribute towards building a society that functions on a legal order and has a vision for the future. The quality of teaching, education, therefore proper values in the spirit of respect for work and the individual protection of public interest, social cohesion, human solidarity, and development in favor of health, harmony, and protection of public and private interests is the precondition, tool and purpose of and for development. Therefore, development policies should consider quality and mass education as the main aim and instrument for development.

5. Recommendations

The genuine reformation of education, mass education, quality and European integration, in Kosovo demands the following:

Raising the quality, should be pressing for Kosovo politics. Universities should stimulate and invest in research, new academic programs and qualified teaching staff. Respecting the legislation on higher education should be a must for these institutions. The appointment of rectors, deans, teachers, should be a responsibility of the university. Therefore, competition, not politics should characterize higher education institutions. The media and civil society, among others, can and should contribute to fight negative phenomena in education institutions.

The employment perspective affects motivation for quality. Employment without violating the quality criteria in public services and institutions, also has consequences. The private production sphere is undeveloped. The lack of complete legislation and in particular the lack of application and effective enforcement (law enforcement) is not at the right level.

Inter-university cooperation and exchange of students and staff, as well as the possibility for practical work will ensure significant quality in the future, a quality for which the Kosovar education system is in great need. In addition, the curriculum of course should be in accordance with European standards and some of the courses should be taught entirely in English.

Training of teaching staff and employing professors that were educated abroad will ensure quality. Even the involvement of temporary teaching staff from abroad will influence academic quality. In addition, institutions should do more to ensure the use of online databases and foreign texts, while more translated materials should be taken from the Republic of Albania.

The quality of education, in general, and of higher education, in specific, is the main aim and main measure of real reformation of higher public and private education. The discontinuity of profit and deceit practices, guided by the short-term “business” logic, neglecting the quality criteria, represent the main jeopardy as well as the need towards establishing urgent measures towards this type of phenomena which are widely present.

The institutions should focus on fund-raising and not expect students, specifically of those who excel and are hard-working, to cover these expenses. Practical work and research initiatives should be the major financing options. Foreign grants, cooperation in an institutional level as well as foreign corporations should be the main focus of the management structures in the higher education institutions.

Deeper cooperation with foreign universities: student exchanges, exchanges of academic staff, programs, practices of students in universities abroad. Inhalation of these experiences directly affects achievement in quality. Quality of academic staff should serve and be committed to funding from external grants and research work of research universities and colleges themselves. So, the cooperation of higher education institutions with domestic and foreign corporations for the needs of their labor market. As well as practical work.

High prices for studies in universities and private colleges are unacceptable and unaffordable for families of Kosovar students. This damages the quality and massive education. Affordable prices maintain the amount and massive education in inclusive private institutions, and quantity facilitates the conversion in quality. Provides perspective for the institution, along with other measures.

Practical work and research findings to be one of the outer financing sources. Foreign grant, the needs of institutions, corporations, etc. Cooperation with similar foreign institutions and foreign corporations for the labor market needs, should be the aims of governing institutions. Programs of study should be in the spirit of planning and foreseeing the current market, separately the forecast for medium and long-term future of the labor market within and outside the country.

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