Influence of a Tempus Project DOIT on University Research and Development

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Introduction

There are challenges involved in implementing any international program for curriculum reform in higher educational institutions (HEI) since there are different stages connected to this process. The stages of curriculum reform include defining the areas of reform, designing the curriculum, leveraging it within the participating institutions, and receiving the top-down acceptance of the reform. There are also several processes involved in the stage of implementing the curriculum, which includes recruiting and training of the faculty, the actual teaching, and accessing the impact or learning outcomes of the curriculum on the students.

This research relates to the design, development and institutional acceptance of a program for curriculum reform aimed to promote multicultural education and cultural diversity in Georgian HEIs. It will review the literature on the processes that support and hinder curriculum reform. Following the literature review, a case study is then analyzed that examines the processes and direction of curriculum reform for multicultural education that is being implemented for these stages in one Georgian HEI.

Theoretical Background

Researchers have analyzed processes that contribute and hinder the success of international projects relating to curriculum reform. Most researchers have emphasized the importance of a shared vision among key stakeholders of the partnership (Aaltonen et al. 2008; Eskerod & Jepsen 2013; and Lavagnon el al. 2010). Fullan (2001) further states that it is vital to the long-term success of change that this shared vision has a common moral purpose and leadership that is fully committed. Research has also shown that when the key stakeholders and team are not committed to the program's vision that these programs have not succeeded (Lim & Zain 1999). Pinto & Slevin (1988), and more recently Diallo & Thuillier (2004) and Lavangnon et al. (2012), also assert that the

involvement of key stakeholders should be through all stages: conceptualization, development, implementation, assessment of impact, and sustainability.

The inclusion of faculty in the process of implementing curriculum change in universities has also been highlighted to be important in numerous studies (e.g., Sng 2008; Rowley et al. 1997, and Eckel 1999). Penual (2007) adds that for successful curriculum reform to occur, there needs to be a structure of ongoing support and training of the faculty.

In their research on Australian curriculum reform programs, DeHarpe and Radloff (2003) list a series of stages that are central for success: sharing of the vision of the program with the faculty and enabling their feedback, and active involvement by key stakeholders. They also emphasize the importance of training and continued support of the staff. They propose that ongoing communication to assess goals, progress, and outcomes are vital for the success of the program.

Briere and Proulx (2013) maintain that a collaborative and inclusive work structure for the planning stages combined with the commitment of the key stakeholders in the institutions have a positive impact on the success of the program beyond the conceptualization stage. Moreover they assert that a key factor for success of curriculum reform programs includes competent management and communication skills of the project leader.

Sofer (2011) discusses in detail the importance of the leadership and communication among the partners in implementing international initiatives based on curriculum reform and stresses the importance of:

> Leaders who are committed to the concept…and make decisions based on what is best for the program as a whole; leaders who provide clear instructions for work and establish reasonable but exact deadlines; leaders who are visible and available to answer questions efficiently, quickly and through a variety of channels…and the establishment of a communication system that is open and transparent which enables the sharing of knowledge and ideas were shown to be crucial for successful international collaboration (2011, pp. 185-186).

In summary from the brief theoretical discussion above, successful curriculum reform is determined by multifaceted processes related to different stages of the program. In all stages, involved support of key stakeholders, good leadership, and communication are crucial. In the conception stage, it is important to ensure that the vision and goals of curriculum reform are shared and communicated to all important members of the HEI, including the faculty. In the process of development of the program, open communication, inclusive participation, and flexibility are keys to success in the development of a culture of trust and collaboration among the partners and faculty. Good leadership, management, planning, training and support are the key factors that enable the curriculum to be implemented.

Background

In August 2012 the European Commission's selection of TEMPUS (Trans-European Mobility Scheme for University Studies) IV grant applications was published. The aim of these TEMPUS programs is to support joint projects and the exchange and sharing of knowledge among professionals that contribute to the development of higher education between HEI of European member countries and their partner countries in Central Asia, North Africa and the Middle East (McCabe, Ruffio & Heinamaki 2011; EACEA 35/2012, pp.14-15).

One of the programs selected in August 2012 was an Israeli TEMPUS initiative of Gordon Academic College of Education (GCE) titled Development of an International Model for Curricular Reform in Multicultural Education and Cultural Diversity Training (DOIT). DOIT unites faculty of 21 different HEI and non-government organizations (NGO) in 7 different countries. Israeli and Georgian HEIs are the central focus and beneficiaries of DOIT's program of curricular reform. DOIT's consortium also includes HEIs from the European Union countries of England, Germany, Austria, the Netherlands. and one Estonian NGO.   Six student unions from the Israeli and Georgian HEIs are also members of DOIT's consortium.

Sokhumi State University (SSU), one of the Georgian HEI's members of DOIT, is the focus of this case study. SSU was founded in 1932 in the Western region of Abkhazia, in Sokhumi. It first functioned as the State Pedagogical Institute training students to be teachers. In 1978 Sokhumi Pedagogical Institute was renamed as Sokhumi State University (SSU) and the number of faculties and academic departments increased. In 1993, due to the military invasion of Soviet Russia, SSU was relocated to Tbilisi and became the Sokhumi branch of Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University. In 2007 the Georgian government decided to give SSU back its former name: Sokhumi State University.

In 2013, SSU offers bachelor's degrees in twenty-seven disciplines and master's degrees in twenty-one disciplines. SSU also has eleven doctoral degree programs. It continues to be a university that trains teachers on the BA and MA levels. In 2012-2013, the Faculty of Education includes 290 students and thirty faculty ranging from the rank of full professors to lecturers. The faculty and student body of SSU include members from a variety of ethnic groups, including Georgian, Abkhazian, Armenian, and Azerbaijani. This case study focuses on this faculty and their relation to DOIT's curriculum reform program.

Methodology

A case study approach is the methodology used in this research in which the processes involved in the conception, development, planning, and accepted program for curriculum reform for Sokhumi State University is examined.

Case studies have historically have been used by anthropological ethnographic work for almost a century (e.g., Boas 1920; and Malinowski 1922; 1961) as well as in other disciplines (e.g., medicine, law, and political science). Creswell (2007, p.73) views case

study research as applying a qualitative approach to the study of a specific topic through one or more examples (cases) within a specific setting. There are different types of case studies. The one used in this study is the single instrumental case study in which the researchers are selecting a theoretical issue (in our case, the conception, development, and implementation plan for curriculum reform) and selects one bounded case to illustrate this issue (Ibid.,74). Following Yin's (2003) analytic strategy for analysis, the approach taken in our research will identify theoretical issues that are interwoven in the case study described.

This case study process is described by the DOIT faculty of SSU who participated from the very first stages of the program. They documented the different stages of curriculum reform, from the conceptualization stages, development stages, planning for implementation stages, and approval process of the Ministry of Education of Georgia. In addition, interviews of SSU's key stakeholders were done by DOIT's SSU team over the period from December 2011 through July 2013. The interviews were done in the Georgian language and were translated into English using the translation method that focused on meaning over word for word translation.

CASE STUDY Part 1: SSU Joining the DOIT Consortium--The Shared Vision

In December 2011, the coordinator of DOIT from Israel's GCE made a trip to Tbilisi, Georgia to participate in a conference and recruit Georgian universities into DOIT's consortium. The coordinator worked in close collaboration with the National Tempus Representative of Georgia who recommended Georgian universities that she felt would both benefit from, and be able to contribute to DOIT's program. One of the recommended universities was SSU. SSU's Dean of the Faculty of Education and several members of her faculty met with DOIT's coordinator to discuss DOIT's main aims and objectives for promoting multicultural education and cultural diversity in academic teacher-training programs. As SSU is one of the only HEIs in Georgia that specializes in Georgian-Abkhazian cultural relations and has as an educational mission to prepare future teachers for working in multiethnic regions such as Abkhazia, DOIT's aims of creating curricular reform in multicultural education for teacher training was a vision that the faculty and administration of SSU could share. Moreover, since Georgia's Ministry of Education has signed the Bologna Agreement, joining an international consortium on this topic fit nicely with the vision and goals of SSU. The Rector of SSU explained:

> One of the missions of SSU is to implement the Bologna Agreement and join international collaboration with other universities…participating in the European Commission TEMPUS Program of DOIT…that aims to promote multicultural education and the teaching of cultural diversity… advancing our ongoing process of higher educational reforms in SSU.

Thus, as Aaltonen et al. (2008), Lavangnon et al. (2010) and most recently Fullan (2001) have asserted, the sharing of a common moral purpose and shared vision between DOIT's

objectives and SSU's educational mission as expressed by the Rector, lays the foundation for successful collaboration and development. The sharing of vision of training future teachers in multicultural education and competencies was expressed more fully by SSU's Dean who expressed the importance of promoting the values of mutual respect, understanding, and responsibility; and the principles of equality and democracy in their teacher-training programs. SSU faculty believe that all of their students should be not only knowledgeable of Georgian cultural diversity, but also gain the pedagogical tools to promote important democratic values for Georgian's pluralistic society (Samniashvili 2008). Moreover, the Dean of the Faculty of Education believes that SSU students need to acquire positive attitudes and pedagogical tools towards multicultural education, explaining that:

> Sokhumi State University aims at preparing their graduates with modern pedagogical methodology as well as promoting high moral responsibility that is important for our participation in the global society…we view that our future teachers need to be trained in multicultural education…and receive the pedagogical tools to teach in culturally diverse classrooms.

Similar to DOIT's program's vision, SSU's vision for teacher-training is based on the importance of their students of education gaining intercultural competencies that can provide children with an open attitude towards diversity. Their view is that one of the roles of teachers is in nurturing their pupils to appreciate their own cultural background as well as the cultural background of others. As such, SSU sees that one of their mission goals in teacher training is that their students, as future teachers, need to acquire knowledge about cultures and the appreciation of diversity, to develop critical thinking, and to promote the rights for equality and respect for all children in their classrooms.

The Head of Quality Assurance Services at SSU explained:

> After the acquisition of intercultural competencies, future teachers will be familiar with cultural diversity in [our] society….[Through our courses]…they will develop their critical thinking, be advocates of the protection of children's and adults' rights in multiethnic surroundings.

Fitting very closely with DOIT's view of the competencies of teachers in the 21st century, the SSU teacher-training program, as summarized by their Dean of Education and by Samniashvili (2008), believe that *teachers and future teachers must be trained to develop*:

- Interpersonal competence, that includes attitudes and personal beliefs in the appreciation of the cultural diversity of all pupils in their classrooms;
- Awareness of their own professional and personal behavior towards different cultures and children with different cultural backgrounds;
- Pedagogical competencies that include teaching skills and tools that enable pupils in their classrooms to respect one another and appreciate each other's cultures;
- Knowledge of the different cultural groups of Georgia and different didactic models of how to teach about the different groups;

- Collaboration competence within the schools that promotes cooperation between teachers in order to share challenges and solutions to problems that may occur in multicultural classroom situations;
- Intercultural communication competencies which enable teachers to communicate with the parents of all of their pupils as well as with organizations that represent Georgian minority groups.

The shared vision of DOIT's program to promote multicultural education in teacher training and SSU's mission for teacher training as expressed above, complement one another, not only in content and specific aims, but most importantly in regards to the "moral purpose" of the program which Fullan (2001) sees as critical in leading change in society.

Another objective of DOIT which is shared by SSU faculty is the aim to "foster the sharing of knowledge relating to the processes of multicultural education through international cooperation that enhances mutual understanding between professionals involved in education" (Sofer 2012, p.92). The Rector as well as the Dean of the Faculty of Education of SSU explained that SSU has an important policy of increasing institutional cooperation with other universities. This policy coheres with the general process of reform and modernization of HEI of partner countries of the European Union which the Ministry of Education in Georgia supports. Thus, joining DOIT's consortium and program for curriculum reform and modernization of their bachelor's and master's degree programs complements the framework of the modernization of HEI in Georgia and is connected very closely with the policy principles guiding academic development for SSU.

After several discussions and exchanges of ideas, the coordinator of DOIT was willing to accept SSU into the consortium of DOIT. The Dean of the Faculty of Education met with other key stakeholders of SSU that included the rector of the college and the heads of different departments in order to present DOIT's program, gain their support, and develop ideas of how their departments may be able to integrate some aspects of DOIT's programs within their curriculum studies.

The importance of communicating with the key administrators of HEI has already been documented in other research such as Eskerod and Jepsen (2013); and deHarpe and Radloff (2003). Moreover it was shown that when this communication did not occur, the programs did not succeed (Lim & Zain 1999). Briere and Proulx (2013) maintain that the importance of good leadership and communication with the administration from the very start of the project is vital to the success of curriculum reform. Thus SSU's internal communication between the Dean of the Faculty of Education with the heads of other departments and the Rector, establishes the foundation for successful collaboration and work within SSU as well as within the DOIT consortium.

Consensus and support was received by the Rector of SSU and other department heads. It was decided that DOIT's program would contribute to the multicultural educational

training of students of education, in several departments on the BA and MA levels. Moreover, the program was seen by the SSU as an opportunity to participate in an international collaborative project with other universities that aim to promote important values (e.g., multicultural education and promoting children and human rights).

The Dean of the Faculty of Education, SSU explained:

> The Faculty of Education of SSU has a serious mission within the DOIT Program in training BA and MA level students in multicultural education. The Faculty of Education has a chance to take part together with other universities in international collaborative projects and enhance the process of preparing skillful future teachers in multicultural education.

On January 26, 2012 a TEMPUS mandate was signed between the Rector SSU and the President of GCE making SSU an official member of DOIT's consortium. A Moodle workstation for the process of writing the TEMPUS application was created in December 2011. . Key stakeholders of each institution in DOIT's team were registered for this workstation so they could observe and/or participate in the application process. Eighty-six members of DOIT's consortium were registered, and could access the workstation. Although not all registered members participated actively in the application process, all could view the discussions that were occurring regarding the development of the application. Transparency and collaboration became a part of the culture of interaction of DOIT's members even before the project was accepted.

CASE STUDY Part 2: Becoming Part of the DOIT Team--Collaborative Work on Designing the Program

During the application stage of DOIT, certain questions or differences in opinions were discussed not only through the forum discussion in DOIT's workstation, but also through Skype meetings. These Skype meetings between the coordinator who was responsible for writing the application and the different members of DOIT, contributed to developing trust, mutual understandings, and reaching the consensus required to complete the application. The SSU team shared in this process by participating in the Moodle workstation to review and comment on the work being done. They also had multiple Skype meetings and discussions with the DOIT coordinator in order to discuss certain aspects of the application and SSU's participation in the project in greater detail.

An associate professor at the Faculty of Humanities, SSU explained:

> Our Skype meetings between the DOIT program coordinator and our SSU team were very useful and productive… they took place regularly. Moreover, we were able to inform the coordinator about the ongoing processes on SSU's part in DOIT's program...Our team members regularly discussed with her such questions regarding implementing the curriculum reform on the BA and MA levels, possibilities for program and syllabi designing…and other topics.

The importance of involving partners and key stakeholders in development of a collaborative project from the first stages onward have been shown by DeHarpe and Radloff (2003) to have positive results in regards to program implementation. Their research emphasizes the importance of open communication and flexibility in successful curriculum reform programs in Australia. Briere and Proulx (2013) also show in their research that international projects that manage to succeed beyond the conceptualization stages were based on inclusive, collaborative work structures. DOIT's coordinator, through structuring the whole application process in an open, transparent, and communicative manner, established a culture of collaboration that SSU's team and other members of DOIT's consortium could support and identify with.

The announcements for selected TEMPUS programs for the fifth call were made in August 2012. DOIT was one of the programs selected with the TEMPUS start date of new projects set from October 15, 2012. The coordinator in communication with the leaders of DOIT in Georgia made plans for the first five-day consortium meeting in Tbilisi that would be held from October 23-27, 2012. Sixty members from DOIT's consortium, including SSU, participated in this first consortium meeting.

At this meeting, eight collaborative working teams (most were international) were established. SSU team joined two of these teams. The Dean of the Faculty of Education, SSU commented:

> SSU is in two working teams of DOIT : 1) Culturally Specific Materials for Georgia and 2) Pedagogical Approaches that Promote Intercultural-Ethnic Understanding in the Classroom. In both teams there are top professionals from the universities of Israel, Georgia and other countries of Europe…

> Together the SSU team members in collaboration with other DOIT team members are creating new syllabi...The collaborative process of exchanging views, sharing experience and knowledge within the working teams is systematic and fruitful and has also contributed to our own teaching and knowledge.

Parallel to SSU's participation in DOIT's working teams, an internal committee was established at SSU consisting of key faculty members from several departments and programs. This committee began the process of reorganization and curriculum development of BA and MA level programs at the Faculty of Education. Thus, educational reform actively began to be planned for SSU based on DOIT's collaborative work which aims to strengthen knowledge and pedagogical tools for promoting multicultural education and children's human rights through teacher training.

The importance of including faculty of the institution in the planned curriculum reform has been documented as being an important criterion that can explain the success of the reform (Sng 2008; Rowley et al. 1997). Thus, while SSU's DOIT team worked in international collaboration, they also worked within their own university to promote DOIT's programs and to decide which ones could best benefit their university.

CASE STUDY Part 3: Developing a Curriculum Reform Plan for SSU

SSU's faculty began designing a program for curriculum reform that would be officially accepted by the Rector's Academic Committee at SSU and the Ministry of Education of Georgia One of SSU's DOIT team members explains:

> Our aim in the university curricula is to introduce techniques and resources of the principles of multicultural education, teaching approaches and methods that we gain from participating in this program and sharing our ideas and knowledge with those in DOIT's partnership.

SSU participated with faculty from four other HEI in Georgia. The Georgian team was working on Culturally Specific Materials for Georgia, and developed several syllabi based on the different expertise of all members of the group. These separate syllabi were then integrated into one common syllabus that was translated into English called *Multiethnic and Multicultural Georgia*. SSU's team prepared several topics on areas of their expertise (e.g., Abkhazia, Shida Kartli, and the overall ethnic composition of modern Georgia).

In the second working team, Pedagogical Approaches that Promote Intercultural-Ethnic Understanding in the Classroom, the SSU team developed two syllabi: *Pedagogical Approaches in the Teaching Process of Culture and Identity*, and *Active Citizenship***.** Both syllabi are based on James Banks five dimensions of multicultural education and include content integration, the knowledge construction process, an equity pedagogy, prejudice reduction, an empowering school culture and social structure (Banks 1993; Banks 2008).

During this period of development work (October 2012-June 2013) SSU began piloting several courses in three different education programs relating to DOIT's objectives of promoting multicultural education and cultural diversity in their teaching programs. The SSU DOIT team, through working closely with heads of different departments, created programs for curriculum reform for promoting multicultural education on the BA and MA level. Some of these programs have already been approved by SSU's Rector's Academic Committee and submitted to the Ministry of Education for their official academic accreditation. On December 28, 2012, the BA programs: Primary Level Teacher Education Program; Inclusive Education Program; Basic and Secondary Level Teacher Education Program were officially approved and accredited.

The chair of the Accreditation Council congratulated SSU's DOIT team on their successful program accreditation. The MA level program in History received program accreditation on the 30th of July, 2013, while the MA level program in Education

Sciences passed the institutional accreditation (authorization) and now undergoing the process for academic accreditation with the Ministry of Education.

Diallo and Thuillier (2004) affirms the importance of the collaborative process and open communication with the faculty. They also assert how important inclusive and cooperative joint work in contributing to the program's success. In the above description, the SSU team succeeded in both the collaborative process of working in international teams and most importantly in bridging between the works of these teams with the needs of their particular university, by maintaining open communication with other key faculty at SSU. What follows below is the actual curriculum reform program that was designed to fit SSU's needs. While all of these programs have been internally approved by SSU's academic committee, some have been accredited by the state and others are still waiting for final accreditation.

CASE STUDY Part 4: Plan for Curriculum Reform for Multicultural Education at SSU

SSU's DOIT program for curriculum reform in multicultural education was for both the BA and MA levels. Below is a brief description of these programs.

BA Degree Program for Curriculum Reform:

In the Faculty of Education a new course, Multicultural Education, will be integrated into the curriculum and made mandatory for teacher education for elementary school grades I-VI. This course aims at introducing students to multicultural education theory and practice and in the modern education system. The course will present the goals, objectives and milestones of multicultural education and also the strategies for the development of intercultural competencies and assessment methods.

BA Minor Program for Curriculum Reform:

A BA minor program in Intercultural Relations is planned for implementation in 2013-14. The curriculum for this minor BA program that is based on DOIT's academic approach to course development in multicultural education and created jointly with other faculty of SSU includes: Intercultural Education, Multiethnic and Multicultural Georgia, Culturally Specific Materials for Georgia Culture and Identity, Active Citizenship.

MA Degree Program for Curriculum Reform:

A new course, Intercultural Relations in Abkhazia: History and Modernity, has been specially developed by the SSU's DOIT team and will be a part of the MA program in History and the MA program in Teaching Methodology. This course is especially relevant as many students come from this conflict region. Another course, Pedagogical

Approaches for Intercultural Education, will also become part of this MA program of Teaching Methodology.

The course, Intercultural Relations in Abkhazia: History and Modernity, is designed to introduce students of both MA programs to the historical basics and modern situation of intercultural relations in the region of Abkhazia. The course topics include of ethnic, cultural, and intercultural relations from a historical perspective in the Abkhazia region, discussing the transformation of intercultural relations of the region to the present period.

For SSU's MA program on Teaching Methodology, an additional course was developed, Pedagogical Approaches for Intercultural Education. This course aims to teach graduate students important pedagogical tools that promote intercultural education, attitudes, and behaviors for the pupils whom they will be teaching.

CASE STUDY Part 5: Activities in SSU that Promote Multicultural Education

DOIT's objectives aim to promote not only curriculum reform, but also to promote the culture of multiculturalism within the spirit of universities as a whole. SSU's DOIT team accomplishes this through their wider activities that promote multicultural educational values throughout the campus. For example, several conference papers were presented by SSU's DOIT team at a Georgian national conference in 2013. The topics of these papers were: *The Challenges and Prospects of the EU Grant Project DOIT*; An Holistic *Approach to Multicultural Education;* and *The Influence of a Tempus Project DOIT on University Research and Development.*

SSU's Head of Scientific Work Coordination Service explained:

> The goal of SSU is to promote multicultural development with different activities, among them are international and local conferences. At the conferences their presentations relate to issues such as the realization of curriculum reform for multicultural education within DOIT programs, holistic approach in multicultural education and more. All these themes were highlighted at the Interdisciplinary Scientific Conference organized by SSU in June, 2013. We view DOIT's programs as significant for us from cultural and historical points of view.

A member of SSU's DOIT team further elaborated:

> As we see, DOIT's influence on our university research and development is actual and relevant. We are sure that effective collaboration with our European and Israeli counterparts of DOIT will contribute to curriculum development strategies in Sokhumi State University. At this stage of implementation of our project, (ten months have passed), we can say for sure--yes, DOIT has had a positive and successful influence on research and development of our university curriculum.

Conclusion: This Is Really the Beginning

The above case study demonstrates how the processes of involvement of key stakeholders, sharing common visions, collaborative work based on transparency and cooperation, leadership, involvement of faculty, and communication contributed to the first stages of an international project aiming at curriculum reform for a specific university that is a part of the team. The curriculum is developed and accepted from the top down and also by the faculty. It will be implemented in the academic year of 2013-14 in several departments at SSU. The real test and challenges lie ahead for DOIT's program of curriculum reform. Faculty who were not involved in the development process need to be trained to teach the newly designed courses, teaching of the new curriculum needs to be assessed and analyzed; and most importantly the impact or learning outcome of the curriculum on the students in particular and the whole university in general needs to be evaluated. These stages will be examined in another research.

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