

Reforming the Education System in Kosovo with the Start of the 9th Classes

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Abstract

Prior to 1999 Kosovo was a province of the former Yugoslavia. While predominantly inhabited by ethnic Albanians, Kosovo was ruled by Serbia during much of this time. Following the war many international organizations joined those developing domestic organizations and had great influence on decision making. This led to Kosovo declaring its independence from Serbia on 17th February 2008. Post-war Kosovo continues to undergo many transitions in all aspects of development, including education. Education reform was essential both to bring education up to date and in line with international standards. However, somewhat by necessity, changes were drawn up rapidly when they demanded, but did not receive thorough planning, that would have allowed them to be implemented and integrated more effectively. The transition from the pre-war education system to reforms also was a result of the policies of both international and domestic influences which have been decision makers on the fate of so much, including education in the country. The application of these reforms has been complex and difficult as the stages of implementation was not conceived, planned, prepared or understood properly starting from Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST), to the teachers and students. Educational reforms began immediately after the adoption of two laws on primary, secondary and university education (Parliament of Kosovo, 2002). The pre-war educational structure included an instructional framework consisting of twelve grades in a 4 +4 +4 arrangement. After the war, Development of the new Curriculum Framework of Kosovo (2001), determined that a revised framework was needed. The new framework includes nine grades in a 5 +4 +3 arrangement. This new plan extends compulsory education from eight years to 9 years of schooling which complies with European and international course in education. (DES, 2001) Given the significance and impact of the process of including ninth grade as compulsory the goal of this study is to answer the questions: Have the education reforms, i.e. the beginning of ninth graders, brought positive change in education or made the situation more difficult? What should be the basis for planning by MEST, when designing new curriculum, especially when implementing programs for the first time? How should teachers be prepared to implement reforms? On what decisions should reforms in the educational system of the new country be based? Methodology: Qualitative research, comparative, analysis, etc.

Keywords: Reforms, teaching and learning, education system, etc.

1. The Education System in Kosovo during 2000-2003

Post-war Kosovo was emerging as an independent nation and society. What could be called an emergency phase in her recovery and development existed. During this period Kosovo was led by the United Nations Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK). In February 2000, UNMIK and Kosovo together created the Kosovo Education Department. This department was headed by Steffie Schnoor from UNMIK and Professor Agim Vinca, from the Interim Administrative Council (IAC). During this period UNMIK administration planned the strategy for education in Kosovo. This strategy was divided into three phases: 1. Interim Phase, 2. Phase of transition, and 3. Phase of integration. (Daxner, 2001)

However at this stage, serious difficulties arose since teachers had not had any training in more than a decade due to the heavy political situation in Kosovo Albanian education of the 90's, when schools in Albanian language operated outside of regular school premises due to the seizing of the Serbian authorities. Teachers were engaged to teach subjects for which they were not qualified. Based on a report of the Kosovo Education Center (KEC), during this time, teachers needed to be trained to give the best results in their classroom. In addition, textbooks in use were terribly out of date because until 1999, they were mainly books published in Albania before the '90, which were out of date already.

From 1999-2000, various international organizations, managed to publish a number of textbooks (about 130 different titles), but that did not cover all the needs of the schools for books.

The state of infrastructure was not at the right level during the period 1999-2000, as many school buildings were destroyed during the war. Some of the destroyed schools were rebuilt, some were built new, but a large number of

schools still remained with instruction taking place in tents or containers.

At this stage, during 2000-2001 a group of international and local experts to design an education system in Kosovo (Designing Education System for Kosovo-DESK). This team was formed by UNMIK, composed of local experts and experts from New York City. This team served as an advisory group to the Department of Education.

Until 2002 the Kosovo education system was headed by Mr. Michael Daxner (UNMIK), who was the only person who enjoyed full authority in decision making at Pre University and University education system. In 2002 the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government (PISG) were formed, and for the first time MEST's leadership had a Kosovo government minister, Rexhep Osmani, who led education reforms in Kosovo.

On 15 August 2002, administrative instructions were issued regarding the curriculum for ninth grade, signed by the then Minister of MEST Mr. Osmani (MEST, 2002). At the time this instruction was issued, the Law on Primary and Secondary Education was still awaiting publication. The purpose of these administrative instructions was "the inclusion of educational curricula for grades nine orientation as a result of the restructuring of the system in primary and secondary education." (MEST, 2002).

In August 2002, the Kosovo Assembly adopted the laws on primary, secondary and higher education that included the decision of adding ninth grades in all schools in Kosovo (Osmani, 2011). This decision was considered although being the initial decision, in favor of education reform in the country. However it was taken so urgently, that teachers and students of that generation caught unprepared.

It was decided to have a five-day intensive training of all teachers, who would be teaching ninth grade. It was conducted from 20th to 25th August 2002. After this training an expert group was formed to propose literature/textbooks to be used in the ninth grade. (Osmani 2011)

The newly developed ninth grade curriculum consisted of the following subjects: Albanian Language and Literature, Mathematics, English, computing, biology, chemistry, physics, geography, history, civic education, music education, arts education, physical education and sports, and the beginnings of the basics of economy and of justice (MEST, 2002). These courses were intended to verify, review, generalization and synthesis of knowledge derived from second grade to eighth grade (MEST, 2002).

The beginning of the school year for the ninth grade did not gear off to a good start. It began without proper preparation of teachers and students or textbooks for the work that awaited them.

According to Mr. Osmani, former Minister of MEST, nine classes were only a reinforcement of knowledge that students had taken up the eighth grade and had orientation guidance for the rest of high school. Of the textbooks, Mr. Osmani said that although late, within that school year, all schools were equipped with texts relevant materials (Osmani 2013). Teachers were not clear what had to be taught in their ninth grade courses, so they taught the same topics that were addressed in eighth grade. Students considered this to repetition of the learning of the lessons.

Until 2002 Kosovo schools, especially secondary level, with the exception of basic books, considered of national importance, such as History, Albanian language and literature, etc, all other subjects were run with the books, programs and plans of the former Yugoslavia before the 1990s. Therefore this change was used by leaders of the time to abandon the old curricula and begin drafting new curricula, in accordance with the local, historical and cultural context. But according to Mr. Daxner beginning of ninth graders it was a matter of necessity due to the lack of sufficient time. According Daxner, preparations have been sufficient even though the school year has begun without drafting of texts, ". . . the texts were missing before this process, and texts which were used up until this period had been established since the time of Serbia..." (Daxner, 2012)

Based on a report prepared by MEST and supported by UNICEF Office in Kosovo, indicators and statistical data for 2004/05, 05/06, 06/07, phase when began Kosovo's education reforms, more exactly the period of inclusion of the ninth grade system, was called the emergency phase. Besides great efforts to accommodate all students in school buildings during this phase, the challenge was making all the preparations to start radical reforms in the education system in Kosovo, primarily in the design, approval and implementation of laws and documents. (MEST, 2008).

However, the actual work in schools was quite different than that reported based on interviews with teachers it was revealed. The situation in the schools, in this period was alarming and according to the teachers, this stage is considered the "experiment" with schools in Kosovo, which has contributed significantly to reducing the quality of education. (Doctoral thesis research, - the results of which will be made public at the end of the paperwork, 2013/14).

2. Difficulties in Implementing Reforms Beginning of Ninth Graders in Kosovo

Based on the data presented above, we see that the period of reform of the education system in Kosovo was one of the

most challenging of the last decade. Rapidly changing political events during period were dictated and accelerated more by processes, which became pivotal among the number of potential problems, than the impact of which is felt even in the present day.

Making the decision to reform the education system was in place anyway, especially due to the fact that Kosovo was trying to become of Europe, not only geographically, but also in terms of its development. The vision to move one step ahead in educating the society however shows dedication and high value for a state. Society which sought to move towards the development of education is aiming to bring development and prosperity of itself. Kosovo's development was on track for it to become part of the Europe.

The idea of reform, has given to Kosovo a new vision for development and being that her vision was to develop in the field of education, it was quite hopeful and promising for the society.

Development of the new Curriculum Framework of Kosovo in 2001 through which Kosovo education system aimed to comply with European and international course in education was not consistent with the circumstances that had passed Kosovo, as well as an emergency situation in which Kosovo was in those years. European space of education had consistently planned and applied reforms, while our country was in the survival stage of education. This is a big difference and completely unmatched, to follow the example of reform. Education reforms in any developed country weren't facing the same difficulties that were in Kosovo.

Our educational system has had to deal with survival, recovery, preparation of plans and programs, professional training of teachers, preparation and implementation of the reformed literature. This was a matter of very broad and deep change to face, in order to reform the education system in Kosovo.

Hence the decision to start with such a major reform, was taken in a very short period called the emergency period according to the MEST, since Parliament had just passed laws to primary education, secondary and higher, was a hasty step for that time period.

Dualism in decision-making, through international co-governance and local officials who not always saw and evaluated circumstances and factors in the same way, was one of the obstacles too. The fact that education in Kosovo had spent a decade of difficult period, during the years 1990/99 (the period of survival of education), made it difficult to implement immediate reforms. It should be mentioned also that school infrastructure was destroyed during the war and in Kosovo many schools, held their classes in unsuitable environments.

The fact that teachers were interrupted in their professional development, due to the circumstances in Kosovo prior to the war, posed difficulties in their ability to implement the reforms.

Under these circumstances, being highly ambitions in seeking to reform the education system, proved unsuitable for such a large immediate change in this area.

This was not only confusing to the Kosovo society, with special emphasis on teachers, school leaders, students and parents, but also created enormous difficulties in their work. Generations that were part of this process; have been forced to do something that had not previously known, had not yet understood and had no idea what was their role in this process.

Lack of information, lack of planning, as well as the lack of literature, could lead this entire generation, in an unknown horizon and lack of experience they needed. The idea of belonging to an involuntary experimental process creates a sense of inferiority and lack of respect. This then prevents the desire to be creative and to contribute towards the goal of a major change in the benefit of all society.

Political interests and ambitions of individual decision makers, whether international or domestic, when directly related to education, can disorder the whole reform. Often these can turn back the reforms and weaken their capacity.

Philosophies of education reform in developing countries are carried out in accordance with other aspects of the political, economic and society reform as a whole. This has not happened in Kosovo, as a result of international management and limited leading responsibilities of local institutions in other areas of society, until the declaration of independence in 2008. Reforming education throughout society is never easy; major reforms usually are encouraged and accompanied by ideological, political and economic differences. For this reason, for the analysis of aspects of reform in a particular environment is important to look at a broader societal context beyond education. (Cummings, 2010).

Any process of change, particularly in education, requires in advance an analysis and assessment of the current situation and in accordance with the vision of development can be prepared and well organized. Since the process of reform is always very difficult process and not easy to be accepted by society, if it was originally applied to pilot these reforms in some schools, then the piloting would give opportunity MEST and other stakeholders to adjust as much as how to start ninth grade classes in all schools in the country. It would also enable them to avoid the problems that can halt the progress of the implementation of reform in the country. The pilot phase also could serve as a preparatory

period, for the design of curricula or textbooks. So I think that the immediate implementation of reforms at the beginning of ninth grade in all schools in Kosovo was a hasty action, unplanned good and inconsistent with the political, economic and social developments.

3. Conclusion

Based on data and analysis that was presented so far, the study concludes that:

- The political situation in the country has hampered planning reforming the education system in Kosovo
- Co-governance of international and domestic factors in the country has caused significant disturbance to start the whole process of educational reform.
- Aiming of the Education System in Kosovo to comply with European and international course in education was not consistent with the circumstances that had passed Kosovo.
- The beginning of ninth grade, within a time limit was too short and too hasty decision with consequences for recovery of the entire education system in the country even till today.
- The decision to start the ninth grade in all schools, without preliminary piloting was a hasty and inappropriate decision for the time.
- The teaching content of the 9th grade was not in compliance with the teaching content of grades 1-8. There was no adaptation of all levels for grades 1-9.
- Preparation / training of teachers for their role in the 9th classes, in a period of one week was not enough for proper preparation and impeded this process to have a good start.
- Lack of textbooks at the beginning of the school year has caused serious problems in the implementation of the reforms.
- Lack of evaluation process of the starting of the ninth grade prevented the identifying of the difficulties that have emerged, and hindered further the process of educational reform in the country.
- Education reforms have been at odds with the political, economic and social developments.
- This period has hampered the progress of the reform in education up till today.

4. Recommendations

- MEST should draft a detailed strategic plan for the way of education system reforms, planning, preparation and implementation in a long term.
- MEST continuously should evaluate and analyze accurately reform process, upon which could be implemented the new reforms in education.
- MEST include in the planning process all stakeholders, in order to have the implementation of new reforms in education easier.
- MEST should prepare and harmonize the teaching contents (plan and programs) of all levels based upon strategic plan for developing new education reforms.
- MEST should plan a comprehensive reform, starting with the piloting of the new programs as first steps.
- All changes in the education system should be prepared after previous education system reforms have been carefully analyzed.
- The purpose of initiating reforms should not be a rapid decision influence by the rapid political developments, but should be well plan and slowly implemented in a safe steps.
- There should be awareness to all stakeholders involved with the change, early enough for the planning, for their role and their professional preparation in accordance with the planned changes.
- The materials that will be serving for the implementation of reforms should be prepared prior to the starting of the process of reform.
- In order for the changes to be qualitative and sustainable, the start of reforms should be applied in minor groups first and depending from challenges and advantages faced upon this piloting reform can be adjusted to become easier and more acceptable.
- Reforming should never be considered as an experiment, failure of which could have a long term consequences.

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