
THE REFORMS IN THE SYSTEM OF EDUCATION AT THE PERIOD 2004-2014

Agim PoshkaSouth East European University, Republic of North Macedonia, a.poshka@seeu.edu.mk

Abstract: The system of education must ensure an ongoing reform and development and this paper aims to analyze these changes after the Ohrid Framework agreement. Although this document was a political agreement it impacted the organization in the system of education largely. In the first part the paper analyzes the need for decentralization of power in the country for the sake of being closer to local communities and also improving services in this regard. The changes were presented in two levels. The first level was an organizational redesign of the service in regard to number of schools in the country. In order to better manage the process, the Ministry of Education established two units: the legal unit and the analytical unit. The urgent challenge for the development of this process has to do with the fact that only in its primary education Macedonia had about 340 primary schools that function as special legal units and therefore the centralized management created the “Black Box” effect according to which only educational units or school heads close to the Ministry of Education could gain privileges or adequate support. A significant legal step was that the decentralization process which did not recognize only the direct delegation of competences from the central to local government, but engaged the school councils, parents council as well as a third party in the process of decision making in the local schools. These decision-making bodies could have a say in the design of the school budgets as well as the selection of the school principals in cooperation with the mayors of the towns. How this was implemented could be a different topic for discussion in another occasion, however, this paper aims to identify key reforms in the educational process in the period of 2004 – 2014. The analyses will include a number of laws before the 2004 period that have impacted the process. It started legal reforms in 2002 with the adoption of the law on self-government and associated with the Law on Financing the Local Self-government in 2004, and a number of amendments on the Law on primary and secondary education in 2004 again.

Keywords: Education in Macedonia, decentralization of education, North Macedonia

INTRODUCTION

This study includes the main developments in the process of the decentralization of education at the period of 2004-2014. The document used in this regards are mainly from international reports on education and particular laws process through the ministries in the country. The process needed at that period (and also needs currently) a more efficient organization regarding the structure of the Ministry of Education and the local authorities. This type of development would provide more responsibilities to the local authorities. Also, the process needed a more independence from the politics. Unfortunately, that is still the case in the country.

The primary expectations were the need to delegate more power and responsibilities from the central to local government. This process as a notion of the administration of the educational process has circulated widely in ex-Communist block and has developed differently in different countries. The UN report states that the attempts for a decentralized education in Hungary had begun in 1970, in Czechoslovakia in 1987 and in Albania in 1992. Unfortunately, Macedonia would still remain centralized as it seemed the same until the year 2004 when decentralization became a legislative issue.

The driving force in this reform process was the Ministry of Education which in 2004 decided to transfer some of these competences to the local self-government. This was implemented in two stages. Stage one analyzed the development of municipalities and the management of the educational process in primary schools and later in secondary schools in terms of infrastructure and possible services. This stage was closely monitored by local and international factors, and the most successful municipalities then went on to the second phase of decentralization and in the report provided by the USAID in 2007, they identified difficulties such lack of motivation from the central government to implement the transfer of power to local authorities, but also the incompetence of the new mayors selected in 2005 to implement these reforms.

Besides the abovementioned challenges the Ministry of Education and Science in Macedonia at that period aimed toward the unification of the database regarding the statistics of the schools, pupils, staff. Also a detailed description and a list of competencies for each unit in the central and local government were missing. In this regard two units were established. The first was called the legal unit and was expected to clarify and build the legal frameworks for the new reality. There was also an analytical unit who will provide progressive input regarding the large number of school units in the system. Regarding this process and in order to have improve efficiency, the process was split into two phases. The first phase planned a limited delegation of competences related to maintenance, reparations,

and goods (excluding the teachers' salaries); the second phase was planned for the period between 2007 and 2009 and it would extend the local authority competences over the education.

EXPECTED RESPONSIBILITIES AND PRIVILEGES OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

The process of reforms also known as the process of decentralization of education started its legal journey in year 2002 with the adoption of the law on self-government and associated with the Law on Financing the Local Self-government in 2004, amendments on the Law on primary and secondary education, the Law on the New Territorial Division and the territorial redefining of municipalities upon which there were 85 municipalities remaining out of 128. Based on the set criteria, about 50 municipalities in Macedonia passed the first phase and were ready for the second stage. Based on the new legal framework, the competences for managing with schools and appointing the principals belonged to both parties: the municipal council and the parents' councils in schools which could also change the school statute and its budget.

CHALLENGES OF THE PROCESS

The period of these reforms was also under the shadow of the big political disputes among the political parties. It was the period in which the expectations of the local self-governments were very high on one side, and the pressure from the opposition in regard to the reforms that created tensions such as the new law of territorial organization. In this regards the process of education and ministry could have not been immune from these developments particularly when we consider the cultural aspect and the multicultural reality in Macedonia.

An approach that was considered was the need to refer to international programs in which particular curriculum reflects the new tendencies in education by have in mind the local contexts. Most probably, the largest challenge in this regard was the curriculum reform. We come from a system in which teaching materials and supportive materials are not very often updated. Even today in 2019, part of the teaching materials in our public system are older publications.

When it comes to designing curriculums that are efficient and in line with the needs of the local communities but are also pedagogically reliable the system needs new teaching materials that are based on realistic needs analyses.

At that particular period the curricula did not encourage values in the teaching materials such as mutual understanding and equality among various different social, ethnic, cultural or ethnic groups. In this situation it is almost impossible to reform a curriculum when the teaching materials do not correspond fully with the reality. In this regard, although most of the stake holders in a society can have similar goals, such as creating educative values that would help the prosperity of the society, some of them face obstacles and discrepancies in educational practices which have historically been created by regimes in power. The curricula needed to introduce topics that would encourage mutual understanding and promote human values.

These materials and methods also need to promote a multicultural and multidimensional competence in regards prejudice reduction and fight against stereotypes and racism. The aspects of multicultural competence are an important dimension in the process of developing high educational standards. It is in this period when the first discussions regarding the introduction of courses such as citizenship and religion were first discussed since the lack of subjects that promote interethnic or interreligious tolerance and multiculturalism was evident across the curricula. It was necessary in this regard for the education system to support programs that will help increase the community awareness towards topic that stimulate tensions.

In a study conducted by Garcia in the USA, during the past 40 years it was usual for the American education system to label the minority students or those coming from poor social strata as "culturally deprived". The theories on cultural deprivation were based on the conjectures that due to the fact that students of minority groups or low stratum do not manifest cultural characteristics of youngsters of the middle class, they are deprived from the prevailing culture. Without it, the theories said, these pupils felt it difficult to compete and achieve good results at school.

Similar problems have been occurring in Macedonia as well. Though most communities hoped that after the fall of Communism, educational possibilities would progress and an egalitarian pedagogy will create new democratic opportunities in the country. The decentralization aimed to process support in managing efficiently the education institutions whereas the quality and academic performance in education need to be assured by governing elites at both levels.

Another challenge for that period were the human resources, since they are considered a key player in the development of adequate education infrastructure and conditions. In order to create an effective multicultural environment for pupils, teachers should demonstrate understanding and respect, be good leaders, and create

environments for intellectual stimulation. Unfortunately, there are many obstacles in achieving these aims in schools.

The process needs equilibrium in regards to creating provisions in schools from the infrastructural and human resources perspectives and an environment in the schools which would be oriented towards the pupils' success continuously.

The purpose of all this aspects would aim a higher academic standard and the process of decentralization aimed that from the very begging. As mentioned above, the level of implementation of these reforms is another topic that deserves specific analyses in another study.

CONCLUSIONS

It is logical that after a certain period we analyze what were the roots and goals of education. At this stage and at this time distance we can see what were the challenges and the successes of the reforms that started in 2004. We could also try to answer questions such as : Is the curriculum designed to educate individuals, communities or the whole society? In this labyrinth of wide varieties of systems of education it seems that we moved from the original idea of "improving the society" into creating and ideal teacher. However, this ideal teacher would be full of skills and instruments but not very worthy if it lacks goals, character, tolerance and humanity. It is important to periodically reflect on the argument and the dilemma raised by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. who argued that: ..."education has both a utilitarian and a moral function". He asserted that reasoning ability is not enough, and this is particularly evident in the present educational reality in which the sense of success and the virtue of the society are more often valued through individualism. Curriculums, and policy makers need to be aware of the dilemma if the purpose of the teaching process is the individual or the community? Sometimes by focusing too much on the individual skills and values of the individuals/our students we forget the common values that the community should promote in regards to equity education and social equality and as a result the success of particular institutions is reported in relation to the successful of particular individuals achieved particular institution.

Being aware culturally and academically for all cultures and their needs within the educational system would make a great difference in the educational development in Macedonia since education must be seen as a way toward the social and human development.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Baker, C. (2001). *Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* (3rd Ed). Bristol, PA: Multilingual Matters, Ltd.
- Bartlet, W (2009) *People Centered Analyses: regional development, local governance and the quality of life*, Skopje: UNDP and SEEU research office.
- Bennet, C.I.(2003) *Comprehensive Multicultural Education: Theory and practice*. Fifth edition. Pearson Education, Inc.
- Bizumic, B. (2015). Ethnocentrism. In R. A. Segal & K. von Stuckrad (Eds.), *Vocabulary for the study of religion* (Vol. 1, pp. 533–539). Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill Academic Publishers.
- Boas, F. (1940) *Race, Language and Culture*. New York: Free Press
- Bullivant, B.M (1983) *The pluralistic dilemma in education; Six case studies*; George Allen & Unwin Inc.
- Byram, M and Earste- Sarries. V (1991) *Investigating Cultural Studies in 175 – 181* . Foreign Language Teaching: A Book for Teachers, Clevedon: Multilingual matters.
- Fishman, J., (1972), *The Sociology of Language, an Interdisciplinary Social Science Approach to Language in Society*, New York, Newbury House Publishers
- Hall, Stuart. (1996). "Who Needs Identity?" *Questions of Cultural Identity*. Edited by Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage
- Hymes, D. 1973: "On the Origins and Foundations of Inequality Among Speakers," Haugen and Bloomfield, pp. 59-85. 3.
- Garcia, R.L. (1991) *Teaching in a pluralistic society: Concepts, models, and strategies*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Hymes, D. (1973) "On the Origins and Foundations of Inequality Among Speakers," Haugen and Bloomfield, pp. 59-85. 3.
- Haugen, E. (1973) "The Curse of Babel," in Haugen and Bloomfield, pp. 47-57. 5. Hertzler, J. 1967: *Social Uniformation and Language*," in Lieberman, pp. 170-184. 6.
- Inglehart, R.F. and Woodward, M., (1967) "Language Conflicts and Political Community," in *Language and Social Context*, ed. by P. Giglioli, pp. 358-377. 7.
- Kramsch, C. (1993). *Context and culture in language teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Krasner, I. (1999). The role of culture in language teaching. *Dialog on Language Instruction*, 13(1-2), 79-88.

MacNamara, J. (1971) "Successes and Failures in the Movement for Restoration of Irish," in Rubin and Jernudd, pp. 65-94. 12.

Poshka, A.(2010) *Evaluating the Cultural Element in ELT*; The Research Office, SEE University, Tetovo.