

A Policy Agenda for the European Dimension of Teacher Education

Strateški načrt za evropsko razsežnost v izobraževanju učiteljev

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Abstract

The article identifies two main points of a policy agenda related to the European dimension of teacher education. This dimension arises from the European dimension of education curricula and from the existence of a European education and employment area; it implies both a European curriculum for teacher education and the assurance of comparability of teaching qualifications throughout the European area. Two priorities are outlined for such a policy agenda. Firstly, a European profile of teaching competences and qualifications is to be defined. Such a profile would, on the one hand, design those competences needed to ensure the teaching of a curriculum aimed at European citizenship education, as well as at European economic, social and political development; on the other hand, it would be a common European reference for the development of teacher education programmes leading to teaching qualifications comparable as to the learning outcomes and to the academic degree they confer. Secondly, assurance systems of comparability of teaching qualifications obtained in several Member States are to be developed or consolidated.

Key words

European dimension of teacher education; European profile of teaching competences and qualifications; assurance systems of comparability of teachers' qualifications

Povzetek

Članek identificira dve glavni točki strateškega načrta [policy agenda], povezanega z evropsko razsežnostjo v izobraževanju učiteljev. Ta razsežnost izhaja iz evropske razsežnosti izobraževalnih kurikula ter iz obstoja evropskega prostora izobraževanja, usposabljanja in zaposlovanja; iz tega sledi evropski kurikulum za izobraževanje učiteljev ter zagotavljanje primerljivosti učiteljskih kvalifikacij vsepovsod v evropskem prostoru. Orisani sta dve prioritetni področji dejavnosti. Prvič, potrebno je definirati evropski profil profesionalnih kompetenc in kvalifikacij za poučevanje. Takšen profil bi, po eni strani, označil tiste kompetence, ki so potrebne, da bi zagotovili izvajanje kurikula, ki je

usmerjen k izobraževanju za evropsko državljanstvo, pa tudi k ekonomskemu, socialnemu in političnemu razvoju evropske družbe; po drugi strani pa bi služil kot skupna evropska referenca za razvoj programov učiteljskega izobraževanja, ki vodijo k primerljivim strokovnim kvalifikacijam, tako glede učnih izidov kot glede podeljene akademske stopnje. Drugič, treba je razviti in utrditi sisteme za zagotavljanje primerljivosti med strokovnimi učiteljskimi kvalifikacijami, doseženimi v različnih članicah.

Ključne besede

evropska razsežnost v izobraževanju učiteljev; evropski profil profesionalnih kompetenc in kvalifikacij za poučevanje; sistemi zagotavljanja primerljivosti učiteljskih kvalifikacij

1 Introduction

The European dimension of teacher education refers to teacher education which takes into account the fact that we are living in a European society and no longer merely in national societies. The existence of a European economic, social and political area, in which each country is integrated, calls for this dimension; as in the past there was the need to construct a national dimension for teacher education, nowadays there's the same need for a European dimension. It is up to teacher education institutions, to the teaching profession, and to national and Community education policies to develop, with the co-operation of social partners, such a European dimension in the context of the progressive construction of the European Union. In this article¹ the role played in this process by national and Community policies is privileged.

Despite the transference of teacher education provision — almost concluded in all Member States — to the responsibility of increasingly autonomous higher education institutions, it continues to be the object of a specific national policy, which is not restricted to that common to all higher education programmes. However, such national policies have not always paid due attention to the European dimension of teacher² education: they continue to be mostly based on the economic, social and political context of each country. At the European Union level, what has been done, until now, is the promotion of trans-national co-operation among *teachers*, including student teachers, and among the

¹ Based on an invited presentation at the Meeting “Teacher training in the society of knowledge: new techniques and new methods for the necessity of learning” organised by the Spanish Presidency of the Council of the European Union (Zaragoza, 3, 4 and 5 March 2002)

² “Teacher education” also includes here “*Trainer* education”.

schools where they are educated or where they are working. The promotion of co-operation among Member States' *policies* is still in its early stages and so the development of a European dimension of teacher education policies is still a challenge. However, the construction of this European dimension by promoting cooperation among national policies is one of the goals of the recent ongoing European Union Common Objectives Process for education and training systems targeted for 2010.³

This article identifies two main points of a policy agenda for the European dimension of teacher education. It stresses two strands of this dimension, giving special emphasis to the political commitments expressed in recent European Union documents. In brief, the European dimension of teacher education calls for, on the one hand, (i) *a European curriculum for teacher education* and, on the other hand, (ii) *the assurance of comparability of teaching qualifications throughout the European area*. This is because teachers need to be qualified to promote students' learning of a European curriculum, as citizens and future workers of European Union, and have the right to qualify and work everywhere in the European area. In other words, the imperative for the European dimension of teacher education stems from the European dimension of education⁴ *curricula* and from the existence of a European education, training and employment *area*, open to every European citizen.

2 The European dimension of teacher education curriculum

The European Union needs teachers who are prepared to promote student learning of a European education curriculum.⁵ Firstly, this section looks for the basis of this curriculum; then, the sense of a European curriculum for teacher education will be looked at. In each case, two generations of the European dimension of education will be distinguished.

³ Part of the Lisbon Strategy, defined by the 2000 Lisbon European Council, and specified in subsequent reports:

- (i) Council of European Union (2001). *The concrete future objectives of education and training systems*. Report of the Council of Ministers to the European Council (Spring 2001)
- (ii) Council of European Union (2002). *Detailed work programme on the follow-up of the objectives of education and training systems in Europe*. Report of the Council of Ministers to the European Council (Spring 2002)
- (iii) Council of European Union & European Commission (2004). *Education and Training 2010 — The Success of the Lisbon Strategy Hinges on Urgent Reforms*. Report adopted jointly by the Council and the Commission and endorsed by the European Council (Spring 2004).

⁴ "Education" includes here "education *and training*".

⁵ *Curriculum* here refers to the whole range of formal learning a society, at any age, considers relevant for its citizens.

A European curriculum for school education

The main reason for the need for a European student curriculum is neither their possible mobility to study abroad, nor future freedom of movement workers are entitled to, but the fact that their horizon is European rather than national citizenship. The main justification for such a curriculum is not, therefore, the added value of European student and worker mobility stemming from being able to obtain identical education and qualifications in any Member State.

First generation: education for European citizenship

Mostly since the eighties, there has been frequent recommendation, in the documents of European Union, that national school curricula should promote education for European citizenship. According to the Resolution of the Council (Education) of the European Union, approved in May 1988, this European dimension aims to “reinforce youths’ feeling of European identity and inform them on the value of the European civilisation and on the foundations on which the European peoples presently consider development should be based, that is, a plea for the principles of democracy, social justice and respect for the Human Rights”. To pursue this goal, Member States should “include explicitly the European dimension in their school syllabi in all suitable subject-matters” and “to foster at all levels contacts and meetings among students and teachers of all Member States with a view to provide them with a direct experience of European integration and of the living conditions in other European countries”. In fact, *the education for European citizenship* constitutes what could be called the first generation of the European dimension of education.

Through specific programmes, European Union institutions have been fostering both the construction of this European dimension in school curricula, by promoting trans-national partnerships among schools and teachers and the mobility of students, including, more recently, those from secondary education. However, there is still a long way to go to implement in all Member States the European dimension of education through school curricula and student mobility.

Second generation: contribution to the economic, social and political development of European society

The need for national education policies to be devised within a European framework is even more relevant when it comes to what could be considered as the second generation of the European dimension of education. This is emerging both from the Luxembourg Process, concerning the promotion of employment, and from the recognition of the role played by education in accomplishing the strategic goal of the European Union for 2010, set out by the 2000 European Council Lisbon summit: “to become the most competitive dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more

and better jobs and greater social cohesion". The contribution of education to this strategic goal was specified during the 2001 Swedish Presidency and the corresponding detailed work programme was set up during the 2002 Spanish Presidency. In these documents the Ministers of Education and the European Commission commit themselves to accomplish a set of common objectives by to 2010.⁶

Implementing this Lisbon Strategy is primarily up to the education policies of each Member State; however, both the Council and the European Commission committed themselves to develop certain activities for mutual support in this process. Indeed, the method chosen for this policy co-operation is the so-called open method of coordination. Following this method, common objectives of the education and training systems were defined and activities targeted at fostering mutual learning from exchanging each Member State's education and training policies were devised. European monitoring of each Member State's progress towards the common objectives will also take place; for this purpose, there will be quantitative and qualitative indicators and the definition of benchmarks.

The method followed has not therefore been that of the legal definition of a common education policy (which would otherwise require a change in community treaties). Rather each Member State has committed itself to guide its own national policies towards commonly agreed objectives and to support each other in implementing them, particularly by exchanging successful political practices and by monitoring the process undertaken. That is, at least since the Luxembourg Process and the Lisbon Strategy, there have been common European objectives and guidelines, mutually accepted by the Member States, for the definition and development of national education policies.

This second generation of the European dimension of education goes beyond the role of education in the preparation of the European citizen. Indeed, it integrates the contribution of education to the development of a competitive economy, in the framework of a knowledge society, and to the enhancement of social cohesion. But economic development and employability are not the only social contributions expected from education. Broader goals were defined by the 2001 Spring European Council: personal and social development by promoting democracy, reduction of inequalities and respect for cultural diversity.⁷ And the same Council specified in spring 2002 that it is expected that education and training should prevent "discrimination, exclusion, racism and

⁶ For this it is called the *Common Objectives Process*; later (2004) several processes – Common Objectives, Lifelong Learning, Mobility, Copenhagen and Bologna – were integrated in a global process renamed "Education and Training 2010". One should bear in mind that this process has been launched and ratified at all stages by the European Council.

⁷ Cf. "The concrete future objectives of education and training systems"

xenophobia” and hence promote “tolerance and the respect for human rights”.⁸ Since then, several common components and guidelines for the education and training curricula of all Member States were jointly agreed by the European Commission and the Council, in 2004, and subsequently endorsed by the European Council.⁹

What seems to underlie this new stage of the European policy co-operation in the education area is the awareness of both the existence of common challenges in this domain, calling for joint responses, and the fact that quality in each Member State’s response is important for the other Member States. Then again, this collective interest does not derive only, or mainly, from the need to create the conditions to make mobility more attractive for learners or for workers. Apart from the importance of this goal – all citizens are entitled to the opportunity to study and to apply for a job in the European area as they usually do within their national space –, there is a common understanding that *education and training play a fundamental role in the construction of European economic, social and political society.*

European curriculum for teacher education

As there is a European dimension of education, teachers need to be prepared for promoting it. Therefore, it is obvious that the teacher education curriculum should also have a European dimension. This is highlighted both in the 1988 Resolution and in the more recent Common Objectives Process.

First generation

The 1988 Resolution highlights the need and gives some suggestions to include components in initial and continuous teacher education programmes aimed at enabling them to promote the European dimension of students’ education. Furthermore, the importance of mobility projects of student teachers and of teachers, undertaken in cooperation with teacher education institutions and schools from other Member States, and of joint teacher education curriculum development, was clearly stated.

Several European Union programmes supporting trans-national co-operation among teacher education institutions and among schools where they are working have been developed since then. However, the following question deserves careful study: to what extent has this European dimension of teacher education been taken into account by national policies?

⁸ Cf. “Detailed work programme on the follow-up of the objectives of education and training systems in Europe”

⁹ Council of European Union & European Commission (2004). *Education and Training 2010 – The Success of the Lisbon Strategy Hinges on Urgent Reforms*. Report adopted jointly by the Council and the Commission (04-02-26) and endorsed by the Spring 2004 European Council..

Second generation

The new horizons opened up by the Common Objectives Process to the European dimension of education curricula inevitably hold implications for teacher education curricula, broadening the scope of their European dimension. No wonder then that in the Common Objectives Process there is also political commitments concerning teacher education; the first of its thirteen common objectives regards the improvement of teacher education¹⁰.

Indeed, the ministers consider the need for “upgrading the initial education and in-service training of teachers and trainers so that their knowledge and skills respond both to the changes and expectations in society, and to the varied groups they teach and train”. And they go on to state: “the role of teachers and trainers has changed – they continue to impart knowledge, but today they also function as tutors guiding learners on they pathway to knowledge. Training should enable teachers and trainers to motivate their learners not only to acquire the theoretical knowledge and vocational skills they need, but also to assume the responsibility for their own learning, so that they have the competences required for both society and work today”. Therefore, in the report¹¹ where they have detailed the work programme for the years ahead, they set out as agenda for national teacher education policies: (i) “identifying the skills that teachers and trainers should have, given their changing roles in the knowledge society”; (ii) “providing the conditions which adequately support teachers and trainers as they respond to the challenges of the knowledge society, including through initial and in-service training in the perspective of lifelong learning”.

In this way, the ministers commit themselves to building up a consensus as to the competences every teacher should possess, on the one hand, and to creating the conditions that allow their education, from the perspective of lifelong learning, to be suitable for the development of those competences. Furthermore, it should also be stressed that whenever there is a reference in the reports setting out the common objectives for the European dimension of the education curricula, the ministers highlight their implications for the expected performance of teachers and, consequently, for the competences constituting the European dimension of their education curricula. Moreover, in a recent report, related to the progress of *Education and Training 2010 Process*, they establish that “European common references and principles should be developed regarding the competences and qualifications needed by teachers and trainers in order to fulfil their changing roles”¹².

¹⁰ Cf. *“The concrete future objectives of education and training systems”*.

¹¹ Cf. *“Detailed work programme on the follow-up of the objectives of education and training systems in Europe”*.

¹² *“Education and Training 2010” — The Success of the Lisbon Strategy Hinges on Urgent Reforms..*

The role of national and community policies in curriculum development

To end this reference to the European dimension of school and teacher education curricula, it is relevant to clarify the role of national and community policies in its development.

Since the end of the 20th century, schools, teacher education institutions and teacher educators, with more or less participation of partners from local communities, have had a greater responsibility in curriculum and organisation development, as the State has granted them an increasing and progressive autonomy.

This trend towards the autonomy of teacher education institutions – mostly due to its recent transference to higher education – implies a change of the role of teacher educators in drawing up curricula, which calls for a corresponding change in the role to be played by public policies. In my view, the main tasks of the latter become: *(i)* defining the socially expected outcomes of teacher education; *(ii)* supporting and stimulating institutions in developing teacher education curricula suitable for the achievement of such outcomes; and *(iii)* giving public assurance of their attainment. That is, country-based and community-based policy initiatives concerning the development of the European dimension of teacher education curricula should not ignore the responsibility of the education and training institutions. Therefore, European political agreements should take into account the autonomy of institutions, as each Member State teacher education policies are doing.

For this purpose, policy initiatives are centred on the definition of the role socially expected from teachers and trainers, characterising their respective teaching competences according to the categories of problems they will have to deal with and solve. They leave to teacher education institutions the identification, within this socially expected role, of the specific knowledge, attitudes and capacities they must learn, develop and acquire, in such a way as to be prepared to mobilise them in concrete teaching situations, organised in specific contexts. Furthermore, they also leave to the institutions the conception, implementation and evaluation of the appropriate learning opportunities in order that prospective teachers acquire such knowledge, attitudes and capacities and develop the needed professional competences. Finally, they expect that institutions show proof that their students only obtain a professional teaching qualification diploma when they have acquired the competences needed to fulfil the role socially expected.

Besides the definition of the role of teachers in ensuring the European dimension of education, without establishing input and process-curriculum components, national and community policy measures aimed at supporting and encouraging the development of the European dimension of teacher education are also needed. Finally, policy measures aimed at external quality assurance of

each teacher education programme also make sense, as guarantee of the appropriateness of the qualification to the fulfilment of the expected role of teachers

3 Assurance of comparability of teacher qualifications in the European area

The European dimension of education *curricula* calls for a European dimension of teacher education curricula, as mentioned. However, the latter dimension is also linked to the existence of a European education and employment *area* that calls for the assurance of comparability of professional qualifications of teachers in order to ensure their recognition within this area.

A European area of teacher education and employment

A European area of teacher education and employment means that: *(i)* there are equal opportunities for any European citizen to obtain a teaching qualification, as a whole or in part, in each Member State; *(ii)* this qualification entitles her/him to teach in any other Member State; and *(iii)* s/he can be recruited for a teaching position in any other Member State

The mobility of prospective teachers and of teachers already qualified in the European education and employment area is, above all, a European citizenship right. Therefore, each European citizen attending a teacher education institution has the right to be provided with an education and qualification enabling her/him to work as a teacher in the European area and not only in the national one. Apart from being a citizenship right calling for a qualification of European value, mobility is also socially relevant in the context of a labour market characterised by either shortage or surplus of qualified teachers, depending on the Member States. And, finally, the advantages of teacher mobility for their professional development in the European dimension of education curricula should be stressed, even when teaching abroad is not their main aim.

Comparability of teacher qualifications in the European area

Regardless of other obstacles to teachers' mobility as learners or as workers, one must recognise that this second strand of the European dimension of teacher education also challenges teacher education institutions and public policies, without ignoring the relevance of community initiatives already undertaken. However, as far as this strand is concerned, challenges are very similar to those of other kinds of professional degrees offered by higher education institutions; therefore, as regards this second strand, it is also important to take into account

here the framework of the Bologna Process.¹³ However, without ignoring that solutions are structurally identical in different higher education fields, it should be noted that it is necessary to pay attention to specificities of each one. In the field of teacher education this specificity stems mostly from the fact that all Member States have a particular policy on it¹⁴, which in general does not happen in relation to qualifications in other fields; these are, indeed, regulated by a common higher education policy. And, it is also true that the Bologna Process lays more emphasis on the academic rather professional qualifications.

Even here challenges are related to teacher education curricula. However, what is relevant now is no longer the need to cover objectives related to the education for citizenship or to contribute to the development of a European society. Indeed, if by any chance the right for teachers to be educated and work throughout the European area did not exist, the first strand would be enough. What is relevant, in this second strand, is the need for teacher education curricula to ensure a comparable qualification in order to facilitate its recognition in other Member States.

Before going any further, two objections to the relevance of this strand of the European dimension of teacher education must be put forward. The first one deals with the weak expression of the mobility of students and teachers in the European area. Apart from the fact that a right should not depend on the number of citizens taking advantage of it, it is also true that the comparability and recognition of qualifications are indispensable conditions for the promotion of student and teacher mobility, which, it should not be forgotten, can be of interest not only to individuals, but also to society. And here lies the second objection: there is already a European directive for the recognition of higher education qualifications related to regulated professions. However, besides the fact that it is not related to student mobility, this directive hasn't been regarded as sufficient for the promotion of the free movement of professionals in the European employment area: *de facto* recognition, apart from facing other obstacles, depends on trust which the recognition body (and perhaps the employer) in one country has in the qualification obtained in another country. Recognition is not an automatic process and the qualification of each Member State, rather than a common European reference, is still taken as the comparability criterion.

The comparability of teaching qualifications, needed for the development of a European area of teacher education and employment, does not only regard qualifications (*i*) as prescribed objectives, but also (*ii*) as achieved outcomes.

¹³ Launched by an agreement of Ministers of Education, signed in Bologna, in 1999, and aimed at pursuing the harmonisation of Higher Education in Europe in order to increase its competitiveness and promote mobility within it. Its main instruments are related to degree structure, credit system and quality assurance of higher education programmes.

¹⁴ Specially, because they have a specific policy regarding school curricula

What is important here is not only to know whether, for instance, the preparation that programmes provide in Germany for teachers of Geography or Foreign Languages is comparable to that of identical programmes in England; it is necessary to know whether the preparation actually attained is also comparable.

Common understanding of the qualifications level and contents

Concerning comparability of qualifications as prescribed objectives, it makes no sense that any Member State framework should be the criterion to which all the others should submit, as the logic underlying present community directives would make it seem; these directives only mean an intermediate, though relevant, step in this process. It is necessary to build up an analogous common understanding, by means of a convergence process, with regard to both the professional level (linked to the academic degree to be granted) and the contents (that is, its characterising competences) of the teaching qualifications in the European area.

Whatever resistance this process of convergence may imply in each Member State, there will always be the possibility to overcome or reduce it if present needs for change in the teaching role are taken into account; among the needed changes in the role of teachers are those related to both generations of the European dimension of lifelong education and training.

Assurance of comparability of teacher qualifications

Comparability of teacher qualifications still raises the question of a system which assures such comparability. A system assuring that, on the one hand, the objectives of the preparation to be provided by programmes (qualifications as prescribed objectives) match comparable professional competences profiles and, on the other hand, that outcomes attained correspond to those objectives. It is still an issue to be tackled to decide whether this system should be European or whether mutual trust in each national system should be considered enough, and, if this is the case, what the conditions should be for such reciprocity to be effective.

Here too, it does not seem that policies should focus on the comparability of processes followed by each institution: expected and attained outcomes related to each teaching qualification are enough as criteria for comparison. Are expected outcomes comparable and are the programmes de facto suitable for acquiring the corresponding qualification? The issue here is that of quality assurance of programmes.

4 A policy co-operation priority agenda towards the development of the European dimension of teacher education

In the policy co-operation agenda towards the development of the European dimension of teacher education two priority fields of action have herein been outlined:

- *The definition of a European teaching competences profile* that, on the one hand, includes those competences needed to ensure the teaching of a curriculum aimed at contributing to European citizenship education and to European economic, social and political development, and, on the other hand, is a reference for the organisation of teaching education programmes leading to comparable professional teaching qualifications in the European area;
- *Development or consolidation of comparability assurance systems of teaching qualifications obtained in several Member States*; if these systems turn out to be Member State-based, it will be necessary to agree on their common characteristics so they become mutually accepted in all Member States.

It should not be necessary to stress that accomplishing this agenda will mean long hard work, although the work has already begun. Some features of the perspectives herein outlined on the European dimension of teacher education constitute a forward-looking view which is perhaps polemic in nature. In addition, some issues of the agenda of the Common Objectives Process have not been dealt with, such as qualified teacher shortage in several Member States and the corresponding need to promote the attractiveness of the teaching profession. Although these issues are also linked to other factors, the above mentioned policy measures to promote the European dimension of teacher education could also significantly contribute to solve them.

Before concluding, it should also be noted that to make this European dimension effective, it is of strategic importance to consolidate and broaden the range of other Member States' languages future teachers have learned during basic and secondary education.

In a move towards the development of the European dimension of teacher education, the role that national policies and policy co-operation among Member States plays has been privileged throughout this article, as was stated at the beginning. However, the decisive role of teacher education institutions and of the teaching profession in this process must also be underlined. Moreover, the process will only significantly move forward if there is a close link and joint efforts between these entities and political instances.

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¹⁵ All can be found in www.eu.int/comm/policies/2010/et_2010_en.html

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