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**LIFELONG TEACHER EDUCATION:
MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES**

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LIFELONG TEACHER EDUCATION: MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES

Ed. Vlasta Vizek Vidović

Summary

Initial teacher education, as well as the professional development of teachers, is the key issue in every country, since the quality of the teaching workforce is among the main factors that influence the level of students' achievement.

Considering the improvement of quality of teacher education (TED), one should always take into account that the term "teacher education" does not only include initial education, but, in the context of lifelong learning, it also includes continuous in-service teacher education and training. Initial as well as in-service TED both play a crucial role in lifelong improvement of teachers' knowledge and skills, and they should encourage students' lifelong learning as well.

Comparative analysis of TED systems in different European countries indicates that, regarding some important aspects of the national policies in the area of teacher education systems, there are similarities as well as differences between those countries. However, the tendency for their harmonization is evident and clear.

For example, an issue of attracting and retaining effective teachers in the teaching profession is not a problem in all analysed countries (e.g. Austria and Ireland). This could be explained through relatively safe government employee-status that includes some privileges while another explanation for this could be that there is a great competition in enrolment for teachers' colleges. In other countries (e.g. Denmark, The Netherlands, Germany, Sweden, Finland) there are some oscillations in regard to the attractiveness of the teaching profession, especially when it comes to natural and technical sciences.

Most studies concerned with the improvement of the quality of TED system focus on organization of such initial and in-service TED which should ensure that the teachers are effective in encouraging students for high educational achievements. Regarding organizational structure of the study programs and the curricula, there are some differences considering the level of centralization/decentralization of political responsibility (e.g. centralization in Greece, decentralization in Sweden, Finland, Denmark and The Netherlands, federalism in Germany and Belgium). There are also differences on the institutional

level: in some countries initial TED is carried out in colleges (e.g. Denmark, Belgium), while in most other countries initial TED programs are carried out within the universities.

There are three models for attaining academic and professional competences: parallel, successive and modular (recently, an integrated approach present in Sweden and Finland).

Retaining and professional development of effective teachers are also important parts of national educational policy, which could be achieved through providing good social and material work-conditions, through creating stimulating learning environment and through the opportunities for lifelong learning. It should be emphasised that continuous in-service TED should meet the highest quality standards, and that different forms of in-service TED are organized by various institutions. However, in most countries there are specialized centres which organize in-service teacher training, that are organized either as university departments (e.g. in The Netherlands, Sweden, Finland), or as regional in-service education centres (e.g. in Germany, Austria and Ireland). Comparative analysis indicates that in-service teacher training is provided in various forms, but in most countries there is a co-existence of university-based and centre-based in-service TED. It should be also emphasized that in the most countries teachers have the possibility of postgraduate specialization in different areas of education and educational sciences.

The role of educational research in TED is crucial for identification of wide range of variables, as well as for the empirical verification of their relations and interactions for the purposes of obtaining new concepts of causal relations important for teaching and learning processes and their outcomes. Recent studies indicate the need for placing the teachers in the centre, and the need for their understanding of research logic and methods. Since the need for acquiring competencies in research methodology is obvious, it was probably one of the factors which influenced the *univerzitation* of initial TED programs.

In conclusion, it could be said that, for the purposes of harmonization of TED systems in Europe, there is the trend of univerzitation of initial TED and linking the theory and practice within TED. That implies coordination and partnership between higher education institutions, research units, school practice and quality insurance agencies, and especially the partnership between universities and schools in which students carry out school practice, which also implies the need for effective education of teachers-mentors. In all countries the ECTS system is implemented, as well as the processes of formal recognition of degrees and ensuring the mobility of students.

Traditional approach – teacher-oriented approach is replaced with student-oriented approach, which should, once it is present at the university level, transfer on pupil-oriented approach when the students finish their initial education and enter the classrooms. The emphasis is also placed on achieving competences in educational research (which are the basis for self-evaluation as well), in the use of educational technology in classrooms and in the use of e-learning which should help teachers create their own networks i.e. exchange of the examples of good practices that could also be very helpful in improving their work. In creating curriculum the emphasis is placed on competences-based approach and the importance of the outcomes instead of input-resources. Consequently, all of the above mentioned should lead to the development of teachers' and pupils' aspiration for continuous professional development.

Education at all levels should be among priorities in every country, and it should be so in Croatia as well. If we are seriously concerned with the changes in our educational system, those changes should certainly include the changes in the system of teacher education and in teaching profession generally. We believe that some of the changes mentioned in this study could play a very important role in encouraging capable students to enter the teaching profession and for retaining competent and effective teachers in the profession:

- changes of rather low economic and social status of the teaching profession in the society;
- recognition of teachers as equal partners in creating educational policy and their empowerment through education for the role of autonomous, creative and reflective expert;
- improved quality of graduate programs for initial TED through upgrading programs of initial TED to the university level (*univerzitation*), through more appropriate education of students on teachers' faculties (more courses in educational sciences and school practice), through engagement of students in educational research and through implementation of new technologies in the programs of initial TED;
- increase the number of opportunities for teachers to obtain education on postgraduate level through specialized and academic postgraduate studies in educational sciences;
- improvement of continuous in-service teacher education through better correspondence between in-service teacher training and professional promotion, balance between different topics within in-service teacher training, stronger influence of various professional associations in creating the content of the in-service teacher training.

Empirical part of this study included surveys conducted on primary, secondary and university teachers and final-year students of teachers' colleges and faculties.

Results of the classroom and subject teachers in primary schools and subject teachers in secondary schools indicate the need for improvement of initial, as well as in-service teacher training which should prepare them for their complex and demanding everyday tasks. The main emphasis should be placed on the quality of the educational sciences program and of the school practice programmes. Those programmes should offer more opportunities for prospective teachers to familiarize with realistic classroom situations and possible problems, as well as with the ways for solving those problems. Focus should also be placed on the competences in the use of educational technology and working with pupils with special needs.

Since the initial TED does not provide teachers with all competences needed in their profession, especially when it comes to some specific needs of the local community, there is an inevitable need for the improvement of the in-service teacher training programs. These programs should be more focused on different issues in psychology and pedagogy and there is certainly the need for more training of teachers in the area of educational technology.

Apart from already offered various programs of in-service teacher training in the forms of seminars, workshops and lectures, teachers express great interest for the postgraduate education in the area of educational sciences as well.

There is also a need for better correlation of in-service teacher training and promotion in profession, and the new changes according to the Bologna process should provide that.

Besides from ensuring economic basis for in-service teacher training, there is also the need for improvement of material status of schools, especially regarding the teaching materials which should also encourage teachers in practising pupil-oriented approach and the development of pupils' creativity, since the teachers, as the results showed, prefer this approach.

Effective system of initial and in-service teacher training plays a significant role in ensuring effective teaching workforce. Therefore, creating the necessary conditions for continuous development of teachers' competences, as well the optimal working conditions, are constant challenge for those involved in creating Croatian educational policy (and in all other countries, as well). While doing that, everyone involved in educational policy should be sensitive to what the teachers' think and say, since their opinions and the needs are the result of everyday experience.

Results of the final-year students of the teachers' colleges and faculties indicate that all the comments in regard to the results of teachers could also be applied on students' results. Students' results also indicate the need for improvement of the quality of initial TED, with the special emphasis on competences in communication skills and cooperation with pupils and other stakeholders in educational process (especially with the parents).

Students also express the need for the postgraduate education in educational sciences at the university level.

Students, like the teachers, prefer student-oriented approach, thus they should have more opportunities to acquire knowledge and skills needed for applying teaching methods which support pupils' understanding and the development of critical thinking and problem solving skills during their initial education.

Results also indicate that students are very much aware of what to expect when they enter the school/classroom. According to their (realistic) expectations, during their school practice students should have more opportunities to familiarize with potential problematic situations, and, consequently, their teachers-mentors in schools should also demonstrate different ways for coping with those problems, and show them methods for their successful solving.

In conclusion we could say that students' results confirm what has already been said within the analysis of teachers' results, and that is primarily the urgent need for the improvement of quality of initial TED. Improved programs should ensure that young people, after completing their initial education, feel competent and capable to cope with their everyday tasks which, on occasion, can be very complex and demanding.

Most of the university teachers consider that teachers' colleges should educate pre-school teachers and primary school classroom teachers and teachers' faculties should educate subject teachers in primary and secondary schools.

The need for partnership between teachers' academies and teachers' faculties is especially recognized regarding the educational sciences program. More than 60% of university teachers consider that this partnership is needed in creating and realization of academic programmes as the programmes of school practice and educational research as well. Most of the university teachers agree that other faculties (apart from the teaching faculties) should also be included in initial TED, and they support the idea of different programs for primary school subject teachers and for secondary school subject teachers. The need for different programs is justified by the fact that primary and secondary schools have different curricula and the age and cognitive abilities of pupils are different in primary and in secondary schools.

Regarding the model of initial TED organization, university teachers think that initial TED for the classroom teachers should be either parallel or modular, while for the subject teachers it should be

either successive or modular whereby they are high in agreement that the program of “two majors” on teachers’ faculties should not be changed.

University teachers most frequently mention the balance of academic, psychological, pedagogical and professional competences i.e. the development of teaching competences (academic, psychosocial and other) as desirable goals and outcomes of initial TED.

Satisfaction with the quality of initial TED is among the university teachers quite low. Some of this dissatisfaction could be explained by the perceived lack of involvement of specific recent issues in educational psychology and pedagogy, while another source of dissatisfaction is the current school practice program within the initial TED. As the criteria for the evaluation of the quality of initial TED, most frequently specified are those related to the pupils’ outcomes and those related to the outcomes of initial TED itself (in terms of students’ competences).

Regarding the quality of the in-service teacher training, most university teachers also find it dissatisfying. They also believe that the institutions of higher education should be more involved in creating the programs of in-service teacher training, which includes different postgraduate TED programs as well. Most of the university teachers express the need for establishing the centre or department of educational sciences within the university for all subject teachers.

Considering the structure and duration of the initial TED program, organization of the school practice and the modularity of the system, university teachers think that some European countries could be used as a role-model when creating Croatian model of initial TED. University teachers support not only the idea of harmonization of Croatian TED system with those in Europe, but they also support the idea of harmonization of the professional degree titles as well.

This study also includes some international examples of good practice i.e. case–studies focused on especially interesting and important issues in the system of initial and in-service teacher education from several EU countries and USA.

Based on the comparative analysis, empirical results, as well as on the international examples of good practice, in the final part of the study we have tried to provide a compiled and comprehensive overview of the systemic approach to the transformation of teacher education with the emphasis on those elements that were recognized as the elements to which special attention should be given. Those are:

national legislative and strategic documents on educational system development (i.e. national standards for teacher education), student-centred curriculum, new areas in the study programs (e.g. use of ICT in education, civic education, exceptional students in the classroom, classroom management and school violence), infrastructural and financial support and quality assurance of initial and in-service teacher education.

In regard to above said the importance of establishing the system of quality insurance is obvious. The system of quality assurance certainly should not be limited on the initial teacher education only, but it should also provide the quality of in-service teacher education and constant support for teaching professionals as well.

In conclusion, we might say that it is encouraging that the majority of described elements have been recognized in the preparation of the new study programs for teachers. Whether the planned changes will actually be realized and how will they affect the development of teaching competences is to be seen.

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