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Practice teaching in Albania/ Perceptions of student teachers

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Purpose of the study

- The purpose of this study is to analyze the education reform in Albania in order to observe the importance and the space that teaching practice (work placement) during university studies displays in the preparation of new teachers.
- In addition, the study aims to bring students' views on the problems encountered during their teaching practice.

Methodology of the study

To bring this study to light, different methods are used:

- Method of secondary data analysis
- Qualitative methods of data collection which mainly were conducted through semi-structured interviews with individuals and focus groups with student teachers aiming to present complete and varied findings.
- The use of qualitative methods in this study aims to analyze the law of pre-university and higher education, as well as an in-depth description of student teachers' perceptions regarding their experience in teaching.

Education Reform in Albania

- The education system in Albania is undergoing constant changes.
- As a post-communist country, Albania is facing challenges.
- The most important issue of these changes lays in the curricular reform.
- Reforms success is closely connected to the teachers' training, especially with their initial training and formation.

Education Reform in Albania

- Various studies have shown that teachers' qualification is one of the most important factors of the school, which has a direct impact and affects students' achievements.
- Orientation towards pedagogical professionalism has replaced the lesson-based teaching by giving more attention and shifting to the formation of teachers' ability so as to develop professional autonomy and to become active promoters of change.
- A reality which is changing, expectations and tasks must be treated with teachers who are gaining new skills.

Education Reform in Albania

- In Albania, there is a kind of perception which is related to the education system in the country where the students are not prepared and equipped adequately with practical knowledge.
- Mostly the study programs that they develop enable them theoretically, making it difficult to put into practice the theories learnt.
- This is noticed, especially in the student teachers'.

Student teacher practice

- Different studies emphasizes the importance of teacher student practice.
- In the report of the European Commission, *Teacher Education and Training in the Western Balkans (2015)*, the section on Albania, the teaching practice is seen as *the least developed component in teacher training programs*.
- According to this report, *in Western Balkan countries, teacher training programs tend to be theoretical, focusing more on subject knowledge than on practical training with teaching techniques that put the student at the center, or in inclusive education*.

Research questions of the study

- How does education reform address the teaching practice of the future teaching students?
- How do students perceive the teaching practice and what are the difficulties they face?
- Does the university prepare students with the adequate knowledge and practical skills needed to handle teaching in practice?

Limitations

- This study has its limitations, especially regarding the use of in-depth interviews and sample taken only at the University of Durres, which hampers the ability to generalize the data.
- Part of the study were only students from elementary teacher programs.

Education system

- Education system has undergone a constant reformation during the recent years.
- There are several legal instruments that either directly or indirectly have affected the education sector.

Some important laws

- *Pre- university law of 2012.*
- *Higher education law of 2015.*
- *Law on Regulated professions in the Republic of Albania (2009) and it was implemented for the first time in 2011;*
- *Regulations for the organization and conduct of professional practice for teaching, a regulated profession (2011), which determined as a necessary stage for the certification of the teachers after having completed one mandatory year of professional training (internship) and pass the State Exam for Teachers.*
- *Pre-University Education Development Strategy 2014-2020.*
- *The laws are changing through different amendments.*

Higher education law (2015)

- According to Higher education law (2015) study programs which form teachers of the same field of study, should have at least 80 percent of the curriculum with similar content.
- But the law doesn't determine the institution of reference and nothing is mentioned regarding student teacher practice.
- Recent research also, has identified that initial teacher training programs do not have the same content.

How does the educational system in Albania work in terms of teachers' preparation?

- Two cycle study programs, Bachelor studies (180 credits) lasting three years and Master studies (120 credits)
- The law obliges teachers to take one year of internship and to take the license exam before being employed as a teacher in the education system.
- What the law does not foresee is the place that the professional practice in these programs should take, as well as the lack of a regulatory document regarding the internship application.

Problems related to student teacher practice

- The relationship between universities and schools during the period of professional practice is not regulated through any regulatory document.
- The supervision of the practice and its assessment is accompanied by problems.
- The mentoring system for the professional practice is vague and almost does not work.
- Initial teacher training programs differ from institution to institution and the curriculum is overloaded.

Student perceptions of the teaching practice

- Both students of bachelor and master programs of elementary teacher programs encountered difficulties in dealing with cases where the pupils with special needs were part of the class.
- They felt insecure about how they should face such situations in the classroom, as in most cases the work is hampered by the lack of support teachers or specialists in the field.
- Another problem related to the difficulties faced by interns which is related to dealing with cases of students who prejudice other students (bullying).

Student perceptions of the teaching practice

- Classroom management is a challenge. According to the interviewed students, this process becomes more difficult especially in cases where there is overcrowding in the number of students, but even when there is no prior planning (diary plan) of lessons.
- Learning in university is more theoretical. **Student response:** *"I do not feel much professionally capable of teaching, as during the university studies we have learned mostly the theoretical aspect, which is what makes it difficult when the practice tasks are being undertaken during the professional practice. There are many more difficulties than I had thought."*
- Inability to use technological tools in teaching.

Conclusions

The issues highlighted in this study, mainly related to:

- difficulties in dealing with high school students,
- classroom management,
- new curricula,
- mentor teachers,
- theoretical-practical approach,
- lack of technological didactic means etc.

should serve as an indicator to improve this process and make it as effective as in the developed EU countries, where we aspire to be part of.

Thank you!



Durrës/ View from the top

