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The main responses of national teacher education systems to European challenges

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Introduction

Ukraine has been actively involved in the dynamic process of European integration and education to understand the benefits, risks internationalization and integration progress in globalization challenges and outlining the new horizons of development of national education policy, promising to set benchmarks [Вербицька 2011: 123].

The development of educational policy is a genuine task for universities and higher education institutions that calls for their contribution at this time. This is especially the case in the field of teacher education. In the last two to three decades, Teacher Education has become a large and important segment of higher education with, on average, about 10% of all students, mainly future teachers, educators and education experts. Recent policy documents at national as well as at European levels increasingly stress the importance of primary and secondary education in implementing Lifelong Learning and in building and sustaining the Knowledge Society. Therefore, Teacher Education can and should respond to new challenges: effective Teacher Education Policy should be developed as a transparent „chapter” of a wider Education Policy, both at a national as well as at a European level [Teacher Education Policy in Europe 2008: 1].

Indeed, the European strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth – Europe 2020 – asserts that the route to lasting economic recovery and social cohesion is knowledge and innovation [European Commission 2010a]. It argues for giving priority to investment in education and training even as budgets are consolidated following the economic crisis. In this new strategy for the development of European Union, teachers are acknowledged as key mediators for achieving structural change and innovation in education. The policy paradox however is that despite this acknowledgement, in many European countries, teachers are often the forgotten agents in education reforms [Psifidou 2010].

1. Purpose of paper

We have to present in this paper selected external and internal factors to the education system that affect and change the role of teachers to a more complex,

multifaceted and constantly evolving one. This changing role of teachers generates new needs for the acquisition of appropriate knowledge, skills and *competences*.

2. Results of research

Different European Policy documents have put teacher policy more explicitly on the European agenda to address these needs. The European Commission in its Communication „Improving the Quality of Teacher Education” [European Council 2007] based on the Common European Principles for Teacher Competences and Qualifications invites Member States to make the teaching profession a more attractive career choice, to improve the quality of teacher education and to pay attention to initial education, early career support (induction) and *further professional development* of teachers. Following up the Council conclusions on improving the quality of teacher education, Ministers in 2008 invited the Member States to focus cooperation (inter alia) on enhancing the attractiveness of teaching as a profession and reviewing teacher recruitment, placement, retention and mobility policies, in order to maximise their impact on the quality of school education [European Council 2008].

The Council in November 2009 agreed, amongst other things, that: „In view of the increasing demands placed upon them and the growing complexity of their roles, teachers need access to effective personal and professional support throughout their careers, and particularly during the time they first enter the profession” [European Council 2009]. Most recently, Ministers of Education have adopted the Education and Training 2020 Work Programme, which includes shared objectives on teacher policy for implementing Commission’s Europe 2020 strategy [European Commission 2010a].

In Green Book on Teacher Education was noted that: „Education and training in the next century must contribute to equip *citizens*, organizations and structures of the community with knowledge and skills to deal pro-actively and effectively with the many challenges of change with which European societies are confronted. Without going into detail at a level of symptoms a large number of both diverse and interrelated changes of the context of education may be observed that are challenges for education and training. Some major changes may be described at a **geo, social, political, technological and material level**.

Despite the number and diversity of changes, *three common features should be analysed*: a) the rapid speed of changes; b) their impact on most spheres of human life, and c) an ever increasing complexity of social, cultural and economic issues with which European citizens are confronted.

At a *geo, social and political level* the following main issues of change should be described: a) the phenomenon of internationalization and globalization of all aspects of life, b) the process of European integration closely related to an increasing *mobility of the citizens* of the European Union, c) increasing immigra-

tion into the European Union. Both the mobility within the European Union and the immigration into it have close relationship to the issue of *multiculturalism* and racism [Green Paper on Teacher Education: 4]; d) changes of values (e.g. a shift from solidarity to autonomy and individualism) and a degree of collapse of old social mores, e) changed structures of family and partnership, f) longer life expectancy and an ageing population, g) changed structures of labor and employment and j) social unrest and disenfranchisement.

At a technological level e.g. the following phenomena are observable: a) an ever increasing explosion of information and knowledge coupled with an increasing complexity both of social and technological issues; b) the impact of new information and communication technologies on all aspects of life; c) the rapidly increasing impact of new technologies (e.g. biotechnology); d) an ever increasing complexity of work-place skills, and e) demands of industry for flexibility in work-force.

At a material level the issues of a) higher standards of living on the one hand and of b) a new poverty (cf. social exclusion) on the other, c) pressures on world commodities and d) an increase in leisure time have to be taken into account as changes as well as challenges. Differences between and within countries in these respects have to be taken into account. Some of these changes that affect the role and tasks of education and training, schools, teachers and teacher education have been placed high up on the education policy agenda. These include: a) integrating information and communication technologies into teaching, studying and learning processes; b) gender issues; c) foreign and/or Community language learning, d) increasing the „employability” especially of youth; e) combating failure at school, and f) establishing new partnerships between the education sector and the sectors of labour and economy. Other important changes and challenges (e.g. European integration, *citizenship education*, *values education*, *multiculturalism*) with their implications for the (re-)definition of the aims of education and schooling and to the *teaching profession* and teacher education have only received limited attention in education policy [Green Paper on Teacher Education: 5].

Thus, teacher education is important because of its impact upon teacher quality. To teach is a complex and demanding intellectual work, one that cannot be accomplished without the adequate preparation. Teacher education not only ensures that teachers are – and remain competent, but it also allows to assure that they stay motivated through time. Research shows that most effective way to raise educational quality is to modify initial teacher education and recruitment, and to develop the means to train teachers that are already in-service; indeed, teacher education has a significant impact on teachers’ behaviors and teaching skills, and on the student outcomes. There are many different challenges that have to be deal with in different countries, and the design of the teacher education has to respond to the specific needs of each system. The situation can be

very different from country to country: some countries experience teacher surplus and others have to cope with teacher shortage.

The shortage of teacher may be general (all type of schools, all types of teachers), or focused on certain subjects (mathematics, languages etc.); locations (rural areas, impoverished neighborhoods) or special kind of schools (special needs). Teacher attrition is also a problem. Finally, teachers face a third challenge: the necessity to improve teacher quality, in a socio-economic context of broader expectations toward teachers. The apprehension of these good practices in their specific context, and the understanding of their interaction with the other inputs of the educational system, can lead to a reflection on how to combine these practices between themselves, the goal being the design of a policy that fits the specific needs of a particular educational system [Musset 2010: 4].

The national responses given to this European call are multiple and embedded in national contexts as already said, however, one may identify some common approaches. To increase competitiveness, quality and responsiveness of teachers' education and training, its provision has been decentralised in some countries like Italy. In this and other countries, regional actors are involved in its design [Psifidou 2007: 10].

Another major development in many countries is the introduction of induction programs – the linking pin between initial and in-service teacher education. In Greece, Spain, Italy and Cyprus, teachers have to follow compulsory training during their probationary period the length of which varies widely. Massive curriculum reforms followed these pedagogical developments. Core curricula designed at national level were complemented by school-based curricula adapted to the local needs. The curriculum itself as a concept have evolved overtime to embrace and define a wider variety of education components including prescriptions on teaching and assessment methods required, learning materials and learning environments [Psifidou 2007: 11].

Curricula moved away from rigid disciplinary and decontextualised content going towards a more flexible, coherent and interdisciplinary approach, and giving possibilities for diverse rhythms and pathways of learning progression. This competence-based approach became very prominent in the last years in almost all European countries [Cedefop 2010b].

Expanded to the so called learning outcomes approach, the focus was shifted from the number of hours spent on learning (participation) or on the course syllabus (content) to the results of learning. These results are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competences acquired at the end of a learning process; same terminology as used for the development and implementation of European tools (such as the European Qualifications Framework, the European Credit System for VET and Europass) aiming to increase transparency of qualifications in Europe and thus facilitate the recognition and validation of any kind of learning, including this acquired within non formal and informal settings [Psifidou 2007: 7].

Motivation, skills and competences of teachers and the quality of school leadership are key factors in achieving high quality learning outcomes. Ensuring a better quality of teaching and training requires that teacher and trainers embrace a broader range of duties and acquire more skills than in the past. The perception of the role of the teacher (trainer) has changed in recent years with more expectation from teachers as well as from schools in general. Key players in supporting the learning experience of learners, teachers and trainers need to take greater responsibility for updating and developing their own knowledge and skills and adapt their skills and working practices to a changing context. Teachers need to work with more heterogeneous groups of students and improve integration of disadvantaged students into mainstream education and training. Teachers and trainers need to master, develop and apply new teaching and training approaches and reflective thinking. This also implies more individualised approaches to teaching and learning, good communication skills, methods of teamwork, democratic schooling management and supportive mechanisms for pupil assessment and school evaluation. Teachers should be more involved and active in school improvement processes [Cedefop 2010: 30].

Conclusions

To design policies that allow to educate and train teachers, capable of helping students to acquire the competencies needed to evolve in today's societies and labor markets is an amazing challenge. In today's context, with the undergoing economic and social changes, high-quality schooling is more important than ever. Traditional role conceptions such as teaching as knowledge transmission or teaching as a craft may well have become obsolete.

A teacher education programme should aim at developing an academic environment in which all students can build on their personal cultural experience and be fully engaged in all aspects of students' activities. Teacher education students must be equipped with the professional confidence to deal with and to build on the challenges of society in order to bring out the potential of their own students, in a context of social justice and common values.

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Abstract

The article presents main challenges ahead of education policy in Ukraine and the necessary changes, which will allow education of teachers able to assist students in gaining competences that will enable them to cope efficiently in evolving society and constantly changing labour market.

Key words: education system, key competencies, educational policy.

Reakcje krajowych systemów kształcenia nauczycieli do wyzwań europejskich

Streszczenie

W artykule przedstawiono główne wyzwania stojące przed polityką oświatową Ukrainy i konieczne zmiany, które pozwolą na kształcenie nauczycieli mogących pomóc uczniom w zdobyciu kompetencji pozwalających na sprawne działanie w ewoluującym społeczeństwie i stale zmieniającym się rynku pracy.

Słowa kluczowe: system kształcenia, kompetencje kluczowe, polityka edukacyjna.