Chapter 9

Initial Teacher Training Challenges in a Context of Educational Reform in Lithuania

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Abstract: The current article comprises a review of the Lithuanian Teacher Training Concept, OECD reviews of school resources and teacher training governmental regulations, and discusses the strengths and challenges of initial teacher training in Lithuania in context of its reform. Specifically, the changes in the teaching competence framework and vision of initial teacher training, and the methods of initial teacher education acquisition and its structure are examined and discussed. Analysis of teaching competences has shown that the priority is given to general skills (reflective practice and research on-the-job) and didactic competences in order to focus prospective teachers on the actual teaching process. Initial teacher training is seen as a foundation for building a teaching career in lifelong learning terms. A mixed model of initial teacher training is expected to provide more opportunities to enter the teaching profession by alternative ways due to an expected lack of teachers. The internship practice in the structure of initial teacher training after graduation is viewed as a means to decreasing young teachers’ dropping-out and ensuring a smooth transfer from university education to professional in-service activity.

Keywords: initial teacher training, teaching competence framework, teacher training model, initial teacher training structure

Introduction

After the 1990s the Lithuanian educational system experienced crucial changes several times. One of the first documents was The General Concept of Lithuanian Education, presented to Parliament in 1992. The Concept was
based on goals, values and relationships germane to the building of a twenty-first century society, and posits four basic principles for Lithuanian education: humanism, democracy, commitment to Lithuanian culture and plurality, and renewal. These principles are still current. The structure of the educational system has also changed. The Law on Education was renewed in 2011.

The demographic situation in Lithuania changed after the 1990s: the number of inhabitants in Lithuania decreased. Changes in society, ICT development, and the establishment of the European Union also influenced changes in education and at the same time, teacher training. Students are changing and new competences are being required from teachers in schools. All the above-mentioned aspects have determined changes in the teacher training curriculum. The aim of this paper is to present the current initial teacher training situation in the context of reform based on documents and a literature review.

**Current socioeconomical and demographical situation**

An analysis of the socio-economic indicators demonstrates that the situation has improved during the last five years (source: Statistics Lithuania). The population in Lithuania decreased by 1,334, while the number of births was almost stable during the last five years (see Figure 1).

![Figure 1. Total number of inhabitants and number of births](source: Statistics Lithuania)

The number of students in pre-school and primary education is almost the same but the number of students in lower secondary and secondary education is decreasing. The total number of teachers also is decreasing (see Figure 2).
The number of students per teacher is one of the highest in Europe – 7–8 pupils per one teacher, although this ratio is less in rural areas and higher in big cities.

One of the biggest challenges in relation to the number of teachers is aging. The average age of teachers is almost 49 years (see Figure 3). The OECD report (Shewbridge et al., 2016) also pays attention to this serious problem in Lithuania.

Most of the teaching staff in Lithuania is female. In low secondary and secondary levels only about 15% of teachers are males, and in pre-school or primary, males consist of less than 5% of the total number of teachers.

The Concept of a Good School was approved in December 2015. It serves as a guideline to schools in their development and improvement of
education quality. The ‘Description of Primary, Lower and Upper Secondary Education Programmes’ document embodies the agreements on education objectives and learning outcomes of the national education community. The implementation of this document will facilitate the systematic development of teachers’ qualifications and ensure the creation of a modern educational environment (Ministry of Education and Science, 2015).

Teacher training system

Institutions of higher education train teachers for early childhood education and care, primary teachers and subject teachers, social teachers, special education teachers, adult education and education management. Pre-school, primary school and subject teachers can work at schools if they have a teachers’ qualification (according to Law, 2009). Teachers in Lithuania are trained by pedagogical-profile and some non-pedagogical-profile universities and colleges. Teachers are trained at colleges (providing non-university study programmes of higher education) and universities (providing basic professional study programmes, Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees and also specialized professional study programmes).

Teacher training in Lithuania follows two models: the concurrent model and the consecutive model. The concurrent model means that all components of the initial teacher training curriculum are combined from the outset, and the consecutive model is when studies in educational subjects, methods of teaching and pedagogical practice in schools enable students to qualify as teachers following their academic studies. Teachers for pre-school and primary education institutions and social pedagogues are trained only under the concurrent model. In Lithuania, the teacher training model has several common curriculum components: studies offering educational programmes, academic studies in subjects and certain disciplines related to school education programmes, subject or integrated study course methodology and pedagogical/school practice. For the last several years there have been one year non-degree pedagogical studies for persons who have a Bachelor in a particular subject. The studies include two blocks of equal value: academic studies and pedagogical practice.

The project of the new Teacher Training Regulation (2018) includes one more important aspect: after graduation teachers should spend one year at school as a pedagogical traineeship/final ‘on-the-job’ qualifying phase.
The new Teacher Training Concept (renewed version adopted 29th May 2018) includes some important aspects:

– Module of Pedagogical studies 60 ECTS
– In-service practice, at least 30 ECTS
– Recognition of competences (gained through practice and informally)
– 1 year of pedagogical traineeship (obligatory). After graduation teachers should spend one year at school as a pedagogical traineeship/final ‘on-the-job’ qualifying phase
– Teaching staff – at least 30% must be practitioners with at least C1 level of English language proficiency.

**Teacher competence framework**

The recent research conducted by the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) on school resources in Lithuania has drawn a conclusion that initial teacher training in Lithuania is focused mostly on the acquirement of subject-related knowledge and studying the curriculum content, while less attention is given to the process of learning and subject didactics. Moreover, the studying of subjects must include the development of teacher’s general competencies, as well as the ability to evaluate and reflect on his/her own teaching practice and to conduct research at school (Shewbridge et al., 2016).

The Teacher Training Concept specifies that teacher training must provide conditions for the would-be pedagogue to acquire competences that are necessary to fulfill his/her new role of an education organizer, creative educator, developer of opportunities, coach, adviser, partner and mediator between the pupil and various modern information sources. The basic components of the teacher’s competence are general cultural competence, competence in the subject/subjects in which teachers are trained, and professional competence. Teacher training is oriented to the development of competences that the teacher will need in his/her practical work.

Requirements for teachers’ competence are set out in the regulations on teacher training and those on discrete areas of studies and also in the Specifications of Teachers’ Professional Competence.

In order to respond to the OECD advice and the needs of the contemporary Lithuanian school, the new requirements for initial teacher training were introduced by the Ministry of Education and Sciences of
Lithuania. They are focused on enabling teachers to work in teams, involve students with special needs, foster interdisciplinary studies, use technologies, respond to students’ individual needs, reflect on and improve personal professional practice and provide professional counselling for parents. Prospective teachers must achieve a C1 level of English language proficiency, due to the fact that 90% of modern scientific literature is being published in English. Prospective teachers must acquire a comprehensive general, cultural, social, political, economic and law education, communication and cooperation skills, lifelong learning provisions, and change and crisis management skills. Teacher must be able to plan, organize and carry out scientific research in order to identify learning disruptions, evaluate the learning process and plan further educational practice based on research data (Project of the Teacher Training Concept and its Basis, 2016).

The teacher competency framework is focused on the key competencies that teachers are expected to acquire and develop during initial teacher education and professional development. The framework was developed in order to organize initial teacher education, self-evaluation and appraisal of teacher’s professional activities, planning teachers’ professional development and career advancement in a way that could be matched with the Lithuanian qualification framework and provide sufficient guidance for teachers about what ‘good teaching’ means (Shewbridge et al., 2016). Teacher competencies are determined by political, economic, social and cultural development directions in Lithuania: an intelligent and integrated society, competitive economics, and striving for sustainable development. Qualified teachers are supposed to participate in the creation of a new vision of society and its educational system, creating the basis for the enhancement of the state’s welfare, and to educate independent individuals, who will responsibly create their own future, as well as the future of Lithuania and the whole world (Project of the Teacher Training Concept and its Basis, 2016).

The teacher competencies are divided into three groups: 1) general competences; 2) didactical competencies and 3) subject-related competencies (see Table 1). It is noticeable that general and didactical competencies acquisition are prioritized over the subject-related competencies. General teacher competencies are focused on four main aspects: teachers’ personal development and lifelong learning skills, professional communication skills, cultural competence, technologies and information management skills. Didactical competencies pay particular attention to learner’s cognition skills, their individual learning needs, differentiation of teaching instruction, assessment of learners’
progress, teacher’s self-reflection and research-making skills. Subject-related competencies include knowledge and skills of curriculum delivery, self-evaluation of subject-specific knowledge and skills, and defining the areas which need to be trained or improved during professional development.

**Table 1. Description of teacher professional competencies**

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<th>General competencies</th>
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<td>• Personal development and lifelong learning – knowledge and ability to manage one’s own professional career and lifelong learning, based on self-reflection on professional activity, constant updating of knowledge and skills.</td>
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<td>• Cultural competence – knowledge and skills to help to preserve the Lithuanian culture, to develop a sustainable and responsible society, to participate in the processes of transforming society and education by acting actively and openly.</td>
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<td>• New technologies and information management skills – the ability to use modern digital technologies and equipment, information search, preparation of textual and visual information to develop students’ information and visual communication culture, systematic development of their digital literacy.</td>
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<td>• Professional communication – ability to establish and foster relationships with the school community, the public, relevant institutions and organizations, effectively communicating in national and foreign languages.</td>
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<th>Didactical competencies</th>
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<td>• Acknowledgement and understanding of learners’ differences and aptitudes (identification of special needs and abilities) and assistance for learners.</td>
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<td>• Preparation of educational environment, learning content and situations.</td>
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<td>• Implementation and development of the educational curriculum.</td>
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<td>• Assessment of learners’ achievement and progress.</td>
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<td>• Teacher’s professional practice investigation – ability to evaluate and analyze the results of one’s own professional activity, identify and solve problems and improve the quality of educational processes.</td>
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<th>Subject-related competencies</th>
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<td>• Knowledge and skills of delivering the curriculum, which corresponds to modern theories and knowledge in the related field as well as self-assessment, identification of further training in order to upgrade or acquire special skills.</td>
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Sources: OECD Reviews of School Resources, Lithuania, (2016); EVS (2016); Description of teachers’ professional competences, Ministry of Education and Science of Lithuania.

Aiming to interconnect the stages of initial teacher training, the transition from initial training to actual workplace, teachers’ professional development and a coherent system of lifelong learning and experience, the teacher competency framework was divided into four levels of mastership; thus, teachers’ professional growth can be evaluated in accordance with the level of acquired competencies: knowledge, skills, values, views and other
personal features which constitute a particular competence (see Table 2). The levels of professional competencies are interconnected and correspond to the levels of the Lithuanian Qualification Framework (2013).

Table 2. Levels of teacher professional competence

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<th>Level of professional competency Brief description</th>
<th>Corresponding level of Lithuanian Qualification Framework</th>
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<td><strong>I. Beginning and strengthening</strong>&lt;br&gt;Teacher’s knowledge, skills and values meet the basic requirements of teacher formal qualification, acquired through formal or informal studies.</td>
<td>6th level Bachelor’s degree</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>II. Professional growth</strong>&lt;br&gt;Teacher applies constantly renewable knowledge and skills in personal professional practice.</td>
<td>6th level Bachelor’s degree</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>III. Dissemination of experience</strong>&lt;br&gt;Teacher applies complex and modern knowledge and skills and uses them to improve the results of personal and colleagues’ practice.</td>
<td>7th level Master’s degree</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>IV. Evaluation and expertise</strong>&lt;br&gt;Teacher’s knowledge, skills and values provide the opportunity to perform research and analysis, and evaluate and improve personal practice as well as professional practice of colleagues and other educational institutions; to create and implement new methods and solutions to improve educational activity.</td>
<td>8th level Doctor’s degree</td>
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Teachers, regardless of the stage of their professional development, can use the current framework and evaluate the results of their own professional practice, reflect on their own professional achievement and/or plan further career possibilities. Moreover, teachers can assess the level of their professional competency and define the purposes of further qualification improvement and professional development.

The European Commission (2016) makes the following recommendations to the government for ensuring quality in teacher training:

– Additional funds for teachers.
– Support for talented student teachers.
Measures to improve the competencies and qualifications of teaching staff.
Measures to attract graduates to the teaching profession.
Initiatives to support young teachers.

Conclusions

The reform of initial teacher training and teaching qualification acquisition is aimed at accommodating the preparation of prospective teachers to the demographical challenges which Lithuania faces nowadays, and to make it more relevant to today’s student needs by incorporating the results of recent research on the organization of teaching and learning processes. Initial teacher training in Lithuania is aimed at providing conditions for the prospective pedagogue to acquire the competences of a researcher, a creator of educational interactions and innovative curriculums in the context of global changes, and a student advisor, coach and partner.

References


