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Initial Teacher Education in Europe: shaping teachers for the 21st century

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Abstract

Globalization has brought new challenges to schools and teachers in Europe. Present models of initial teacher training need to address new challenges in order to give teachers the skills to deal with complex issues in their scientific areas. This has been a concern to teacher programs and educators and it is reflected in the different models of teacher training existing in European countries. This paper aims at discussing the models of initial teacher training in some European countries, trying to understand similarities and differences not only in the formal contexts but also in terms of contents. We will address several issues trying to reach the fundamental question: What kind of teachers do we want for the 21st century? The main purpose will be to identify how initial teacher training has incorporated a global dimension.

Keywords: initial teacher training; models of training; Europe; globalization; education;

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1. Introduction

The process of globalization can be defined as a process of economic, social, political, cultural and territorial integration according to the world system theory. This process of integration of several dimensions of human existence has somehow shaped the notion of what it means to be an educator in the 21st century. And of course, this situation is influencing initial teacher training programs in many countries.

This paper intends to demonstrate that there is a process of integration happening in the educational area, considering teacher training. There are international guidelines subscribed by many nations of the world that have contributed to the idea that teacher training programs should address common issues of a global nature. UNESCO is leading this process in terms of research, recommendations and educational programs involving many areas of the world. OECE has also issued important reports concerning teachers and teacher training.

Being a teacher is now viewed in a global dimension that this research tries to illustrate in terms of skills, challenges and processes. Teacher training has also undergone this process of integration – this is particularly clear when comparing the European models of teacher training. This reality will be analyzed in what concerns the particular case of Initial Teacher training not only in terms of models but also content. This will be analyzed in particular case of initial teacher training not only in terms of models but also in terms of content.

The final chapter will present some considerations as to the idea of shaping teachers for the 21st century and also some difficulties that nations still face when meeting the challenge of globalization in the educational area.

2. Methodology of research

This research is based on document analysis in a qualitative perspective. Document analysis can be defined as “a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents—both printed and electronic (computer-based and internet-transmitted) material” (Bowen, 2009). This analysis aims at selecting content related to the area of research and organizing its themes, cases and categories.

Our analyses of the documents will be presented in a descriptive way. So, the most important data will be presented in order to determine the most relevant aspects of the content being analyzed. The qualitative analyses of the data intend to present the most relevant aspects of the bibliography in order to understand its explicit nature in terms of setting models and frameworks related to the different aspects of the research.

3. Being a teacher in the 21st century: The global dimension

There is an idea of what it means to be a teacher that is being established internationally in the last decades. If we consider the work of international organizations such as UNESCO, there is a clear concern in outlining the main features of the teacher that meets the challenges of the 21st century. In order to understand the main influences, set by international educational boards we have selected some relevant documents that have influenced the educational systems of nations around the world in the recent decades.

In 1996, the UNESCO Report “Learning: The treasure within” (Delors, 1996) defined an important moment in the definition of the model of teacher that should lead the generations of the future. Its 7th chapter “Teachers in search of new perspectives” is dedicated to the defining the role of teachers as transformation agents. In connection, teacher training becomes an important part of this process of change. After analyzing aspects of education for the 21st century, some recommendations are presented in order to pursuit this goal. The most relevant are summarized below:

- Teachers’ work is no longer to provide information and knowledge to the students, but to present scientific content trough problem solving tasks, in a particular context and perspective, so that students can connect the solutions with other pertinent queries.

- The Commission believes that it is necessary to rethink teacher training in order to foster humanistic and intellectual abilities in future teachers, having in mind a new concept of teaching.

- Initial Training – It is important to set strong links between universities and institutions involved in training of future teachers. In the long term all teachers must have attended higher education, and initial teacher training must be assured in cooperation with universities or even in the university context; on the other hand, considering the role of teachers in the development of their students, this training must be centered in the four pillars of education. It is important to mention these four pillars of education, in order to better understand the nature of the work of the teacher:

Table 1. The Four Pillars of Education (adapted from Delors, 1996)

| Learning to know | Learning to do | Learning to live together | Learning to be |
|--|---|---|---|
| Learning must be a combination between a sufficiently broad general knowledge and the opportunity to work in depth on a small number of subjects; learning must be viewed as learning to learn and learning throughout life. | Learning to do means not only acquiring an occupational skill but also the competence to deal with many situations and work in teams; learning to do' means developing the ability to communicate with others, developing social skills, adaptability to change in the world of work and in social life, learning to innovate, take risks, manage conflict. | Very important in the context of globalization, learning to live together means the development of qualities such as knowledge and understanding of self and others, respect for other people and their cultures, resolving conflicts through dialogue and competency in working towards common objectives. | Learning to be means learning to be human through acquisition of knowledge, skills and values; developing personal commitment and responsibility. |

Some years later UNESCO published another important reference for teacher educators and education researchers “Seven Complex Lessons in Education for the Future” (Morin, 1999) where Morin presents his ideas concerning the complex nature of education for the future, identifying fundamental issues that must be addressed by educators: Detecting error and illusion, principles of pertinent knowledge, teaching the human condition, Earth identity, confronting uncertainties, understanding each other and ethics for the human genre.

These complex issues (or lessons) imply a model of teacher that goes beyond scientific knowledge but shows a holistic nature and a compromise with an integral and quality education. The traditional role of the teacher as a subject specialist is somehow insufficient to meet the challenges presented by new educational and societal changes. Training teachers for the future has to include this balance between subject teaching and student development.

Perrenoud (2008) considers that the teacher of the future generations must acquire a number of skills, fundamental to a good professional development in the 21st century. Having to face new educational paradigms and new school practises the discourse about teacher’s professional development is required to adapt to these challenges.

These new teaching skills are the ability to organize and direct learning situations, manage the progression of learning, develop and use devices of differentiation, engage students in their own learning and in their work, work in teams, participate in school administration, contact and involve parents in the process, use new technologies, manage their own professional training and face the duties and the ethical dilemmas of the profession.

It is clear that the teacher is no longer in the center of the teaching/learning process but is becoming a facilitator monitoring learning and adapting teaching (of different nature, such as subject knowledge but also communication skills, innovative practices, critical thinking, to mention some examples) to students'

needs. These new skills must be acquired in the early stages of teacher training where future teachers must be able to develop research skills and focus on a reflective practice.

The report “Education for all 2000- 2015: Achievements and challenges” (UNESCO, 2015) presents an important group of achievements that have been completed since the beginning of the 21st century as well as the challenges that still need to be met. The report has a chapter related to the quality of education (Chapter 6) and presents some interesting considerations related to the teaching profession and teacher training in the world: Investing in teachers is essential to assure education quality, the status of the teaching profession has been devaluated and this tendency needs to be inverted, teachers need to adapt to a change from content centered curricula to a competency – based approach, more and better trained teachers will be an important asset in terms of improving education.

The report presents the idea that teacher training is fundamental in order to attain many of the goals of an effective education for the future generations: Motivated and better prepared teachers will always be an important part of the process. The UNESCO Education Strategy 2014 – 2021 (UNESCO, 2014) defines a group of important guidelines that should be present in the educational systems of the member countries (195 countries and 10 associated members), emphasizing the importance of considering teacher training programs as an important part of educational quality.

Education is increasingly considered as an important mean to decrease poverty and social inequalities. And among the strategic goals for 2021 there is the need to pursue a change in discourse and educational practices and to address teacher matters and improve the quality of teaching:

- Education must reflect the needs of the 21st century as school cannot be isolated from society. We live in a global, dynamic, evolving and diversified world and schools must be able to prepare students to deal with this reality.

- The concept of educational quality must be linked to an idea of pertinence (education has to provide students the means for a better life).

- Change in pedagogical practices is fundamental in terms of changing the role of teachers as educators.

It seems that being a teacher in the 21st century has incorporated a global dimension. The idea that the process of integration also comprises what education is and what it means to be a teacher is being set by international researchers and international organizations such as UNESCO. It is possible to understand that the teacher of the 21st century has to be able to accomplish a set of educational goals (cognitive, social, affective and ethical nature as well as subject knowledge goals) that are very different from the model of teacher who only had to be a specialist in his or her subject area.

This change in the role of the teacher, globally perceived, can only happen through an adequate professional training that contemplates the different demands of the profession. And initial teacher training has a huge importance in this process, as we will try to demonstrate in the next chapter.

4. Initial teacher training in Europe: Models and contents

Initial teacher training in Europe is a very important period in what concerns teachers’ professional development. According to Caena (2014) this importance arises from the fact that students must be understood as future citizens that need to learn not only subject knowledge but also develop a set of skills and attitudes while schooling. In order to develop these skills, such as communication and collaborative skills, creativity or critical thinking, they must experience learning activities that will allow this kind of learning. And this is only possible if teachers master these skills themselves.

Although teacher training is a lifelong process, initial training is very important as future teachers have the first opportunity to experience and learn in professional and active environments. In Europe, initial teacher education has been gradually influenced by international developments such the creation of the European Higher Education Area and with the changes affecting universities across Europe following the Bologna process. An important change is that initial teacher training has become a master level formation in many countries.

In terms of models of implementing initial teacher training, the European reality is so diverse that it is difficult to include all the particularities of all universities involved in teacher training programs in this analysis. Still, according to European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice (2013), it is possible to identify some main findings when researching about initial teacher training programs across Europe:

- The prevailing qualification for basic school teachers seems to be the bachelor degree; for secondary school teachers the qualification is a master degree; in some countries both levels require a master degree.
- Initial teacher training programs last between four and six years.
- Two main models of initial teacher training can be identified: The concurrent model and the consecutive model.
- In the concurrent model student teachers are involved in specific teacher education right from the start of their higher education program while in the consecutive model students' teacher education comes after they complete a scientific degree.
- In some countries the two models coexist.
- In a minority of countries scientific BA gives access to the teaching profession (without teacher training).

Trying to better understand how initial teacher training happens in European countries the following tables illustrate the several routes of the process in different European countries (adapted from European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2015).

Table 2. BA and Total Duration (in years) of Initial Teacher Education for Work in Lower Secondary Education of some European Countries

| Model of Initial Teacher Training | Countries | Years of Duration |
|-----------------------------------|--|-------------------|
| BA (Concurrent model) | Belgium – Denmark – Greece – The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia - Turkey | 4; Belgium (3) |
| BA (Consecutive model) | Cyprus | 5 |
| BA (Both Models) | Bulgaria – Ireland – Latvia- Lithuania – Malta Romania- United Kingdom- Montenegro - Norway | 3, 4 |

It is possible to apprehend that in countries where initial teacher training is a BA formation, the majority of the countries have two possible routes for students to acquire this qualification: Either by completing a BA in the scientific/educational area or by including in the BA a specific training that gives access to the teaching profession. In the other countries where initial teacher training is a BA there is only one route to do it.

Table 3. MA and Total Duration (in years) of Initial Teacher Education for Work in Lower Secondary Education of some European Countries

| Model of Initial Teacher Training | Countries | Years of Duration |
|-----------------------------------|---|---------------------|
| MA (Concurrent model) | Check Republic - Serbia - Germany | 5 |
| MA (Consecutive model) | Estonia – Spain- France - Italy – Luxembourg - Portugal | 5, 6 Luxembourg (7) |
| MA (Both Models) | Croatia - Hungary- Poland- Slovenia - Finland- Iceland | 5, 6 |

In countries where initial teacher training is equivalent to a master level, European countries present a similar educational route of 5 to 6 years and students may complete an MA already in educational training, complete a BA and then enter an MA in the educational area, or choose between the two routes. There is the case of Luxembourg where the training takes 7 years to complete. There are still some countries where initial teacher training may correspond to a BA or MA qualification (it is the case of Netherlands and Austria, the BA route being the main model).

It would be very interesting to analyze all these different routes but our purpose is to understand how initial teacher training is organized at national level. The fact is that the educational policy in many

countries is a centralized one but in many others it is decentralized, and of course these differences are also present in the models of teacher training.

It is possible to conclude that in spite of some European common policies in terms of higher education, they have not led to uniformity in terms of initial teacher training models. In 15 countries the minimum level to enter the teaching profession (mainly in secondary level) is a MA degree while in 15 countries BA holders can enter the profession (even at secondary level).

In terms of contents the situation is different as it is at this level that it is possible to realize the influence of international guidelines in terms of what education must be and what teachers should be able to do. The initial teacher education programs in European countries show similarities as demonstrated by the inclusion of 3 basic components in all programs (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2015):

- Content - It is essential that prospective teachers have sufficient academic knowledge of the scientific subject.
- Theory of teaching (pedagogy) - Trainee teachers need to be theoretically prepared in terms of didactics and pedagogy but also methods of teaching and learning theories as well as formation in class management, group teaching and other educational knowledge.
- Practice – To be involved in real schools and classes is a very important part of the process of initial teacher training; being in contact with teaching and learning environments since the beginning of the training means concrete experience in real classes, including learning how to handle real issues inherent in teaching and class management; practical experience involves school and classroom observation, shared teaching under the guidance of an experienced teacher and the first teaching experiences;

In spite of this, the fact still remains that in some European countries teachers may enter the profession without completing an initial teacher training program. This reality has to do with the tradition in initial teacher training programs in some countries while in others a scientific qualification is enough to enter the teaching profession as demonstrated above.

Adding to the key components in initial teacher training programs there are also a number of core competency requirements that may be identified in training programs and that teachers are required to develop. These are outlined below (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2013):

- Sound knowledge frameworks (e.g. about school curricula, education theories, assessment), supported by effective knowledge management strategies.
- A deep knowledge of how to teach specific subjects, connected with digital competencies and students' learning.
- Classroom teaching/management skills and strategies.
- Interpersonal, reflective and research skills, for cooperative work in schools as professional communities of practice.
- Critical attitudes towards their own professional actions, based on sources of different kinds – students' outcomes, theory and professional dialogue – to engage in innovation.
- Positive attitudes to continuous professional development, collaboration, diversity and inclusion.
- The capability of adapting plans and practices to contexts and students' needs.

We have tried to demonstrate that in spite of national differences and approaches in terms of initial teacher programs there is clearly a tendency in terms of the role of the teacher considering the kind of competencies he or she must possess from the early stages of their training. In European countries where initial teacher training is still a BA degree educational reform is undergoing in terms of adding some pedagogical formation (that is the case of Flemish Belgium), attending a formal induction, a mentoring program or even in school placements (professional training).

The important conclusion is that being a teacher is no longer being a subject area specialist. Even in countries where there is no formal teacher education or at least it is not a centralized policy, schools manage to organize in terms of assuring some kind of training aiming at improving teachers' qualifications and competencies. This is certainly a challenge imposed by the need to reduce the gap between school activities and societal demands and it represents a change in the role teachers are being prepared to play as educators in demanding times.

5. Final remarks: The global identity in initial teacher training

There is a process of integration happening in the field of education as it was demonstrated. This integration results from the fact that the future education in particular is developing within a global framework. This globalization of education is related to the need to shape a viable workforce capable of competing in an increasingly competitive and global economy (Kumar, 2013) and teacher education is part of this imperative in terms of assuring the training of a future workforce.

One of the most significant impacts of globalization in education was the need to prepare teachers for new roles in schools. These new roles are set by international organizations such as UNESCO and OECD as they try to shape a global vision in terms of the needs of all nations in the world. This fact is also a clear example of this process of integration of different global issues.

According to Harper (2009) it is important to reflect on the effects of globalization on formal education. These effects are of different nature and impact - an increase in the diversity of classrooms, the role of technology in the classroom and school work, the changing nature of teachers' work, just to mention a few. As a consequence the work of the teacher is now incorporating recommendations of a global dimension in order to meet all these challenges. And of course, these recommendations have influenced teacher training programs in general and initial teacher training in particular.

We have shown that being a teacher in the 21st century, as defined by UNESCO, includes several dimensions that have changed the role of teachers in school and society. The 21st century teacher has a global identity and teacher training has to be able to work towards new societal challenges.

How nations are implementing these international recommendations in their national policies happens in different ways. We focused in the case of some European countries and tried to understand how initial teacher training is happening in recent years and how it translates into this new teacher identity. Both in models and content of initial training programs these countries have shown important similarities. Many countries where initial teacher training is now an MA have evolved from a BA level.

Initial teacher training is a university centered process in the majority of European countries but there are some challenges that need to be addressed and many problems can be identified within national contexts resulting from national interpretation of common European policies. It is likely that the process of integration that is happening in higher education will tend to standardize models of teacher training across Europe.

In terms of programs' content, it was easier to identify common views on what initial teacher training should include: Clearly, initial teacher training now includes subject areas, methodologies, pedagogical aspects and teaching practice and supervision. Shaping teachers for the 21st century seems to be a European concern as current programs reflect the motivation to contribute to the changing role of the teachers and they also incorporate this global identity of the teaching profession.

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