**BOLOGNA PROCESS: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE EDUCATION OF PRESCHOOL TEACHERS**

**Kiril T. Barbareev**

**Abstract**

*Today, in Europe, all preschool teachers working in preschool education and with children from early school age are educated at least to the first level. Institutions that educate teachers follow national guidelines set by the ministries of education or professional bodies, which results with a degree of homogeneity of the programs. But there are countries in which university autonomy has priority and then great disparities can arise among curricula and subject programs and courses as well as modules at universities that educate the same profiles. In the last decade the field of curricula for the education of preschool teachers has witnessed some novelties which are introduced by the Bologna process and which are based on the methodology for the reconstruction of the European higher education area.*

**Key words:** Bologna process, initial education, educators, study programs.

**"The whole secret of the clock lies ​​in the order.   
There is hope to find a model of education   
similar to the clock"**   
Jan Amos Comenius (1592-1670)

Education is a multidisciplinary subject which comprises a series of core disciplines: psychology, philosophy, sociology, applied linguistics, curriculum studies, social and political sciences, social anthropology and history.[[1]](#footnote-1)

This subject is divided into two broad but closely related areas:[[2]](#footnote-2)

**- teacher’s education (including kindergarten teachers),**

**- educational sciences.**

Today, in Europe, all preschool teachers working in preschool education and with children from early school age are educated at least to the **first level**. Institutions that educate teachers follow national guidelines set by the ministries of education or professional bodies, which results with a degree of homogeneity of the programs. But there are also countries in which university autonomy has a priority and in such a case great disparities can arise among the curricula and subject programs and courses, as well as modules at universities educating the same profiles.

In the last decade the field of curricula for the education of preschool teachers has witnessed some novelties which are introduced by the Bologna process and which are based on the methodology for the reconstruction of the European higher education area*.*

The most significant news is the sharpening of the focus on the results of the study programs expressed in **competences** (knowledge, skills, and abilities). This means that a study program for preschool teachers should necessarily state **general (generic) and subject - specific competences**, which, together with **descriptors** (indicators) of levels of study decide on the qualification of a graduate.

Hence, future preschool teachers must acquire a range of competences, including knowledge, values ​​and skills needed to achieve the highest academic standards in their subjects or areas of study program. They should also be aware of the theory and practice of education relevant to the age group they teach, of the national priorities of education, and of the role of preschool teachers as professionals.

**The role and importance of the study program for preschool teachers**

A study program provides information about what knowledge, skills, values ​​and attitudes should be included in the teaching-scientific process and how it should be done. At the same time, a study program emphasizes the need for cooperation at all levels of staff education.

Study programs highlight all educational contents and experiences that society and higher education institution deem valuable and important to be offered to students in the course of the educational process. A study program aims to articulate different goals and contents, learning, and methods of evaluation that are important for the development of an individual and the society.

Thus the reaction of the whole social, scientific and professional community, their interests, debates and comments when they discuss reforms in the educational work or changes to curricula is perfectly normal. These are very sensitive issues.

Therefore it is recommended that the policy of building a study program is based on **solid foundations**, but it should not be a **"fortress"** of the educational system, and changes of programs should be made over an extended period of time for current generations, but there has to be a vision for future generations – for hundreds of thousands of students - and it is quite certain that i and possible failures can cause serious and unpredictable consequences for the society as a whole and for each of its individual members. The essence is to build a **study program** or **curriculum**[[3]](#footnote-3) that will be an instrument and a doctrine for achieving those goals that will primarily be in accordance with man.

**What in fact is a study program? –** “A study program” is a sum of relatively connected teaching subjects or other teaching units (modules and other teaching contents) belonging to one area of study with which a student acquires a qualification enabling him/her to practice some profession or to continue his/her studies.[[4]](#footnote-4)

"Study area" is one of 22 areas defined in ISCED classification of study areas according to UNESCO.[[5]](#footnote-5)

The study program for the education of preschool teachers must be in tune with the dynamics of the European and international education. On the internal plan, the institution which educates preschool teachers should take care of the legal regulations and the specificity of education in their country. At European level, the study program should be aligned and harmonized with the requirements of the **Bologna Declaration[[6]](#footnote-6)** concerning higher education and the principles of the **Lisbon conference[[7]](#footnote-7)** on lifelong learning.

The objectives of the study program for the education of preschool teachers must be specified through the achievements of students and their skills and competences: (1) knowledge (which they learned and understand), (2) practical competences (what they know and can do), i.e. it must move from the so-called **input** - oriented study program (defined by what the professor teaches) to the so-called **output** - oriented program (defined by the skills and competences acquired by students).

The definition of students’ achievements and competences (learning outcomes and competences) as reference points when designing a study program is the primary tool used in order to be involved in the European area of higher education at an equal level.[[8]](#footnote-8)

**The key steps in the process of designing a study program** - the process of designing a study program should follow these main stages:[[9]](#footnote-9)

**Meeting the basic requirements** - (1) Have the social needs of the study program at regional/national/European level been determined? Has this been done based on consultations with the main factors: employers, professionals and professional bodies? (2) Is the study program sufficiently interesting from an academic point of view? (3) Have the common reference points been established?

Are the resources needed for the program available at or (if necessary) outside the (partner) relevant institutions?

**For international undergraduate studies** that are offered by more than one institution - (1) Are the relevant institutions committed? At what foundation: a formal agreement or strategic alliance? (2) Are there sufficient guarantees that the program will be conducted legally in different countries? (3) Is there agreement about designing the duration of the program in such a manner that it will comply with ECTS which is based on student load?

**Table.1. Hierarchy of designing a study program**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **CONTEXT** | **INFLUENCE** |
| **Philosophy of the study program** | **The Bologna process** |
| **National framework** | **European framework of qualifications** |
| **Institutional framework** | **Plan for strategic development** |
| **Subject area** | **Subject standards** |
| **Study program** | **Professional organs, institution organs,**  **program specification** |
| **Module/individual course** | **Descriptors of the level. Anticipated learning outcomes** |
| **Student’s learning** | **Teaching and learning strategies** |

**Duration of studies** - during the last decade education follows a general trend towards internationalization. More than ever before, students are convinced that it is in their interest to study abroad for a certain period. In accordance with the the Sorbonne Declaration*[[10]](#footnote-10)* (1998) and the Bologna Declaration (1999г) that were the decisive factors for introducing a **national credit system in** most countries **ECTS[[11]](#footnote-11)**, a debate about the desirable duration of study programs naturally arose. Thus, Europe has come to a consensus on the following general structure:

**Table 2. *General structures of the duration of a study program***

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Study level** | **Working weeks in a year** | **Working hours (1week-40/42 hours)** | **ECTS per year** | **Total duration of the studies** |
| **First cycle – undergraduate studies** | 34 – 40 | 1400 – 1680 | 60 | 180 -240 ECTS  3 - 4 years |
| **Second cycle – (post) graduate studies** | 46 – 50 | 1500 – 1600 | 60 -75 | 120 -150 ECTS  2 - 2,5 years |

The above table is in accordance with the official length of the academic year of institutions and countries in Europe - beginning and end of an academic year. According to the calculation in the above data, the duration of the holiday during which students are normally expected to continue their work on preparing project tasks, projects, etc.

Most European countries fit within the **34** to **40** **weeks a year**. If we accept that a study/ working week contains **40 to 42 hours**, then the practical number of hours during which a student is expected to work in the course of one academic year ranges from 1400 to 1680 (*an average of 1520 hours per year*). Given that an academic year contains **60 ECTS** credits, one credit then contains about **25 to 30** hours of student load.

There are programs, for example in Great Britain and Ireland, where a normal academic year has **46 do 50** working weeks and students are engaged in the course of the entire calendar year. Such examples are relevant for the programs of the second cycle where **75 ECTS** credits are gained. It should be pointed out that a structure of an academic year containing a greater number of credits than this is undesirable.

The study program for part-time students anticipates **45 ECTS** credits per year; four years of study for part-time students are equal to three years of study for regular studies (full time students).

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**Docent PhD Kiril T. Barbareev**

**University “Goce Delcev” – Stip**

**Faculty of Educational Sciences**

**kiril.barbareev@ugd.edu.mk**

1. **Gonzales, J. and Wagenaar, R**. *Tuning Educational Structures in Europe. II. Universities’ Contribution to the Bologna Process*. Bilbao/Groningen: University of Deusto / University of Groningen, 2005, pp. 75-93. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. ISCED 1997 classification; see: http://www.unesco.org/education/nfsunesco/doc/isced\_1997.htm [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The term *curriculum* (Lat. Curriculum) has different meanings; a lot of languages do not have an appropriate equivalent so the original term is increasingly being used. The term *curriculum* is used in its broader and narrower meaning. The broader meaning relates to the curriculum composition which comprises the following elements: learning goals, learning contents (programs), conditions and manner of implementation of programs and internal evaluation, and of educational achievements. These elements are mutually dependent and therefore they make up the composition. So, for example, the program is implemented in accordance with goals, while care must be taken of internal and external conditions of learning (students’ previous knowledge, skills and motivation), which are affected by evaluation results (Pastuović, 1999). The narrower meaning of the *curriculum* refers to the learning contents that are systematized in the program. *The national curriculum* includes teaching plans (relevant programs) of compulsory education. A curriculum is a set of clearly defined activities in educational work (goals, tasks, contents, organization, methods, techniques, media, strategies, etc.). Its fundamental characteristic is "a **student** *focused on learning*," but precisely articulated (algorithmicize); that is why not all planning and programming can be called – *curriculum*, but only that which meets the methodological requirements, criteria and technology for the development of a curriculum. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Law on Higher Education. Official Gazette of R. Macedonia no.35 dated 14.03.2008.. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. http://www.unesco.org/education/nfsunesco/doc/isced\_1997.htm [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. **Joint Declaration of the Ministers in Europe signed in Bologna on 19 June 1999**. Ministers from 29 European countries signed the Bologna Declaration, whose main objective is: by 2010 to develop a coherent and cohesive European Higher Education Area (ENEA). This was confirmed on 19 May 2001, the first follow-up conference in Prague. On 19.September 2003 Ministers responsible for higher education from 33 European countries met in Berlin in order to review the progress, to determine priorities and new goals in terms of accelerating the realization of ENEA. The next meeting was held in Bergen in May 2005, and since then 45 countries are involved in the process. The Republic of Macedonia became a signatory of the Bologna Declaration in 2003. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Lisbon Declaration was adopted in March 2000, and its strategic goal is that EU becomes the "most competitive and dynamic knowledge based economy in the world, capable of sustaining economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion". The essence of this commitment is education and training at the summits in Stockholm (2001) and Barcelona (2002), which adopted strategic goals and the detailed work program for achieving the Lisbon goal by 2010. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. The rreform of curricula according to Bologna, Prof. PhD Elizabeth Bahtovska, Bologna bulletin (2008). National TEMPUS Office. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. **Setting educational structures in Europe** (TUNING PROJECT), Socrates - Tempus2006

   Adjustment of educational structures in Europe (Tuning Educational Structures in Europe) – a widely known and frequently cited project coordinated by the University Deusto in Bilbao, Spain and the University of Gröningen (the Netherlands). Popularly called the Tuning project it was initiated in 2000; from its start, the project had support from the European Union program Socrates – Erasmus, and in the second phase - Tempus, it managed to include more than 150 universities in Europe with a common goal: "harmonization of educational structures." In the third stage the universities of the Western Balkans are included.

   The joint project of a group of researchers from eight universities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia, managed and coordinated by the Belgrade Center for Educational Policy, is a reference indicator of an array of structural changes that occur and should occur in the area of the curricula of the institutions educating teachers who will later take part in the educational process.

   The goal is to establish a common European area of higher education by the year 2010. This is a very rare project dealing with the curricula of teacher education.

   Since 1999, the most representative expression of the process of Europeanization (which is geopolitically wider than EU) in the context of higher education was initiated by the Bologna process. In fact, it is a response to the "internal" (i.e. European) challenges of the nineties, above all, it is a call to the convergence of different, even incompatible national systems, but simultaneously, a response to the processes of globalization (for example: the issue of competitiveness and attractiveness of higher education globally). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. The Sorbonne Declaration 25 May 1998 highlights the major role of universities in the development of the European cultural dimension. This declaration specifies that the creation of a European area of higher education is crucial to promote mobility of citizens and their employment, as well as for the overall development of the Continent. This declaration initiated reforms in higher education in Europe and it confirms the willingness of governments to act in this direction. European higher education institutions have accepted the challenge and took the leading role in creating a European space in the spirit of the fundamental principles laid down in the charter of Magna Charta Universitatum, Bologna 1988. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. **The European system of transfer and accumulation of credits** (ECTS) is based on a certain number ofprinciples.

    One academic year of a full-time student has an absolute value of 60 credits:

    - 60 credits represent the average load of about 1500 hours, corresponding to approximately 25 students’ working hours per credit. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)