

## CURRICULUM REFORM: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Osman Buleshkaj  
Ministry of Education in Kosovo, Kosovo  
obuleshkaj@gmail.com

Selim Mehmeti  
Ministry of Education in Kosovo, Kosovo  
selimmehmeti@hotmail.com

### **Abstract:**

The development of the competency-based curriculum and its implementation is a topic of particular importance for researchers in Kosovo. Although the curriculum reform of pre-university education in Kosovo started eight years ago, it has neither been fully integrated in school teaching programs, nor has its implementation been extended to all schools. This study outlines teachers' assessments of the structure and content of new teaching programs designed inline with the competency-based curricula the 2016/2017 school year. This paper derives from a more extensive study conducted for Ministry of Education Science and Technology in Kosovo. It presents the a model of study based on a five-point assessment scale administered with 395 teachers from 72 schools involved in the implementation of the new curriculum in grades 1, 6 and 10. The study attempts to explore the utilization of new teaching programs and teachers' expectations during the piloting of the curriculum. The structure and design is aimed to enable researchers to understand teachers' views on the implementation of the new teaching programs, challenges they are faced with and specific needs identified for improvement in different subjects and school environments. In conclusion, it is aimed that this study shall provide orientation on finalizing the teaching programs, suggest particular support that should be provided to schools, and brings forth a perspective for better implementation of the new curriculum at national level.

*Keywords: Curriculum development, planning, implementation, competencies, teaching program.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST) with the new Curriculum Framework (2011) and the Core Curriculum (2012), has defined the competency-based curriculum approach, learning outcomes for curriculum areas and has set the plan and structure to pilot curriculum in 95 schools over the period of 4 years. The piloting phase identified a number of requirements for improvement and focus, such as: (i) the need to determine the minimum teaching time for each subject in the respective classes; (ii) break down of learning outcomes of curriculum area into the learning outcomes for specific subject; (iii) the need to set learning topics and organize them in subject teaching programs for each grade; (iv) provide guidelines for classroom implementation; and (v) the need to provide school based support and clear guidelines for implementation of new teaching programs. Therefore, in 2016 MEST revised the Curriculum Framework and the Core Curricula, it prepared and presented the teaching programs for the preparatory grade and grades 1, 6 and 10, and it began implementation as of the 2016/2017 school academic year in 72 schools in Kosovo.

The Curriculum Division at MEST has led the work of the working groups, which for a relatively short time prepared 61 teaching programs for the preparatory grade and grades 1, 6 and 10. The new programs were presented in seven information workshops organized by MEST for teachers and principals in the 72 schools, and they were assigned to continue with the implementation of the new curriculum. Teachers and school directors were informed particularly on the structure, content and methodology of the implementation of new teaching programs for the respective grades. Also, during the workshops organized in the regional centers, teachers and school principals received CDs with the new teaching programs developed for classes under the new curriculum.

Meanwhile, based on the new teaching programs, teachers from the 72 schools implementing the new curriculum conducted their teaching plan, annual and lesson plan. The focused training of teachers who started working with these teaching programs was provided in October-November 2016, respectively about two months after the start of the 2016/2017 academic years.

The finalization of the teaching programs for these classes was scheduled by MEST to take place in December 2016 and finalize them in January 2017 after having received feedback from teachers about their experiences during implementation, their recommendations for necessary changes and possible amendments to the national curriculum. The countrywide implementation of the new curriculum in all Kosovo schools was planned to start in the academic year 2017/2018, firstly with the preparatory grade and grades 1, 6 and 10.

To assess whether the structure and content of the teaching programs is clear and understandable for teachers working with these programs and whether the process of commencing the implementation of teaching programs for the preparatory grade and grades 1, 6 and 10 is proceeding as planned, MEST authorized a research team from the Kosovo Pedagogical Institute (KPI) to conduct this study. This study was carried out during the teacher trainings organized in different curriculum areas. Initial findings from this study were presented to curriculum coordinators at MEST in December 2016.

## 2. INITIAL LITERATURE REVIEW

Curriculum development or revision is a process related to changes in education and is intended to respond to the challenges society faces, or to adapt to societal developments, achievements in science, technology, and the achievement of the vision that determines the future society. Such reasoning, similar to what was said above, is found in most of the curricula developed in recent years. This is also found in the introduction of the Curriculum Framework for Pre-University Education in Kosovo document, which emphasizes that the new curriculum has been developed to address challenges such as the need to build a knowledge society, integration into the digital era, increasing interdependence and mobility, learning to live together, sustainable development, diaspora and migration (MEST, 2016).

The literature review refers to the curriculum documents revised in 2016 (Curriculum Framework and three Core Curricula), the study reports on trends in the development of new curricula and study report: Pilot School Evaluations of the New Curriculum Implementation Process (Mehmeti, 2015).

The reports of the analyzed studies on trends in the development of new curricula reveal that curriculum documents vary from country to country, and differences are noticed in the structure of curriculum documents as well as in terms of goals, principles, organization of teaching content, placement of learning outcomes, number of curriculum areas or subjects, etc. They also differ in terms of the competency-based approach and the number of key competencies, the approach of subject integration in curriculum areas and the number of subjects incorporated within a curriculum area. Likewise, curriculum documents in different countries promote and require the inclusion of technology in teaching, application of the system and various forms of assessment, provide orientation for on the teaching

hours for curriculum areas or teaching subjects, and clarify school responsibilities and autonomy during implementation of the state curriculum (Education Scotland, 2015).

The Curriculum Framework for Pre-University Education in Kosovo promotes the competency-based approach, and the focus is shifted from the pressure on achievement of the content defined by teaching programs and textbooks to the development of key competencies established through learning outcomes. It aims to achieve the development of competencies defined within the curriculum through curriculum areas, elective courses/modules, projects, cross-curricular and extra-curricular activities and other innovative forms led by schools.

This way, the Kosovo Curriculum Framework (KCF) is similar to many we find in some European countries, such as Scotland, Finland, Slovenia and other countries (Koivula, 2014; Koren, 2014; Morgan, 2014). The KCF consists of seven curricular areas: Languages and Communication, Arts, Mathematics, Natural Sciences, Society and the Environment, Physical Education, Sports and Health, and Life and Work. With regards to the main competencies, Kosovo has differences in the number of competences and the designation of their content. The KCF establishes six main competencies: (i) communication and expression; (ii) thinking; (iii) learning; (iv) life, work and environment; (v) personal; and, (vi) civic competence. Curriculum in Scotland, for example, has three competencies: (i) learning; (ii) life; and, (iii) work (Janaqi 2014). Meanwhile, Albania has also developed a Curriculum Framework that is similar to Kosovo's Curriculum.

The Core Curricula is designed for the three formal levels of pre-university education in Kosovo (primary education grades 1-5, lower secondary education grades 6-9 and upper secondary education grades 10-12). In addition to the general aspects related to respective degrees of the curriculum, the Core Curricula also provide orientations for school autonomy, the innovative and flexible use of teaching and learning time, and the support for designing school-based curricula (MEST, Core Curricula, level II - 2012, p. 89).

The new curriculum enables the school and its professional teams to design teaching programs and plans for subjects and classes within the respective curricular degree, based on descriptions for each curriculum area, learning outcomes for the curriculum degree and the teaching time available for a curriculum degree. Likewise, the new curriculum enables the use of alternative teaching resources during the teaching and learning process. However, existing textbooks continue to be the main source of teaching and learning (Hamza, 2011, p. 14). New textbooks were not prepared for the curriculum pilot process in Kosovo, but teachers were advised to use existing textbooks and other alternative sources to ensure achievement of learning outcomes.

The integration of subjects within curriculum areas and the requirements to provide integrated approach-based teaching constitute a major change when implementing the new curriculum. Efforts to include integrated cross-curricular subject programs may have considerable merit, but have failed to provide a solid foundation (Marsh 2009, p.44). On the other hand, school autonomy in determining learning outcomes and teaching content by subject and class based on the core curriculum is another challenge, which if not properly understood may lead to significant differences between schools regarding what they do and how they support students in the development of key competencies. This challenge was largely reflected in the schools involved in the initial piloting of the Kosovo curriculum when MEST led the process of compiling classroom plans and programs (Devetaku-Gojani, 2011; Potera, 2014; Mehmeti, 2015).

### **3. PROBLEM OF THE STUDY**

The main problem addressed in this study is the lack of understanding the level of implementation of teaching programs, deriving from the new competency-based curriculum, in piloting schools in Kosovo. While the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology in Kosovo has developed and disseminated curriculum documents and teaching programs to all pilot schools, teachers working with preparatory grade and grades 1, 6 and 10 are facing a challenge to plan lesson and prepare bi-monthly plans based on the instructions and guidelines received during focussed trainings. The extent to which instructions and guidelines provided to teachers and schools are helping them to implement the new teaching program will be further explored and interpreted as perceived by participants in this study. How are teachers in piloting schools in Kosovo implementing the new teaching programs and what are the challenges they are facing at this stage of implementation? In other words, what can and should Ministry of Education, Science and Technology do to support better implementation of the teaching programs at the school level before the new curriculum is fully implemented at the national level.

Three questions frame this study:

1. How clear and understandable is the structure of the teaching programs for teachers involved in their implementation?
2. What are the challenges identified by teachers during the implementation of teaching programs and how they overcome those at school level?
3. What are teachers' suggestions to amend aspect of the new teaching programs?

#### **4. RESEARCH MODEL**

The research approach proposed for this study is a mixed approach, quantitative and qualitative. This approach is suggested on the basis of research questions, which points the need for quantitative and qualitative data, as well as on the basis of the model of the study, the assessment model. Usually, assessment models ask whether a program or project has reached the intended goals. They evaluate how well has a process worked, if a given intervention or change has brought the intended results (Matthews, 2010).

The study model is intended to capture teachers' assessments of the teaching programs' structure designed according to the new curriculum, and to evaluate the process of launching implementation in the preparatory grade and grades 1, 6 and 10. Thus, the study subjects are the teaching programs designed under the new curriculum and the beginning of their implementation, not the teachers that are implementing these programs. The overall purpose of this study is to provide information to MEST, respectively to the curriculum area coordinators and teaching programs designers, regarding teachers' assessments of the structure and content of teaching programs, challenges and problems identified in their implementation in the first term of the 2016/2017 school year, and to provide orientation and recommendations for addressing them before the national programs are adopted and their implementation is launched to other schools.

##### **4.1. Population and sample**

The study involves teachers from the 72 schools that are implementing the new teaching programs for the preparatory grade and grades 1, 6 and 10, which are part of the curriculum trainings organized by MEST in the period October - November 2016. This population consists of 620 teachers involved in curriculum trainings organized by MEST in the regional municipalities: Prishtina, Mitrovica, Peja, Gjakova, Prizren and Ferizaj.

##### **4.2. Data collection instruments**

To get answers to the main questions of the study, a five-point assessment instrument is prepared and it covers various indicators related to the teaching programs of the preparatory grade and grades 1, 6 and 10.

The assessment tool used in this study is organized into three sections. The first section includes 9 indicators for the teaching programs structure, and the second section includes 13 indicators for the implementation of teaching programs at schools. For both of these sections, teachers will be asked to provide assessment choosing one of the five scale-points for each indicator. Value 1 of assessment shows that the indicator is not reached at all, while value 5 assessment shows that the indicator is reached at a very high level by the school. The third section includes five open-ended questions related to teaching programs and their implementation, such as the lessons offered by subject programs, implementation challenges and problems, overcoming challenges and the suggestions to amend any important aspect of the teaching programs of the subjects covered by the teachers.

To conduct the study analysis it is required to use statistical, descriptive and comparative methods, through which the results will be obtained, presented, described and compared. Data obtained will be presented in tables, diagrams and other forms for easier reflection and discussion of results with education stakeholders in Kosovo and wider.

##### **4.3. Data collection procedure**

The data collection procedure is developed on the basis of the guidelines prepared for field researchers. The guidelines contain a brief description of the purpose of the study, the form of presentation to teachers, the manner of data collection and the dynamic data collection plan. The

primary document to be analyzed is the Teaching program being utilised by teachers at the school level.

The teaching program is a document developed for each curriculum area. It describes learning outcomes and teaching content, learning topics, relevant teaching and assessment methodologies, and teaching materials and resources of the respective subjects. Therefore, the assessment instrument used with teachers utilizing these teaching programs includes nine specific indicators related to the teaching programs structure. The main aspects of the assessment instrument target the structure of teaching programs developed according to the requirements of the competency-based curricula, and include: introduction to the subject, purpose of the subject, teaching topics, learning outcomes of subjects and topics, learning outcomes for subjects and topics and their correlation with the results of the curriculum area, methodological guidelines, guidelines on implementing cross-curricular issues, guidelines on student assessment, and guidelines on teaching materials and resources.

#### **4.4. Data analysis procedure**

The data analysis procedures includes encoding process of each instrument filled out by the teachers involved in the study and the input of the data collected in the SPSS program. The data from the assessment tool will be analyzed and reported in percentage and average assessments of the teaching programs structure, under each subject and for indicators related to the implementation of teaching programs. For open question data, a special analysis will be applied by grouping the results in topics on the basis of particular frequencies with respect to the same topics or issues, and then summarized conclusions on issues raised by the majority of participants involved in the study.

### **5. ASSUMPTIONS**

Subjects selected for this study work in pilot schools implementing the new curriculum in Kosovo since 2013. These participants have had numerous trainings, participated in many workshops and discussions about implementation, and had different roles in planning and implementing the new curriculum at the school level. Therefore, embarking on this research study, we acknowledge that we have certain assumptions as follows:

- Teachers are making sure that the planning and implementation of the teaching programs is well prepared and structured.
- Teachers and other school staff will be agreeable to participate in this study; they will responding to all questions openly and honestly, and provide a descriptive analysis in the open-ended section of the questionnaire.
- Schools are receiving sufficient support to implement the new curriculum in general, but more specifically the new teaching programs in particular.
- All participants, teachers, have been utilizing MEST prepared resources to effectively implement the teaching programs in pilot schools.
- Teaching programs in the preparatory grade and grades 1, 6 and 10 meet the expectations of teachers, and have a content structure that is generally clear and understandable for most teachers.

### **6. CONCLUSIONS**

This paper provides a snapshot of curriculum implementation and teaching programs in Kosovo. It highlights the main steps taken to prepare the teaching programs and thus enhance teaching practice during implementation of the new curriculum in preparatory grade and grades 1, 6 and 10. Initial literature is identified, primarily in Kosovo and countries Kosovo learned from, with regards to curriculum reform process. Finally, a description of the methodology planned to explicitly explore the questions guiding this study; the sample and instruments prepared to collect data were highlighted and briefly explained.

### **REFERENCE LIST**

1. Devetaku-Gojani, H. (2011). Curriculum, Teaching Plans and Programs Development in Kosovo 2001-2011. *Pedagogical Research - summary of papers, 2011*, (pp.136-164). Prishtina, Kosovo Pedagogical Institute.
2. Education Scotland. (2015). *Community learning and development in curriculum for excellence: 1. Senior phase*. Edinburgh, UK: Education Scotland.

3. Hamza, M. (2011). Basic education curriculum. The needs for revision, trends and conceptualization. *Pedagogical Review*, 2011, (pp. 136-164).  
[http://www.izha.edu.al/materiale/Revista\\_Pedagogjike\\_2011.pdf](http://www.izha.edu.al/materiale/Revista_Pedagogjike_2011.pdf)
4. Janaqi, G. (2014). *Development of Competency Based Curriculum in Albania: Preparations for a Successful Process*. International Conference - New Curricular Approach - Future Challenge, Publications, Presentations and Recommendations, (pp. 77-92). Prishtina, Ministry of Education, Science and Technology.
5. Kocani, A. (2008): *Exercises with quantitative research methods in social sciences*. Ufo Press. Tirana.
6. Koivula, P. (2014). *Finland's experience in developing and implementing the competency-based curriculum: How to support the implementation process?* International Conference - New Curricular Approach - Future Challenge, Publications, Presentations and Recommendations, (pp. 51-62). Prishtina, Ministry of Education, Science and Technology.
7. Koren, A. (2014). *Role of school principals in the implementation of the competency-based curriculum*. International Conference - New Curricular Approach - Future Challenge, Publications, Presentations and Recommendations, (pp. 129-140). Prishtina, Ministry of Education, Science and Technology.
8. Marsh, J. Colin. (2009). *Basic concepts for understanding the curriculum*. Fourth edition in Albanian, Tirana, Center for Democratic Education.
9. Matthews, B. / Ross, L (2010): *METHODS OF RESEARCH*. Practical Guide to Social and Human Sciences. Center for Democratic Education (CDE). Tirana.
10. Mehmeti, S. (2015). Pilot school assessments of the new curriculum implementation process 2014-2015. *Pedagogical Research - summary of papers, 2011*, (pp. 5-22). Prishtina, Kosovo Pedagogical Institute.
11. Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (2016). *Pre-university Curriculum Framework of Pre-university Education of the Republic of Kosovo* (revised). Prishtina. <http://masht.rks-gov.net/uploads/2017/02/korniza-kurrikulare-finale.pdf>
12. Ministry of Education, Science and Technology.(2016). *Reviewed Core Curricula for (i) Pre-primary and Primary Education, (ii) Lower Secondary Education, and (iii) Upper Secondary Education*. Prishtina. <http://masht.rks-gov.net/uploads/2017/02/kurrikula-berthame-1-finale-2.pdf>
13. Ministry of Education, Science and Technology.(2016). *Teaching programs of the preparatory grade and grades 1, 6 and 10*. Prishtina.
14. Morgan, N. (2014). *Scotland's approach to implementing the curriculum for excellence: How to best support implementation at school level?* International Conference - New Curricular Approach - Future Challenge, Publications, Presentations and Recommendations, (pp. 37-50). Prishtina, Ministry of Education, Science and Technology.
15. Potera, I. (2014). Level of school information and their attitude towards the new curriculum. *Pedagogical Research - summary of papers, 2014*, pp. 45-72. Prishtina, Kosovo Pedagogical Institute.