

Review on Education in Kosovo

1. Background

In the post war period, since June 1999, the Kosovar education system has been governed by the United Nations Interim Administration (UNMIK), respectively the Department for Education and Science (DES). In this period considerable results have been achieved in stabilizing the education system in Kosova. So, even in the first post-War school year (1999/2000) students returned to their schools, from where they had been expelled by force a decade ago, and the attendance reached a satisfactory level, whereas a part of the education facilities destroyed during the war were repaired or rebuild.

After initial attempts to mobilize forces for change in education, the DES policy towards major education issues has been to outsource the responsibilities to several agencies, referring to them as lead agencies. The lead agencies are international organisations, with proven competence in certain field of education: *UNICEF Kosovo* (curriculum development), *Finnish Support to the Development of Education in Kosovo* (special education) *The Kosovo Educator Development Project - KEDP* (teacher training).

The first democratically elected Government of Kosova was established in March 2002 following the November 2001 Kosova-wide parliamentary elections. The appointment of the first Kosovar post-war Government was followed by the formal hand-over of responsibilities to the newly established Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST) based on Constitutional Framework for Self-Governance in Kosovo. The MEST has full responsibility in implementation of education system development and planning with some responsibilities remaining to UNMIK counterpart (so called reserved rights according to the Constitutional Framework).

The MEST in cooperation with UNMIK representatives and all relevant Higher Education stake-holders has developed the Kosovo Strategy for Higher Education for the period to 2015. This Strategy gives priority to the implementation of the Bologna process and also recognizes the importance of the Tempus programme as a major instrument for securing a real progress.

2. Higher education context

Institutions

The Kosovar higher education system operates through two state universities, University of Prishtina and the University of Mitrovica. The University of Prishtina consists of 17 Faculties with a total number of students of 28 832. The former Higher Schools and the Faculty of Teaching were integrated within the Faculty of Education which now has branches in three municipalities.

The MEST has blocked the licence to the University of Mitrovica following the removal of the its rector by decision taken outside the scope of the authority of UNMIK and the legitimate Kosovo institution. Currently this institution is linked more to the Serbian HE system. UNMIK raised this matter to the highest authorities concerned, with no result. Consequently, MEST continues suspension of the accreditation of the University of Mitrovica.

Due to irregular elections of the Rector and University officials in 2004, University of Prishtina until June 2006 operated with a Supervisory Board functioning as the higher management body of the University. Finally, the new authorities were legally elected and this will have a positive impact in the implementation of the three cycle study system according to the Bologna process.

Reform process

The tertiary system is going through a critical phase of reforms, aiming the restructuring of the higher education institutions in conformity with modern European standards. However, the political developments and the past isolation have left evident traces in all levels of the education in Kosova, and the process of reforms is not straightforward and without problems.

In fact, the principles of Bologna declaration were adopted since the academic year 2001/2002 , according to which many university departments organized their studies based on the 3+2+3 system, where the European Credit Transfer System is included. From this short period experience, one may say that the ECTS has not been introduced in a comprehensive and systematic way. The restructuring of the curriculum needs a more detailed consideration of the teaching content and methodology of subjects, of literature, of student-professor relationships, as well as of the university administrative structures, which often do no meet the needs of newly created environment.

During the 2004/2005 academic year the University of Prishtina enrolled the first students of the second cycle (Mater of Art or Science - 2 year program) in 11 Faculties with 45 Departments. The total number of accepted students in the MA program was 1199.

The situation of irregularity and uncertainty within the state University influenced the private sector, where up to know 18 new private institutions, have been established. Opening private HE institutions responds to the need to give a chance to the increasing number of scholars to enroll in university study programmes – the two state universities do not have enough enrolling capacity. The period of functioning of these private HE institutions is too short in order to make definite conclusions. Private universities have pragmatic enrolling policies – they open only attractive programmes for the students. Some of the

programmes are labour marked needs tuned, other are less. Some of them are already licenced from the MEST, but giving licence for this institutions before the establishment of the Agency of Accreditation might increase the risk for development and provision of study programmes incompatible with acceptable international standards.

It is expected that the Kosovo Accreditation Agency will be established during the academic year 2006-2007, and this is part of the Memorandum of Understanding that has been reached between the MEST and the Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Culture and the Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Austria for an institutional partnership to be concluded in three years. Within Higher Education Act, there is a legislative necessity to establish the Kosovar Agency of Accreditation, as an independent body. In the long run this Agency would : conduct regular assessment of individual programs as well as institutional reviews within higher education, license, inspect and accredit by means of professional and transparent methods, help the institutions of the HE to develop and to increase the quality of their activity, oversee the implementation of the Bologna Agreement in HEI.

Mission and objectives

The mission of the Higher Education Division within MEST is: "to ensure equal access to education and to promote educational excellence to all Higher Education Institutions". Goals which have been set up within this Division are as following: *to provide a challenging and supportive environment in which staff and students can realize their potential and develop the skills and flexibility needed in a rapidly changing world; to improve access in Higher Education Institutions and stimulate research and teaching at the highest international standards according to Bologna Declaration; to ensure the quality assurance system for Higher Education Institutions; to provide higher education programs through distance learning and lifelong learning, to establish the Excellency in social and scientific research.*

Bologna process

Links with the labor market

Much of the gained knowledge in the past system turns out to be irrelevant and not applicable for the daily requirements and market needs. The recent labor market statistics show that 56.6% of job-seekers in Kosova are unskilled, what is likely to cause an unending spiral of structured unemployment. On the other hand, there is a mismatch between competencies developed within the formal education system and those required within the labor market. There is evidence that Kosova's population is under-educated in comparison with the needs of a modern economy, and this ranks higher education reforms among top priorities in the society.

There is hardly any contact between Kosovar higher educations and research institutions, although this would be favorable and rewarding for both. There is no cooperation or even flow of information that would enhance modernization of higher education. The incorporation of new knowledge in the curricula and contacts with experts from research sector are extremely scarce and slow down the pace of transformation of the insolated university towards more entrepreneurial and market oriented institution.

Mobility and cooperation with international institutions

The programs of international academic cooperation are a very good stimulation for the Kosovar academic staff to remain in their university positions, as the low income has caused for many university professors to take their position at the university as peripheral and to spend most of their time for better paid jobs. This kind of academic cooperation is supported by international donors: the typical support for long term cooperation is offered by Tempus, and there are also mobility programs offered by WUS, DAAD, IREX, Soros, British Council, etc.

Recently, OSCE established the Support Unit of Democratization, Youth, and Education, which foresees support to the HE as well.

Sometimes, the participation in these programs is limited because of the lack of knowledge of foreign languages, in particular English. Further more, there is lack of appropriate and sufficient administrative capacity for international cooperation.

ETF has supported the so called Dublin group, in order to develop the National Qualifications Framework for Kosovo. The group was headed by the Commission for Education and Culture in the Kosovo Assembly. This group has recommended the establishment of an agency, related but also independent from Ministries and other institutions.

Pre-university education

Overall data

The total number of pupils in 30 municipalities of Kosovo, including the grades from 1-13, is **422819**, out of which **3468** Bosnian, **2573** Ashkali, **548** Roma, **75** Croats, **2328** Turks, **1033** Egyptians, **1450** Gorani, and the remnant is Albanian (The data for the Serbian and Montenegrin pupils is not available to the MEST).

New curriculum framework

During the post- 1999 reform of the Kosovar education system, there were attempts for a new curriculum and new pedagogy to be introduced- and in general one may say that the new curriculum is constantly undermined by an old pedagogy.

New curricula has started to be developed consequently starting from the first grade, and in the school year 2006-2007 the grades 5, 9, and 13 will be completed, which will finalize the new curriculum framework that has been launched in 2001.

The new curriculum has been enthusiastically expected by students and parents, who think that the new curriculum alone is enough to reform teaching and learning. However, the curricula in particular at the secondary level are still overcrowded, and there is insufficient focus on central topics in some curricula.

As part of the new curriculum, new textbooks were designed- however, there are concerns about their quality, in particular about their lack of attractiveness for pupils. Also, the new textbooks are not accompanied by parallel teacher handbooks which would illustrate ways by which new textbooks could be used.

Difficult context

The main obstacle for implementing the new curricula is the obvious material deprivation in which teachers and pupils alike work. Also, even though the law obliges the government to supply pupils with free books for elementary grades, this is not the practice in reality.

The new curriculum remains generally as a concept, more than as a practice. It is not easy for the teachers to break with the frontal methodology of teaching, in particular taking into consideration the big number of pupils within a classroom, ranging from 30- 40, and the work in three shifts, in particular in urban areas.

Training

In the field of teacher training, there is a division of labour between the Teacher Training Review Board, consisting of 15 members who are elected for 3 years at a time representing all stakeholders (different school sectors, language groups, teacher union, parents, employers, university and Ministry) , and the Ministry Training Section. These two bodies have produced standards of assessing the teaching practice in pre-service and in-service teacher training programmes, the teacher licencing procedures, and requirements to be met by providers of pre-service teacher training. The Ministry Training Section coordinates the training programmes and develops local trainer capacity.

It has been suggested that the basic principles underlying the training are: learner-centred teaching, teachers as lifelong learners, and practical programmes designed with concrete learning objectives.

Assessment

There are currently grade 9 and grade 13 (matura) national tests. They are computer corrected and externally assessed. It is envisaged that in the coming school year also the national test will be introduced at the end of the 5th grade.

However, the formative assessment/assessment for learning is still developing in Kosovo and is becoming opened to new ideas in particular coming from the learner-centred pedagogy.

Unfortunately, most of the assessment carried out in the classroom is reduced to oral repetition and mechanical reproduction of the learned information. There is very limited evidence for learning techniques of assessment, such as student peer-assessment and self-assessment.

Didactic Centres

Kosovo Education Center with support of international donors has established didactic centres in five municipalities. They are equipped with a variety of materials and provide opportunities for teachers to do research and produce learning materials. The problem of resources and in particular lack of science labs is still present even in urban schools.

Vocational education

Vocational schooling in Kosova at secondary level is provided for students completing elementary school who do not gain a place in gymnasium (about 60 per cent). There are about 50 vocational schools, each with a limited number of specialist programmes.

The Ministry of Education has prepared the Strategy Document for Vocational Education in 2003, and it recognizes that resources for the vocational schools are extremely limited.

The academic approach to vocational education is determined in part by a number of features of the wider context in which vocational schools are located in Kosova, such as almost total absence of industry in Kosova, absence of significant links with employers from either public or private sector, shortage of materials and resources to support practical teaching, etc.

Links with higher education

There seems to be a lack of clear links between the Faculty of Education at the University of Prishtina and the school system. At present, this Faculty does not have a powerful and constructive role in the process of curriculum reform and teacher development. This Faculty requires support to engage in the reform process, in order to offer its contribution in the certification and professional development of teachers and administrators of the pre-university education system.