

## ***Teacher Preparedness for Human Rights Education – Curriculum Assessment in Higher Education Programmes in Albania***

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### **Abstract**

The pre-service training of teachers is the first important stage in the professional journey of the teacher toward his or her main mission. It lays the foundation for professional thinking and provides the new teacher with a set of basic skills to make classroom learning truly effective. Initial teacher training is a key factor in increasing the quality of teaching to improve student outcomes and make school highly successful. The assessment was conducted during the period April - September 2021. The methodology included a detailed review of the study programmes and course syllabuses was conducted in three Education Faculties in Albania. The research methodology used mixed methods involving mainly desk-based research, complemented by interviews with key stakeholders. The study programmes and course syllabuses were analysed using content analysis methods. Content review prioritised university subjects that are the most relevant to EDC/HRE. Curricula alignment in initial teacher's education is not achieved because of different approaches taken by higher education institutions. Programmes for preparation of teachers in higher education institutions involved in the study have different courses with various timeline and specific weight in the study programmes. Based on the analysis of the syllabuses of the reviewed courses the curricular approach is mainly knowledge based and partly, objective and competence based. Student-teachers, university professors and teacher mentors should form a learning triangle which in turn will increase the quality of teaching practice in line with EDC. There is a need to consider and approach EDC/HRE concepts with a more cross-curricular and inter-disciplinary lens.

Keywords: Teacher Preparedness, Education for Human Rights, Higher Education Curricula

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## Introduction

The pre-service training of teachers is the first important stage in the professional journey of the teacher toward his or her main mission. It lays the foundation for professional thinking and provides the new teacher with a set of basic skills to make classroom learning truly effective. Initial teacher training is a key factor in increasing the quality of teaching to improve student outcomes and make school highly successful. Early intervention in the teacher training process employing the EDC/HRE approach is a necessary condition for fulfilling the mission of education as a public good, the wider functioning of society and the advancement of democracy.

During the last decade no similar studies have been carried out in Albania, making this document a baseline study that can be further developed and enriched. The detailed analysis presents a comprehensive review of EDC/HRE integration in higher education curricula in initial teacher education of Teaching Faculties in Tirana, Elbasan and Durrës. The study aims to identify opportunities and challenges that could lead to the alignment of the official curriculum, teaching practices and policy development processes with EDC principles. The review is both descriptive and analytical.

## Methodology

In the first instance, teacher's faculties and their programmes were selected for further analysis. The process covered an online review of all Education/Teaching Faculties in Albania in order to gain possible insight into curricular details with regard to EDC/HRE.

A detailed review of the study programmes and course syllabuses was conducted in three teaching Faculties in Tirana, Elbasan and Durrës. Tirana was chosen as the central biggest university in Albania; Elbasan as the main university that has historically prepared teachers; and Durrës, as one of the most recently established universities. In the second instance, a methodology was developed for analysing pre-service teacher programmes including content, learning objectives, hours of teaching and methods of teaching. The assessment was conducted during the period April - September 2021.

The research methodology aimed to respond to the following main research question: **“Based on the written curricula, does pre-service education prepare teachers to understand and implement EDC/HRE principles in schools?”** The research methodology used mixed methods involving mainly desk-based research, complemented by interviews with key stakeholders. The study programmes and course syllabuses were analysed using content analysis methods. Content review prioritised university subject that are the most relevant to EDC/HRE.

The desk research consisted of a review of previous studies, relevant strategic and legal documents and the written curricula and selected course syllabuses of the three selected faculties. The study of the CoE documents, which provide the required standards for assessing the level of teachers' preparedness but also the vision to strengthening teacher's professional competences, attitudes and practices, served to draw the standards and practices towards which the HE curriculum and learning objectives have been assessed. The assessment is mainly restricted to the field of official written curricula. Delivered and applied curricula were not part of the assessment, even though some information about them was

obtained through interviews. Direct information was collected from 10 interviews with heads of teaching departments and professors in the selected faculties.

There were no serious limitations in conducting the assessment. In order to get access to documents, e-mails, phone calls and face to face meetings with university pedagogues were applied.

## **Results and Discussions**

Study programmes in faculties that prepare teachers have undergone thorough reforms, but yet reviewed curricula are different from each other. Curricula alignment in initial teacher's education is not achieved because of different approaches taken by higher education institutions. Programmes for preparation of teachers in higher education institutions involved in the study have different courses with various timeline and specific weight in the study programmes.

Based on the analysis of the syllabuses of the reviewed courses the curricular approach is mainly knowledge based and partly, objective and competence based. The term "competence" is vaguely and sporadically mentioned. On the whole, there are course objectives expressed in terms of knowledge and some cases, in terms of skills. Competence based curricula that forms the basis of the pre-university education system in Albania, is not the reality in the higher education setting. Universities have not yet reflected into their programmes plans reform issues raised by pre-university education. These issues deal with the concept of key competences in education, learning environments, structure and content of new programmes and courses, planning of teaching based in competences, student assessment, reporting of student's achievements, levels of achievements, etc.

Officially written curricula for both study cycles at the knowledge level is highly relevant to EDC standards and principles. Throughout their years of study student-teachers acquire deep knowledge about democratic competences related to human rights, democracy, citizenship, participation, inclusiveness, diversity, non-violent conflict resolution, critical thinking, etc. Based on the written curricula, at methods level, curriculum design and approach provide abundant information as to how to apply theoretical knowledge into EDC/HRE practice. Despite the differences between universities, written curricula respond to child-centred teaching methodologies, child-centred approach, interactive and inclusive methodologies, all fundamental to EDC/HRE implementation.

The main problems lie in the field of pedagogy (teaching instruction), which, in most general terms, is not in alignment with the EDC standards. Most of the teaching instruction in universities is formal, traditional, with lecturing professors speaking at the podium and students passively listening to them. Lectures that leave students space to engage, reflect and think are rare and this varies largely from one professor to another.

The Professional Practice (Teaching Practicum) needs to be further organised, updated and reformed by establishing a healthy partnership between professors, student-teachers and mentor teachers. Given the importance of practicing knowledge and skills within the EDC/HRE framework, it is of utmost importance to reform and improve this process.

The highest relevance to EDC standards is found in two study cycles: pre-school teaching; and basic education teaching (1-5<sup>th</sup> grade).

Written curricula are designed based on the gender equality principle. Courses present opportunities for discussion on issues such as women's rights, gender roles, gender discrimination, sexism and gender equity. Critical thinking is widely encouraged, and the students are expected to play a significant role at governance and structural level of the decision-making process. The Education Department's approach is widely based upon critical thinking as essential to developing competencies for democratic culture.

Written university curricula respond to contemporary sensitive-debatable issues at local, regional and global levels. Reviewed courses are led by the principles of opening and entering into dialogue with student-teachers on complex debatable issues. They nurture sensitivity towards the local contexts and encouraging flexibility in reactions. They also create opportunities for student-teachers' for personal self-reflection on their own values, and beliefs.

## **Conclusions**

The research which involved a wide range of actors, helped to draw the following conclusions:

- ✓ The development of an academic curriculum compliant with EDC/HRE in Albania is encouraged by a) A continuous demand of pre-university education for qualified teachers with EDC competences; b) Global priorities in education: CoE, UNESCO, etc; c) A gap created in the faculties since the massification of higher education did not respond to the needs of pre-university education.
- ✓ Education faculties pay special attention to the acquisition of the citizenship competency, as a key competency for lifelong learning.
- ✓ Curricular content is conducive to EDC-related policy development.
- ✓ Professional practice is considered as an essential and integrated part of the programme in initial teacher education in Albania.

## **Recommendations**

The unification of curricula should continue and be completed, with special emphasis on its content to better serve the needs of pre-university education. According to the Law on Higher Education in Albania it is necessary that curricula of programmes of the second cycle for the preparation of teachers, maintain unification at national level based on the respective science discipline, at 80%. Successful teaching practice calls for successful teacher mentors. Their role is important. Student-teachers, university professors and teacher mentors should form a learning triangle which in turn will increase the quality of teaching practice in line with EDC. There is a need to consider and approach EDC/HRE concepts with a more cross-curricular and inter-disciplinary lens.

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