

**CURRICULA FOR PRESCHOOL TEACHER TRAINING AT THE COLLEGE FOR
PRESCHOOL TEACHERS IN ALEKSINAC AND “ST. CYRIL AND ST.
METHODIUS” UNIVERSITY OF VELIKO TURNOVO - BRANCH VRATSA
(COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS)**

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Abstract: Professional pedagogical training of future students has always been an up-to-date topic of scientific research. The necessity to meet the needs of society, the specifics of contemporary children and the expectations for them, the characteristics of the individual personality that will devote themselves to the teaching profession requires its continuous scientific updating. The world in globalization imposes trends that could be found in the field of education, in the preparation of teachers in particular. This is evident in the curricula, under which teachers-to-be undergraduate students are trained. The purpose of the paper is to compare the curricula for acquiring the qualification of a preschool teacher at two higher education institutions - the College for Preschool Teachers in Aleksinac, Serbia and Vratsa branch of “St. Cyril and St. Methodius” University of Veliko Turnovo. The objectives of the comparative study are to:

1. Describe the opportunities for acquiring preschool teacher qualification in Bulgaria and Serbia and make a short historical overview of the development of the two educational institutions;
2. Analyse the professional pedagogical competence in the context of the European Qualifications Framework;
3. Compare in formal and content aspect the preschool teacher training curricula at the College for Preschool Teachers in Aleksinac, Serbia and “St. Cyril and Methodius” University of Veliko Turnovo - Branch Vratsa.

Training of preschool teachers in Serbia and Bulgaria is very similar. It is organized both in pedagogical colleges and in faculties of education at universities. Both educational institutions have a centuries-old and very similar history. In order to keep pace with latest development and follow the education policies of their countries, they have gone through different stages. Founded in the late 19th century, nowadays the two institutions have successfully established themselves as leaders in their regions.

Comparison of the curricula of the two higher education institutions preparing preschool teachers at the ISCED 6 reference level with its two sub-levels 6A and 6B proves the globalization processes in the higher education system, which facilitate study and job mobility. Differences are not essential. Common features are much more in number. This will affect the recognition of the qualification identified by the descriptors: knowledge, skills and competence. Through the disciplines included, the hours they are studied, how they are arranged in the course of education, and the implementation of the European credit transfer system - the two curricula reflect the contemporary understanding of preschool teacher training.

Keywords: Professional pedagogical training, curriculum, preschool teacher

1. INTRODUCTION

Professional pedagogical training for future students has always been an up-to-date topic of scientific research. The necessity that this training should meet the needs of society, the specifics of contemporary children and the expectations for them, the characteristics of the individual personality that will devote themselves to the teaching profession, requires its continuous scientific updating. The world in globalization imposes trends that could be found in the field of education, and the preparation of teachers in particular. This is evident in the curricula, under which teachers-to-be undergraduate students are trained.

The objective of this paper is to compare the curricula for acquiring the qualification of a preschool teacher at two higher education institutions - The College for Preschool Teachers in Aleksinac, Serbia and “St. Cyril and St. Methodius” University of Veliko Turnovo - Branch Vratsa.

Being aware of the fact that curricula are compared at the ISCED 6 reference level with its two sub-levels - Professional Bachelor (ISCED 6A) and Bachelor (ISCED 6B) - it is necessary first to set out the grounds for such a comparison.

1. It is possible because:
 - subject of the comparison are the curricula for acquiring “preschool teacher” professional qualification;
 - both countries - Serbia and Bulgaria - have signed the Bologna Declaration and follow its clauses.
2. The training duration shall not be taken into account when comparing and drawing conclusions. It shall be considered, but it will not be involved when generalizing them.

3. Based on this study, competence levels can be compared for one and the same professional qualification acquired as a result of training at two sub-levels under the European Qualifications Framework - ISCED 6A and ISCED 6B.

4. Both institutions - the College for Preschool Teachers in Aleksinac, Serbia and Vratsa branch of “St. Cyril And St. Methodius” University of Veliko Turnovo are partners and such a comparison would contribute to any subsequent joint activities related to the mobility of students and lecturers.

The objectives of the comparative study are to:

4. Describe the opportunities for acquiring the qualification of a preschool teacher in Bulgaria and Serbia and make a short historical overview of the development of the two educational institutions;

5. Analyse the professional pedagogical competence in the context of the European Qualifications Framework;

6. Compare in formal and content aspect the preschool teacher training curricula at the College for Preschool Teachers in Aleksinac, Serbia and “St. Cyril and St. Methodius” University of Veliko Turnovo - Branch Vratsa.

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2. PRESCHOOL TEACHER TRAINING IN SERBIA AND BULGARIA

According to the Law on Fundamentals of Education System (2009), which is the main law on education in Serbia, the training for acquiring a preschool teacher qualification is carried out at Pedagogical colleges and faculties of education at universities. In colleges it is three years long, resulting in a Professional Bachelor's degree (ISCED 6A, 180 ECTS). Graduate students are given the opportunity of one-year specialization (60 ECTS) in pre-school education, drama or music. University education is 4 years long with options for a one-year post-bachelor (ISCED 6B) Master's program (ISCED 7). To practise the profession of a preschool teacher neither specialization nor a master's degree is required. Training in pedagogical colleges is sufficient.

In Bulgaria the training for acquiring a pre-school teacher qualification is carried out at pedagogical colleges and universities. Similar to the situation in Serbia, college education is three years long, and university education is four years long. Graduates of pedagogical colleges with Professional Bachelor degree (ISCED 6A) may continue their education in Master programmes (ISCED 7) lasting 4 or 5 semesters. Almost 100% of college graduates benefit from this opportunity.

3. ABOUT THE HISTORY OF THE TWO EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Both educational institutions have a centuries-old and very similar history. In order to keep pace with latest development and to follow the educational policies of their countries, they have gone through different stages. Founded in the late 19th century, nowadays the two institutions have successfully established themselves as leaders in their regions. College for Preschool Teachers in Aleksinac continues the tradition started with The Royal Serbian Teachers School founded in 1871 which was transferred from Belgrade to Aleksinac in 1896, with a decree of King Alexander Obrenovic. The Branch of “St. Cyril and St. Methodius” University of Veliko Turnovo in Vratsa continues the tradition of the Vratsa Pedagogical School, founded in 1881 when it was one of the pioneers of the pedagogical education in Bulgaria.

Over the years, depending on the legislation, the College for Preschool Teachers in Aleksinac has had different names - Teachers Academy (1972), Preschool Teachers School (1993), College for Preschool Teachers (2007 - to present).

Similar is the history of the Branch of “St. Cyril and St. Methodius” University of Veliko Turnovo in the town of Vratsa. Over the years it has also had various names - Institute for Preparation of Primary Teachers (1941), Institute for Preparation of Junior High School Teachers (1942), Secondary Pedagogical School (1956-1960), Preschool Teachers Training Institute (1960-1989), Pedagogical Institute (1989), Pedagogical College (1997), “St. Cyril And St. Methodius” University of Veliko Turnovo - Branch Vratsa (2011 - to present).

In the years following 2007, the curricula in both educational institutions have been developed in accordance with the requirements of the 1999 Bologna Declaration on the establishment of a common European Higher Education Area, where oversight on the quality of education is carried out by the relevant national authorities.

Training in the two institutions is carried out in different majors. The College in Aleksinac offers only preschool teachers training, while the Branch in Vratsa offers training for teachers of all levels of preschool and school education.

4. THE PROFESSIONAL PEDAGOGICAL COMPETENCE IN THE CONTEXT OF THE EUROPEAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

The European Qualifications Framework is a common European reference framework that acts as a tool to facilitate comparison and understanding of qualifications obtained in different countries. This document puts the selection of the content and organization of training and the assessment of its results on new foundation. EQF uses 8 reference levels based on learning outcomes defined as knowledge, skills and competencies. It is fully compatible with the higher education qualification framework developed under the Bologna Process.

The professional pedagogical competence is a result of the training at the ISCED 6 reference level with its two sub-levels 6A and 6B, Professional Bachelor and Bachelor degrees respectively. By applying the EQF, it becomes clear that mastering this competence is a continuous process that includes acquiring knowledge (facts, principles, theories), continues with the formation of skills to apply it (cognitive and practical skills), and ends up with building of personal professional skills and proven ability to use them in learning and creative situations (competences). Based on the idea of the European Higher Education Area, the professional pedagogical preparation of the future preschool teachers has to be aimed both at the formation of professional competences and key, portable competences relevant to the respective qualification. The latter are more general and the first ones build up upon them.

Based on an analysis of the portable (key) competencies defined by Peter Debrecen, G. Lecheva identifies the key competences of the teacher-to-be undergraduate student: public speech skills; critical thinking; skills to work in a team; creativity; interpersonal skills; planning skills; skills for situational analysis; predicting skills; persuasion skills; task assignment skills; team building skills; coordinating events skills; evaluation skills; flexible / adaptive response to change, organizational skills; process management (teaching/learning process) under constant pressure [1].

For the purposes of the present study, it is assumed that pedagogical competence means the teacher's ability to fulfil their professional commitments as a science-based perception of pedagogical reality and pedagogically adequate actions. According to V. D. Shadrikov the pedagogical competence is a unity of interrelated basic competences: to motivate pupils' activity; to set goals in education; to reveal the personal meaning of a particular subject and the specific subject's topic; to apply an individual approach to pupils; to implement decisions related to solving pedagogical tasks; to develop an educational programme; to organize the course of study, which includes: competence in organizing the activity conditions: informational, technological, etc; competence referring the student's level of understanding of the training task; competence in evaluating the current and final learning outcomes [2].

When comparing the curriculums of the two educational institutions that reflect the content of the training to acquire a 'preschool teacher' qualification, we will search for their compliance with the European higher education policy.

5. ASPECTS OF CURRICULUMS COMPARISON

The curriculum is a document that confirms the content of a course of study. In the higher education system, it is developed by each institution and then approved by the relevant body. The comparison of the curricula for preschool teacher training at the College for Preschool Teachers in Aleksinac, Serbia and 'St. Cyril and St. Methodius' University of Veliko Turnovo - Branch Vratsa will be based upon the following aspects:

1. Formal aspects
 - 1.1. Structure of the curriculum - format and parts.
 - 1.2. Are the curricula developed according to majors or study fields?
 - 1.3. Number of study hours - for the whole course of training, for one year.
 - 1.4. Arrangement of the academic disciplines - successive (sequentially), simultaneous (concurrently), concentric, combined simultaneous-concentric;
 - 1.5. Credit system - number of credits per one semester, one year, the entire course of education duration. Number of study hours that bring one credit.
 - 1.6. Ratio of the study hours in accordance with the form of training (lectures, seminars);
 - 1.7. The entity that develops and approves the curriculum.
2. Content aspects
 - 2.1. Theoretical preparation
 - 2.1.2. Differentiation of academic disciplines by their nature - general educational, general pedagogical, special. Names of the academic subjects. Percentage ratio. Arrangement by semesters.
 - 2.1.3. Differentiation of academic disciplines according to their status (compulsory, elective, optional). Percentage ratio. Arrangement by semesters. Relation of the elective and optional subjects to the compulsory ones.
 - 2.1.4. Ratio between theoretical and practical training.

2.2. Practical training:

2.2.1. Beginning of practical training. Types of practical training. Number of hours for the separate types.

3. Assessment of the results of training.

3.1. Number of exams (exam, on-going assessment) for one semester.

3.2. Graduation:

3.2.1. Verification and assessment of the theoretical training (state exam, thesis paper defence)

3.2.2. Verification and assessment of the practical training

Conclusions on the formal aspects of comparison:

1. Both curricula are in matrix format, and the academic disciplines studied are unfolded arranged in their codes, status, hours, and the number of credits they result in. It is noteworthy that the curriculum of the College for Preschool Teachers in Aleksinac contains information about the nature of the disciplines studied - general, theoretical methodical, scientific professional, artistic professional, professionally applied, professionally theoretical. The curriculum of Veliko Turnovo University - Branch Vratsa contains an information package detailing the objectives, professional competences and the possibilities for professional realization. Such package is not present in the curriculum of the College for Preschool Teachers in Aleksinac.

2. The students' weekly workload throughout each semester is approximately the same - about 23 or 24 study hours.

3. For each discipline, whether compulsory or elective, the curriculum of the College for Preschool Teachers in Aleksinac provides both lectures and seminars. In the Veliko Turnovo University - Branch Vratsa curriculum, seminars are provided for only few disciplines. Lectures are predominant. Such a model of training is a direct one in its nature with the lecturer playing the leading part and the student having a passive role. Having a curriculum organised in this way, the lecturer should search for different options for stimulating the cognitive activity of the students.

4. Both curricula have been developed according to the European Credit Transfer System. The training under the curricula envisages the acquisition of 60 credits per year which is 30 credits per semester.

Conclusions on the content aspects of comparison:

1. In both curricula, the academic disciplines can be grouped into general educational, general pedagogical, special. In their higher percentage they coincide in terms of their names. It is natural that the general educational and general pedagogical disciplines are organised in the first two or three semesters. Most study hours are devoted to learning the methods of teaching ... (a certain subject) that are the same in both curricula. Students at Aleksinac start studying them in the fourth semester and those at Vratsa in the third semester. At first glance, it seems that at the College for Preschool Teachers in Aleksinac the methods for teaching ... (a certain subject) are studied with a very large number of hours (they are taught in two parts during the IV and V semesters). But we have to note that this is also the case in the Veliko Turnovo University - Branch Vratsa, since apart from studying the disciplines Methods of teaching ... (a certain subject) there are also other disciplines that are pre-studied in preparation for the methods themselves. For example, "Pedagogical Fundamentals of Technics and Technologies" precedes the study of "Methods of Teaching Design and Technologies in the Kindergarten". And so it is for each and every methodology.

2. The disciplines in both curricula are arranged for simultaneous study. In the curriculum of the College for Preschool Teachers in Aleksinac, they are more evenly organised, where 6 or 7 disciplines are planned for each semester. In the curriculum of Branch Vratsa, the number of disciplines is slightly bigger during the first two years - about 9 and 10 per semester and relatively less for the third and fourth year - 6 disciplines per semester on the average. However, considering that Branch Vratsa's curriculum is not just about preparing preschool teacher, but also primary school teachers, as well as primary school teachers in foreign language, then the larger number of disciplines is well explainable.

3. In both curricula, the disciplines of theoretical preparation are differentiated by status. In the curriculum of the College for Preschool Teachers in Aleksinac, those are divided only into compulsory and elective at a ratio of 67%: 33%, while in that of Branch Vratsa the percentage of the compulsory ones against the elective and the optional ones is 68%: 27%: 5%. Given that the optional disciplines are also elected, it is clear that in both curricula the ratio of disciplines is almost the same. Students trained in Branch Vratsa have greater choice of disciplines. Every semester, except the first one, students can choose from over 10 options (suggestions). Thus their professional interests are satisfied to a higher extent.

4. The curricula of both higher education institutions provide hours for practical training. At the College for Preschool Teachers in Aleksinac, it is a total of 300 hours and it is very well distributed. Students have the opportunity to practice in kindergarten every semester starting from the first one when the practice amounts to 20 hours and gradually increasing it up to 80 hours in the VI semester. At Vratsa Branch of Veliko Turnovo University there are only 195 hours dedicated to the practical training of undergraduates starting in the third

semester. The practical training is divided into three types: observations (45 h) - III, IV, V semester; pre-internship practice (60 h) - VII semester; student teaching internship (90 h) - VIII semester.

Conclusions on the assessment of the results from training.

The curriculum of the College for Preschool Teachers in Aleksinac, does not contain an outlined procedure for ongoing and final assessments of the results from the training, so this does not allow us to make a comparison.

6. CONCLUSION

Comparison of the curricula of the two higher education institutions preparing preschool teachers at the ISCED 6 reference level with its two sub-levels 6A and 6B proofs the globalization processes in the higher education system, which facilitate study and job mobility. Differences are not essential. Common features are much more in number. This will affect the recognition of the qualification identified by the descriptors - knowledge, skills and competences. Through the disciplines included - the hours they are studied, how they are arranged in the course of education, and the implementation of the European credit transfer system - the two curriculums reflect the contemporary understanding of preschool teacher training.

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