

Regional research findings relevant for developing National Qualifications Frameworks for teachers within ATEPIE project

One of the objectives of ATEPIE project is to 'formulate policy proposal and recommendations on building national qualifications framework for teachers through regional cooperation'. One of the overall aims of the project is to 'contribute to the development of evidence based policy making in South east Europe'. Considering this overall aim this paper compiles a number of findings of research conducted in the region that are relevant for the above project objective of developing proposals of national qualification frameworks in the participating countries¹.

The purpose of this paper is to present the findings of the relevant research conducted in the region and provide comments on the relevance of these findings for the work on the national qualifications framework for teachers that could inform the project methodology and guide the work of national teams in the countries participating in the ATEPIE project. The paper draws considerably on three major regional studies concerning teachers and their education:

- 1) *The prospects of teacher education in South-east Europe* edited by professor Pavel Zgaga from the Centre for Education Policy Studies at the University of Ljubljana. This is a cross national survey of pre-service and in-service teacher education conducted in 2006.
- 2) *Tuning Teacher Education in the Western Balkans* is a regional research project carried out by the Centre for Education Policy in 2008, looking into the perceptions of the needed teacher competences by teachers, teacher educators and student teachers in the five ATEPIE countries and the extent to which these competences are represented in teacher education curricula.
- 3) *Teachers for the future - Teacher development for inclusive education in the Western Balkans* is a regional report prepared by the Centre for Education Policy for the European Training Foundation in 2010, analysing issues and challenges in relation to the preparation of teachers for inclusive educational practices. This report is based on the country reports which review relevant policies, initial and continuing teacher education and development in each country based on the data collected in 2009.

In addition to these, the paper draws on other relevant studies from and on the region, such as Lažetić, Komnenović, and Vukasović (2010), Pantić, Wubbels, and Mainhard (2011), Rajović and Radulović (2007), and Vizek-Vidović (2005).

All countries participating in ATEPIE project are covered by the findings of the research conducted in the region presented below. The paper describes the research findings (**in bold**) and comments on their relevance and potential use for the development of the national qualifications frameworks for teachers. Further information about the relevant research can be found in the reports and publications listed in the references at the end of this document.

ATEPIE project defines national qualification frameworks (NQFs) as bringing together 'learning outcomes, profession specific standards, entry standards to the profession and elements of profession related progression'. A concept that could be useful for developing thus understood NQFs is a concept of competence as it underlies these different components such as learning outcomes and standards (see Lažetić *et al.*, 2010). The project also describes NQFs for teachers as implying 'a clear development of quality assurance procedures for teacher education and training providers'. Accordingly, the findings of regional research presented in this paper refer to:

- 1) *Competences (or more specifically for ATEPIE purpose - Teacher competences)*
- 2) *Quality assurance*
- 3) *Teacher education and development*

¹ Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia

1) *Teacher competences*

Teachers, teacher educators and student teachers from the participating countries perceive teacher competence to involve four components in the following order of importance:

- 1 Knowledge of subject matter, pedagogy and curricular areas**
- 2 Dealing with values and child development**
- 3 Self-evaluation and professional development**
- 4 Understanding education system and contributing to its development (*Tuning*)**

This finding could be informative for defining the areas of teacher expertise that comprise the 'real' teacher competence as perceived by education professionals as opposed to formally prescribed competences. It is important to keep in mind what education professionals themselves perceive as teacher competence in order to define NQFs that can foster comprehensive, realistic and effective teacher development. The full list of items is presented in the Appendix C of the *Tuning* publication, and by each group of competences in the Appendix to Pantić, Wubbels & Mainhard (2011).

The fourth component above is perceived by the participants from all levels of education in all countries as significantly lower in importance relative to the other three components. This component included items such as an ability to participate in school development planning or in debates about education priorities at the national level (*Tuning*)

This finding informs about the image of teaching profession spread in the region. Used to their role as classroom professionals operating between children and subjects, teachers do not immediately recognise their role in contributing to systemic developments. Although much dissatisfaction has been expressed about the present state of the education systems in the region, the responsibility for 'fixing' this is seen as being in the hands of an external authority, notably the government, and not as being an integral part of the teaching profession. Setting NQFs for teachers needs to consider the existing and desired roles of teachers in a given system. Are teachers deliverers of centrally prescribed policies, curricula and methods or highly professional co-creators of such policies, curricula and methods?

Teachers would welcome competence-based teacher standards but have an overly narrow concept of the competences that ensure inclusive education. At the same time teacher capacities and willingness to foster social cohesion and inclusion in their classes are in doubt (ETF)

Setting NQFs for teachers also needs to consider the broader aims and policies of education in the countries. For example, inclusive education is a concept adopted in all of the participating countries and incorporated in their various policy documents, laws and by-laws. It would also need to be incorporated in teacher standards if such policies are to be set strongly on the agenda and eventually implemented. Most of the participating countries lack established initial teacher competence-based standards that relate specifically to inclusive approaches to education or to any other teacher standards. Feedback from research into the concept and use of competences to establish teacher standards tended to be positive. However, teachers tended to think that more specific and narrow competences were more useful than the broader range of competences that might actually make greater systemic impact in relation to inclusion (see e.g. list of competences for inclusion on p. 56 of the ETF Regional report). At the same time many countries reported responses from teachers that indicate a lack of awareness and commitment to working inclusively with educationally disadvantaged students and a few even showed outright hostility to including students with non-standard profiles. Some teachers' motivation for change in this respect and in general is in doubt.

In order to systematically promote and implement inclusive education policies such competences would need to be integrated in the NQFs and permeate all other standards of quality teaching and subsequent teacher education and development. An example of how elements relevant to inclusive education can be incorporated into standards for teachers is given on p. 83 of the ETF Regional report.

Teacher isolation is more prevalent than collaboration and potential of whole-school strategies is not sufficiently recognised (ETF)

In the region teaching and learning seem to be perceived as individualistic teacher-class activities rather than as a collaborative school-based activity. There is some limited recognition of the importance of school principals and the insufficient development of leadership skills and collaboration among school staff and the wider school community, as well as insufficiently mutually supportive home-school relationships. Considering the importance of school and wider community environments for teachers' work, especially in relation to education of students from disadvantaged backgrounds, it is essential that NQFs incorporate relational aspects of teacher competence, such as interpersonal and collaborative skills and strategies.

2) Quality assurance

There is little evidence about the implemented policies as teaching and classroom practices are rarely observed (ETF)

Possibly the greatest challenge facing the education systems as a whole and schools in particular is that of ensuring quality classroom practices throughout the entire education system and ensuring that quality subsumes competence and autonomy of teachers. A major task for NQFs would be to propose a referential framework that could serve to assure quality and at the same time leave enough room for teachers and other school professionals to exercise professional judgment and discretion. A step in the right direction could be development of NQFs based on a consultative process with a wide range of stakeholders including teachers and other school staff engaging in setting a broad common frame of reference of quality teaching to which various quality assurance frameworks and subsequent monitoring mechanisms could refer.

Quality assurance systems in education are not effective and lack formative links in general and in relation to teachers' work and development (ETF)

The links between internal and external school evaluation and the evaluation of teachers are unclear or non-existent in most participating countries, nor are the connections between school and teacher evaluation and teacher standards and development clear. This situation precludes a coherent system-wide promotion and implementation of education policies and related desired teaching practices. For this reason it would be important to consider how NQFs for teachers fit into the existing quality assurance frameworks and procedures relevant for teachers, such as national NQFs, teacher standards where they exist, higher education accreditation procedures, institutional quality assurance for pre-service teacher education, schools and continuing professional development programmes, teacher career progression frameworks, conditions of service, and the like.

Quality assurance and accreditation systems for pre- and in-service teacher education programmes and providers are insufficiently developed (ETF)

Quality assurance and accreditation systems for pre-service and in-service providers and programmes are at an early stage of development, as are systems for schools and teachers and teacher competence standards (see issues 19 and 20 in ETF Regional report). However, together they indicate an overall even if still tentative trend towards developing quality assurance and enhancement mechanisms in all the participating countries. In this contexts the work on NQFs could be approached as a way of setting guiding principles for the enhancement of these other quality assurance frameworks and mechanisms including explicit links to how NQFs can guide and support each of the those segments i.e. quality assurance and accreditation systems for pre-service and in-service providers and programmes, systems for schools and teacher evaluation and promotion.

Teacher status and employment conditions unfavourably affect quality recruitment and sustaining teacher motivation (ETF)

Many teachers from the participating countries expressed feelings of resentment about being criticised or being told to respond to policies by changing their practices without being provided with any support system to address these changes and, moreover, with no incentive of value to teachers. If no improvement in teacher job satisfaction and social status is offered, it is unreasonable to expect teachers to change their working habits. Adding more demands whilst providing no significant additional support will only lead to frustration and resistance. Such sentiments are echoed passionately in some of the country reports (see e.g. Macedonia country report, p. 35; and Bosnia and Herzegovina country report, p. 43) and have implications for retaining teachers and for the need to provide relevant professional development opportunities and develop better links between professional development and salary levels and teacher promotion.

This finding bears important relevance for development of NQFs and related quality assurance frameworks. On the one hand, these need to consider the reality in which teachers work and on the other they need to set the requirements for higher quality of teaching and teacher competence. In these contexts teachers need to be encouraged and supported to develop new competences. The gap between the present reality and desired quality of teaching could be closed by pointing to systems of teacher support that would be complementary to the policy proposal on building NQFs for teachers.

3) Teacher education and development

When competences are set as desired outcomes of teacher education they are by and large defined in terms of knowledge, sometimes as skills, rarely as attitudes and almost never refer to values (*Tuning*). Insufficient ethical education as part of teacher preparation has been reported throughout the region (Rajović and Radulović, 2007; Tuning, 2008; Vizek-Vidović, 2005; Zgaga, 2006).

At the same time education professionals rated high the importance of the group of competences referring to values and child-rearing (see the first finding of the *Tuning* project above). While competences relating to subject matter are important and to a large extent are covered by the existing study programmes, what seems to be missing is a focus on educational value of subject knowledge and preparation for practice in concrete educational and institutional settings and broader social contexts. The competences related to understanding education system and contributing to its development are also found to be most rare in teacher preparation curricula (*Tuning*).

These findings point to the necessity of integrating social and moral purposes in the definition of competence, and suggests that teacher formation needs to raise awareness about the profession's normative connotations and prepare teachers to deal with the value-driven aspect of their job. The high evaluation of teachers' moral role also indicates that the narrow view of competence as technical performance is likely to face opposition in the region, as it did elsewhere (Pantić, Wubbels, & Mainhard, 2011).

Views of teacher competences for inclusive education are mixed and sometimes conflicting. At the same time there is a dearth of structured opportunities for developing competences for inclusive education. Pre-service teacher development in the region is found to focus on subject and content rather than on building systemic holistic competences for inclusive education (ETF)

This finding has implications for the teacher preparation and development. The views of teachers, other professionals and parents expressed in the country reports transmit a pervasive sense that inclusive education is not yet totally real to teachers in the countries, in that the concept and the necessary fundamental competences are not well understood or accepted and practised by all teachers, despite the assertions of some to the contrary. Inclusive education is legally not a matter of choice or personal preference for teachers, yet some teachers still view it as such – and even whole schools and the secondary school sector, both academic and vocational. Inclusive education requires real and substantial change from teachers. The implications for teacher development that arise from

discussions of this issue at both pre-service and in-service levels are enormous and complex. Perhaps the clearest message is that current teacher preparation is not coherent with national policies on inclusive education and often does not equip teachers with sufficient confidence and motivation to implement even the limited inclusive approaches of which they are aware.

With most countries lacking given standards in terms of initial teacher competences, pre-service teacher education continues to be focused on disciplinary knowledge rather than on building competences. There is a lack of cross-curricular approaches to equipping teachers with competences for broad inclusive practices. Where inclusion-relevant courses exist they are mostly focused on the education of children with SEN. Values and inclusive education aspects of teacher preparation can not be adequately covered only through explicit focus on these topics in special course units. They need to permeate whole curricula and philosophies underlying teacher education. For NQFs this might mean that these cross-cutting themes need be considered when formulating competences in all areas of teacher expertise.

ICT in teacher education is still in an early phase in most parts of South-east Europe (Zgaga, 2006).

This finding is also relevant for incorporating ICT expertise into NQFs for teachers but bearing in mind the pedagogical uses for which teachers need such expertise, not simply knowledge of ICT in its own right.

Continuing professional development (CPD) is inadequate and poorly coordinated and is not linked to conditions of service (ETF)

A number of systemic deficits have been identified in the present in-service teacher education provision in the region. It is often compulsory but may not be the kind of development that teachers need, the participation does not generally result in promotion or enhanced salaries, leading some teachers to treat it as a worthless exercise. Many teachers do not put what they should have learned into practice, there is a dearth of practical follow-up to in-service teacher education, both to ensure its implementation and to evaluate its impact on teacher practices and on student outcomes, and so on.

The implications for teacher development are substantial. There is a clear need for teachers and national and local authorities to seek ways to enable teachers to benefit optimally from in-service teacher education and CPD and to ensure that these benefits translate into improved learning experiences and outcomes for their students. In-service teacher education is only a possible early part of the more comprehensive and extended CPD which should be ongoing throughout careers. Many of these issues can be addressed in NQFs. For example, they could highlight the need for teachers to become knowledgeable and competent users of research, to learn to undertake practitioner research and collaborative research and to evaluate their in-service teacher education and CPD using research methods.

Vast majority of teacher education institutions in the region are reforming their curricula. More than half of them are active in either planning or developing learning outcomes and competences based curricula. In the process of restructuring their curricula vast majority institutions find the employability of their graduates important and very important and think they need to make their programmes more comparable and compatible with European and international trends (Zgaga, 2006).

In-service teacher education institutions in the region as well think they can improve their provision by making it more comparable and compatible with European and international trends. In the process of developing new in-service teacher education provision institutions most often aim to support teacher in implementing new curricula, using new teaching methods and enhancing their practical competences. Depending and renewing teachers' educational and subject matter knowledge are further on the list (Zgaga, 2006).

These findings hold promise for the potential influence of NQFs as guiding the change of teacher initial and continuing education and professional development programmes. Again, NQFs could include explicit suggestions for support and strengthening pre-service and in-service providers and programmes. Looking at European examples do seem appropriate as this is in line with the institutions' own aspirations.

References:

ETF (European Training Foundation) (2011). Regional Report *Teachers for the future - Teacher development for inclusive education in the Western Balkans* (Pantić, N. Closs, A. and V. Ivošević). [http://www.etf.europa.eu/webatt.nsf/0/9E076CFB736A59AFC125788F0033258C/\\$file/Teachers%20for%20the%20future_web.pdf](http://www.etf.europa.eu/webatt.nsf/0/9E076CFB736A59AFC125788F0033258C/$file/Teachers%20for%20the%20future_web.pdf)

This regional report prepared for the European Training Foundation is based on 7 country reports. Below are the links to the country reports for the countries participating in ATEPIE project:

Bosnia and Herzegovina

[http://www.etf.europa.eu/webatt.nsf/0/C12578310056925BC125772E002B2093/\\$file/NOTE85SB89.pdf](http://www.etf.europa.eu/webatt.nsf/0/C12578310056925BC125772E002B2093/$file/NOTE85SB89.pdf)

Croatia

[http://www.etf.europa.eu/webatt.nsf/0/C12578310056925BC125772E002BD5AB/\\$file/NOTE85SBD6.pdf](http://www.etf.europa.eu/webatt.nsf/0/C12578310056925BC125772E002BD5AB/$file/NOTE85SBD6.pdf)

Macedonia

[http://www.etf.europa.eu/webatt.nsf/0/C12578310056925BC125772E002C131E/\\$file/NOTE85SBET.pdf](http://www.etf.europa.eu/webatt.nsf/0/C12578310056925BC125772E002C131E/$file/NOTE85SBET.pdf)

Montenegro

[http://www.etf.europa.eu/webatt.nsf/0/C12578310056925BC125772E002C7903/\\$file/NOTE85SBHH.pdf](http://www.etf.europa.eu/webatt.nsf/0/C12578310056925BC125772E002C7903/$file/NOTE85SBHH.pdf)

Serbia

[http://www.etf.europa.eu/webatt.nsf/0/C12578310056925BC125772E002CAB00/\\$file/NOTE85SBJV.pdf](http://www.etf.europa.eu/webatt.nsf/0/C12578310056925BC125772E002CAB00/$file/NOTE85SBJV.pdf)

Lažetić, P., Komnenović, B. and M. Vukasović (2010) *National Qualifications Framework*, Centre for Education Policy, Belgrade 2010.

http://www.cep.edu.rs/sites/default/files/izdanja/Nacionalni_okvir_kvalifikacija.pdf

Pantić, N., Wubbels, T., & Mainhard, T. (2011). Teacher Competence as a Basis for Teacher Education: Comparing Views of Teachers and Teacher Educators in Five Western Balkan Countries. *Comparative Education Review*, 55 (2), 165-188.

Rajović, V. and Radulović, L. (2007). Kako nastavnici opažaju svoje inicijalno obrazovanje: na koji način su sticali znanja i razvijali kompetencije. *Nastava i Vaspitanje*, 4, 413–435.

Tuning Teacher Education Curricula in the Western Balkans (2008) Centre for Education Policy Pantić, N. (ed.), Belgrade 2008.

http://www.cep.edu.rs/sites/default/files/izdanja/Usaglasavanje_programa_obrazovanja_nastavnika.pdf

Vizek-Vidović, V. (2005). Cjeloživotno obrazovanje učitelja i nastavnika: višestruke perspective. Zagreb: Institut za društvena istraživanja u Zagrebu.

Zgaga, P. (ed.) 2006. The prospects of teacher education in South-east Europe. Ljubljana: University of Ljubljana. <http://www.pef.uni-lj.si/ceps/knjiznica/doc/the-prospects-of-te-in-see.pdf>