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The 21ST Century Skills OECD Strategy and Curricular Reform Of Teacher Preparation Faculties in Albania

Abstract

Many nations around the world have undertaken wide-ranging reforms of curriculum, instruction and assessments with the intention of better preparing all children for the higher educational demands of life and work in the 21st century. What are the skills that young people need to be successful in this rapidly changing world, and what competencies do teachers need in turn to teach those skills. This leads to the question what teacher preparation programs are needed to prepare graduates who are ready to teach well in a 21st century classroom. As the world of the 21st century bears little resemblance to that of the 19th century, education curricula and teacher preparation curricula need to be deeply redesigned for the full triad of Knowledge, Skills and Character, and keeping in the forefront the Meta-layer of learning how to learn, interdisciplinarity, personalization etc.
OECD has lastly launched the OECD Skills Strategy responding to this by shifting the focus from a quantitative notion of human capital, measured in years of formal education, to the skills people actually acquire, enhance and nurture over their lifetimes. The curriculum is already overburdened with content, which makes it much harder for students to acquire skills via deep dive into projects. Drawing a parallelism between what is the rationale of the 2012 OECD Skills Strategy and what the Albanian pre-university and university education curriculum is like, the paper attempts to come up with recommendations about the measures to be taken to make Albanian universities and training programs become more responsive to the workforce and the societal needs of today.

Keywords: *Curriculum, Assessment, Skills, Knowledge, Learning-how-to-learn*

1-Introduction

This paper delves into Better Skills, Better Jobs and Better Lives-a Strategic Approach to Skill Policies, a strategic document passed and approved in the ministerial council meeting of 24th of May 2012, where Ministers from OECD countries met under the Chairmanship of the Republic of Turkey and the Vice-Chairmanship of Chile and Poland in Paris under the heading "All on Board: Policies for Inclusive Growth and Jobs" to define the policy strategies needed to support the recovery from the worst financial and economic crisis of our lifetimes, promote inclusive growth and deliver much needed jobs.

The paper is organised into four chapters, the first one addressing the strategic approach to skill policies, the second one unfolding the 21st Century Skills Framework as with regards to curriculum and instruction, teacher professional development,learning environments and assessment, the third chapter deals with the implementation of the better skills strategy in the study case of Albania. It focuses on the obectives of the teacher education reform in Albania of 2010, and based on the findings of a study carried out in the teacher preparation faculties in Albania, by the Institute of Educational Development,addresses the missing skills of Albanian students and how should curriculum reformation be pathed in order for students to be properly qualified in accordance with the 21st century skills OECD Strategy.

The last chapter, An indication of teacher education paths and their implications, expounds upon the scenarios presented in the Green Paper for Teacher Education in Europe, and attempts to find pathways for the reformation of the curriculum of teacher preparation faculties in Albania towards a functional basis.

2-Better Skills, Better Jobs and Better Lives-A Strategy Approach to Skill Policies

This paper delves into Better Skills, Better Jobs and Better Lives-a Strategic Approach to Skill Policies, a strategic document passed and approved in the ministerial council meeting of 24th of May 2012, where Ministers from OECD countries met under the Chairmanship of the Republic of Turkey and the Vice-Chairmanship of Chile and Poland in Paris under the heading "All on Board: Policies for Inclusive Growth and Jobs" to define the policy strategies needed to support the recovery from the worst financial and economic crisis of our lifetimes, promote inclusive growth and deliver much needed jobs. The OECD Skills Strategy, provides for investing in people's skills and education to improve their marketability in the current juncture. As stated in the chairs summary of the meeting:

The OECD Skills Strategy shifts the focus formal education and training or the qualifications/ diplomas attained, to a much broader perspective that includes the skills people acquire, use and maintain. People need both hard and soft skills to succeed in the labour market to contribute to better social outcomes and build more cohesive and tolerant societies. Without adequate investment in skills, countries can no longer compete in an increasingly knowledge-based global society. As Angel Gurria(2012) states in his foreword to Better Skills, Better Jobs, Better Lives:

The OECD Skills Strategy provides an integrated, cross-government strategic framework to help countries understand more about how to invest in skills in a way that will transform

lives and drive economies. In particular, the strategy provides the foundations upon which governments can work effectively with all interested parties – national, local and regional government, employers, employees, and learners – and across all relevant policy areas to:

1. Develop the right skills to respond to the needs of the labour market
2. Ensure that where skills exist they are fully utilised.
3. Tackle unemployment and help young people to gain a foothold in the labour market in a way that makes best use of their skiles.
4. Stimulate the creation of more high-skilled and high value-added jobs to compete more effectively in today's global economy.
5. Exploit linkages across policy fields(Better Skills 2012, Foreword,p.3).

Much is expected from initial education and training systems in the 21st century. State-of-the-art skills in a disipline remain important and innovative and creative people generally have specialised skills in a field of knowledge or a practice.But the dilemma for educators is that routine cognitive skills that involve reproducing subject-matter content – in other words, the skills that are easiest to teach and easiest to test – are also the skills that are easiest to digitise, automate and outsource. As, it comes out in the 21st century skills framework, Education is increasingly expected to develop new ways of thinking, involving creativity, critical thinking, problem-solving and decision-making; new ways of working, including communication and collaboration; new tools for working, including the capacity to recognise and exploit the potential of new technologies; and, the capacity to live in a complex world as active and responsible citizens.

Since skills requirements change and people need to adapt and learn new skills over their working lives to ensure occupational mobility, compulsory education is where people should master foundation skills and where they should develop the general desire and capacity to engage in learning over an entire lifetime. The fact that PISA shows large proportions of students leaving compulsory education with a poor command of these foundation skills demonstrates that these goals are still elusive in many countries.
The recommendations of OECD Better Skills Strategy , as organized into policy levels suggest:

a)Identification of skills and up-dating curricula.
As the nature and structure of employment has changed markedly in recent decades , more highlevel skills are needed than ever before. These changes in skills demand have to be identified, articulated and translated into up-to-date curricula and relevant programmes. Local differences have to be considered, particularly in emerging economies where these differences can be large.

b)Engagement of social partners in designing and delivering curricula and education and training programmes.
Learning in the workplace allows young people to develop "hard" skills on modern equipment, and "soft" skills, such as teamwork, communication and negotiation, through real-world experience.This also smooths the transition from education into the labour market. Participation of the trade union reprezentatives , and prospective employers in university curriculum development , helps to include broader, transferable skills and to ensure that

good-quality training is available to all.

c) Ensuring that education and training programmes are of high quality.
A clear quality-assurance framework that serves both accountability and improvement purposes needs to be set in place on both education and trainign institutions thereby combining internal and external evaluation without imposing an excessive administrative burden.

d) Investing in high-quality early childhood education and initial schooling, for children from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

This helps children start strong in their education careers and first skills beget future skills. Later in life, financial support targeted at disadvantaged students and schools can improve the development of skills. Since individuals with poor skills are unlikely to engage in education and training on their own initiative and tend to go more on social assistance , second-chance options can offer them a way out of the low skills/low income trap.

e) Ensuring that costs are shared
   Governments should design financial incentives and favourable tax policies that encourage individuals and employers to invest in post-compulsory education and training.(OECD,2012, p. 27).

3-The 21st Century Skills Framework

There is a profound need to rethink the significance and applicability of what is taught, and to strike a far better balance between the conceptual and the practical.The Framework for 21st century Skills framework, introduced by the Partnership for 21st century Skills, presents a holistic view of 21st century teaching and learning that combines a focus on 21st century student outcomes(a blending of specific skills, content knowledge, expertise and literacies) with innovative support systems to help students master the multi-dimensional abilities required of them in the 21st century.The graphic represents both 21st century skills student outcomes (as represented by the arches of the rainbow) and 21st century skills support systems (as represented by the pools at the bottom).The elements described below are the critical systems necessary to ensure 21st century readiness for every student. Twenty-first century standards, assessments, curriculum, instruction, professional development and learning environments must be aligned to produce a support system that produces 21st century outcomes for today's students.

21st Century Student Outcomes
and Support Systems
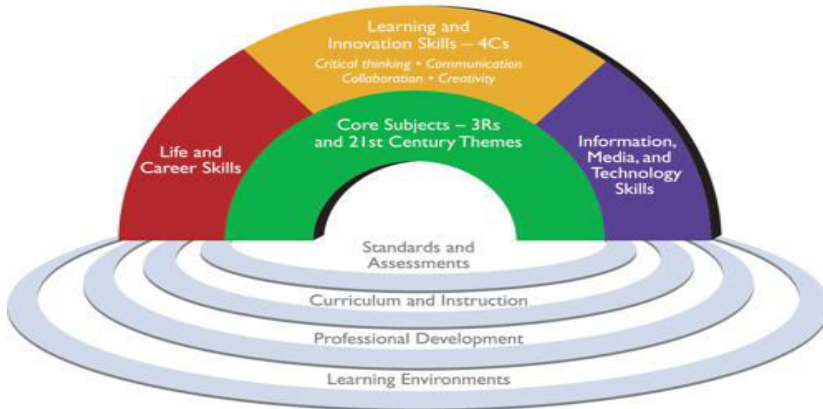
While the graphic represents each element distinctly for descriptive purposes, all the components should be viewed as fully interconnected in the process of 21st century teaching and learning.(Partnership for 21st Century Skills, http://www.p21.org/storage/documents/aacte,retrieved 20.04.2012, p.3). An explanation of the composing elements follows:

21st Century Curriculum and Instruction

21st century Curriculum and Instruction foresees that:

• Schools must move beyond a focus on basic competency in core subjects to promoting understanding of academic content at much higher levels by weaving 21st century interdisciplinary themes into core subjects:Global awareness, Financial, economic, business and entrepreneurial literacy, Civic literacy, Health literacy, Environmental literacy
• Universities must enable innovative learning methods that integrate the use of supportive technologies, inquiry- and problem-based approaches and higher order thinking skills
• Universities, schools and curriculum development agencies must encourage the integration of community resources beyond school walls.

21st Century Professional Development

The 21st century professional development of the teachers foresees that:
• Teachers/university lecturers should seize opportunities for integrating 21st century skills, tools and teaching strategies into their auditorium and classroom practice
• Teachers/university lecturers should strive to balance direct instruction with project-oriented teaching methods
• Teachers/university lecturers should illustrate how a deeper understanding of subject matter can actually enhance problem-solving, critical thinking,communication,collaboration

and creativity

• Teachers/university lecturers cultivate their ability to identify students' particular learning styles, intelligences, strengths and weaknesses

• Teachers/university lecturers develop their abilities to use various strategies (such as formative assessments) to reach diverse students and create environments that support differentiated teaching and learning

• Teachers/university lecturers support the continuous evaluation of students' 21st century skills development

• Teachers/university lecturers encourage knowledge sharing among communities of practitioners, using face-to-face, virtual and blended communications

• Teachers/university lecturers use a scaleable and sustainable model of professional development

21st Century Learning Environments

A 21st century learning environment creates learning practice, human support and physical environments that will support the teaching and learning of 21st century skill outcomes.This kind of environment also:

• Supports professional learning communities that enable educators to collaborate, share best practices and integrate 21st century skills into classroom practice

• Enables students to learn in relevant, real world 21st century contexts (e.g., through project-based or other applied work)

• Allows equitable access to quality learning tools, technologies and resources

• Provides 21st century architectural and interior designs for group, team and individual learning.

• Supports expanded community and international involvement in learning, both face-to-face and online learning

21st Century Assessment

• Supports a balance of assessments, including high-quality standardized testing along with effective classroom formative and summative assessments

• Emphasizes useful feedback on student performance that is embedded into everyday learning

• Requires a balance of technology-enhanced, formative and summative assessments that measure student mastery of 21st century skiles

• Enables development of portfolios of student work that demonstrate mastery of 21st century skills to educators and prospective employers

• Enables a balanced portfolio of measures to assess the educational system's effectiveness at reaching high levels of student competency in 21st century skills.

A successful intertwining of the following variables into the teaching and learning process ensures an embodiment of 21st century skills, content knowledge and expertise, emphasizes deep understanding rather than shallow knowledge, engages students with the real world data, tools, and experts they will encounter in college, on the job, and in life and allows for multiple measures of mastery.

Learning and innovation skills
Learning and innovation skills increasingly are being recognized as those that separate students who are prepared for a more and more complex life and work environments in the 21st century, and those who are not. A focus on creativity, critical thinking, communication and collaboration is essential to prepare students for the future

Information, media and technology skills
People in the 21st century live in a technology and media-suffused environment, marked by various characteristics, including: 1) access to an abundance of information, 2) rapid changes in technology tools, and 3) the ability to collaborate and make individual contributions on an unprecedented scale. To be effective in the 21st century, citizens and workers must be able to exhibit a range of functional and critical thinking skills related to information, media and technology.

Life and career skills
Today's life and work environments require far more than thinking skills and content knowledge. The ability to navigate the complex life and work environments in the globally competitive information age requires students to pay rigorous attention to developing adequate life and career skiles like: flexibility and adaptability, initiative and self-direction, social and cross-cultural skills, productivity and accountability, leadership and responsibility
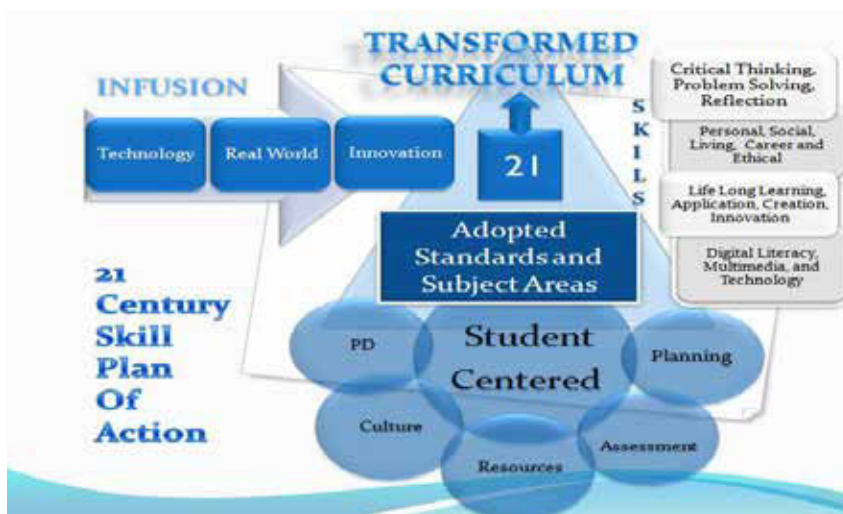
4. An Implemetation of The Better Skills Strategy:The Case of Albania

The quality of education does not depend only on how good the curriculum is, how complete the supporting legislation is, but also on how functional the system is to prepare the students to face the future challenges, to analyze, ponder and communicate in an effective way, and to get involved in lifelong learning. Teacher training issues and concerns are not only new to
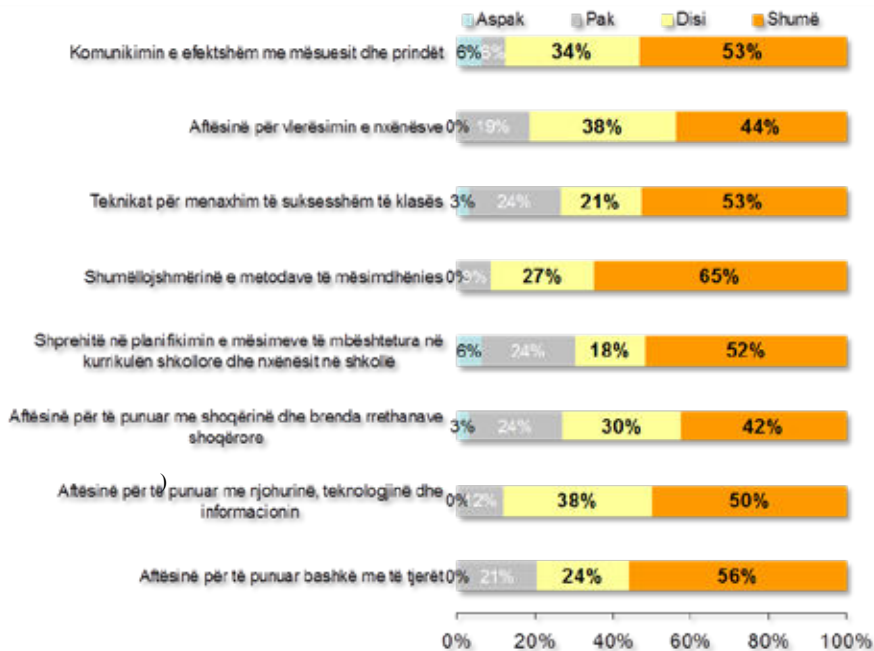
Albania. In most European countries, evolving trends of teacher education have not always had consistent patterns. The teaching role in European countries has faced several challenges. Knowledge-based teaching has become obsolete. The orientation towards pedagogical professionalism has replaced these conceptions, and more focus is being given to building teachers' ability to develop professional autonomy and become pro-active agents of change. Changing reality, expectations and tasks need to be addressed with teachers acquiring new skills.

Three aspects seem to be of the utmost relevance:

  • Teachers are supposed to acquire competence to establish powerful learning environments in order to make high quality education and training a reality.
  • Teachers should be able to transform academic knowledge into teaching and learning situations in order to make provision of a broad knowledge base (cf. the concepts of holistic education, erudition and 'Bildung').
  • Co-operative problem-solving and teamwork seem to be indispensable to meet the challenges of teaching and learning" (Buchberger et al., 2000, p.25).

In the midst of the evolving dynamics of teacher education in Europe, as well as with a strong understanding of the need for change, the teacher education reform in Albania was launched in 2010, although the stage was set a few more years before. It is seen as complying with the strategic development of education in Albania, the European dimension of education, the Lisbon Strategy and the Europe 2020 Strategy. It has a focus on key knowledge-based economy features such as innovation, education, training and lifelong learning and the digital society. For the first time, teacher education faculties have a unified structure and the necessary space to adapt to tradition and capacities. Musai (2010) elaborates on the innovations of the new model:

• introduction of a minor discipline on the second level master studies, which aims at increasing competences of future teachers
• introduction of the subject of research from the first year of bachelor studies
• introduction of the subject of information and communication technology
• institutionalisation of the school's professional practice by having it divided into specific stages suitable for the teachers of elementary or middle high-school levels conclusion of the studies with a research thesis
• establishment of teaching- and learning-excellence centres for equipping students with teaching skills
• introduction of professional competency-based learning and standards-based assessment. (Musai,2010,p.3)

	Aspak	Pak	Disi	Shumë
Komunikimin e efektshëm me mësuesit dhe prindët	6%		34%	53%
Aftësinë për vlerësimin e nxënësve	0%	19%	38%	44%
Teknikat për menaxhim të suksesshëm të klasës	3%	24%	21%	53%
Shumëllojshmërinë e metodave të mësimdhënies	0%		27%	65%
Shprehitë në planifikimin e mësimeve të mbështetura në kurrikulën shkollore dhe nxënësit në shkollë	6%	24%	18%	52%
Aftësinë për të punuar me shoqërinë dhe brenda rrethanave shoqërore	3%	24%	30%	42%
Aftësinë për të punuar me njohurinë, teknologjinë dhe informacionin	0%	12%	38%	50%
Aftësinë për të punuar bashkë me të tjerët	0%	21%	24%	56%

Nevertheless, the reform in teacher education will need a few more years for the results to show. The situation is clearly still fragile and underlying conceptions, typical of a minimum-competency model, interfere with progress.A draft study of the Institute of Educational Development(2012) on the relevance of teacher preparation curricula and methodology to the profile of the prospective teachers expected to teach in a renewed basic education curriculum, highlights the fact that in terms of skills we can recognize:

1.The presence of themes and objectives in the subject syllabi intending to form skills and attitudes in the prospective teachers.

e.g. themes like the implementation of the new teaching methods like team work, project work and use of ICT.

e.g objectives like introducing the students to core skills and attitudes for the teaching and learning activities in the classroom.

Të përvetësojnë artin e komunikimit në klasë dhe format e mënyrat më të suksesshme të motivimit e vlerësimit të nxënësve në matematikë.", "Njohjen e studentëve me elementët bazë të procesit mësimor duke zbuluar lidhjet midis mësimdhënies dhe të nxënit, me tërësinë e metodave të mësimit dhe ecurinë metodike duke vlerësuar rolin e mësuesit dhe nxënësit në to. Pajisjen me mjeshtëri, aftësi, shkathtësi e shprehi që janë thelbësore në zhvillimin e veprimtarive që mësuesi ndërmerr gjatë mësimdhënies në klasë".

2. Frequent occurrence of the use of interactive methodology in the auditorium. More than 65% of the students agree that the program offers them the possibility to use a variety of interactive method, 55% that the program enables them to develop group work skills,53% believe that the programme offers them successful techniques to develop the class management skills, and 50% agree that the programme enables them to make use of ICT.(Graph 1)

3.Frequent use of the traditional teaching methodology with elements of the interactive methodology. 38% of the students confirm that the lecturer gives the lecture and then poses questions for discussion,26% of the students confirm that only the tradicional teacher-centered methodology is used in the classroom settings, while 35% confirm of having their classes basen on entirely interactive methods.

4.Frequent use of the interactive method in the seminars,confirmed by 65% of the students.

5.Frequent use of ICT in the lecturing sessions, confirmed as such by 60% of the students, and rare use of it as confirmed by 40% of the students.

4. An Indication of Teacher Education Paths and Their Implication

The National Education Strategy lists a number of models for teacher education that could be promoted in the system, such as the 'collective-classrooms training model', 'distance-learning' or 'subject-based training model'. At the same time, a comprehensive list of teacher education scenarios is elaborated in 'The Green Paper on Teacher Education in Europe'. Elements of such scenarios are relevant to the case of Albania and can be summarised as follows.

• Establishing coherent and clear goals and tasks for the entire system of teacher education and the systemic relationships of its components and contributions is one scenario. It is necessary to clarify which competences and attitudes prospective teachers should develop during initial teacher education. Initial teacher training standards need to be finalised and approved. However, it is noted that this scenario has several implications in terms of the actions needed to be undertaken and readiness of the current model of teacher education to meet these requirements. Thorough analysis is required regarding teachers' roles, tasks and qualifications, as well as which specific models to adopt for equipping teachers with the proper qualifications needed. The recent attempts to professionalise teaching in Albania all contribute to meeting the requirements of such a scenario.

• A second scenario, as described by the Green Paper, focuses on linking teacher education and the teaching profession through a well developed knowledge base, and by studying the learning processes of students and the design of learning situations. These activities would enhance skills creation within the profession. Therefore, a key intervention includes changing how academic disciplines are introduced, organised and delivered, how they are transformed into human-knowledge structures and into clear teaching, studying and learning realities in classrooms. The need for integrated curricula is a clear and immediate pre-requisite for this to happen. Efforts for reforms need to focus both on the pre-university and university level in order to ensure coherence and continuity.

• Introducing subject-matter didactics which provide the scientific knowledge and empirical practices to be used in effective teaching and learning contexts is another scenario described

in the document. This could lead to a lack of integration, however, and needs very careful consideration before it is adopted. An alternative to subject-matter didactics is by adopting a thematic approach, which has more potential for ensuring integration. The paper suggests that teacher education institutions should engage further in the production and design of scientifically validated practices and educational software that primarily lead to more efficient teaching and learning aids. This should be followed by establishing research-based structures.

• Other scenarios include enabling teachers to act according to context-oriented dynamics, through developing a collaborative problem-solving capacity, by adding a research and development component to teacher education, by building partnerships between institutions of teacher education and schools, by introducing the concept of Professional Development Schools, by better induction into the professional cultures of schools, by aiming at continuous development and systemic conceptions of in-service education, through the diversification of the professional tasks of teachers, by having a greater focus on teacher educators and through accreditation of teacher education programmes.

Currently, there is not enough research- and evaluation-based data to confirm which decisions are the best to take or to revise. It is advisable, in the context of reform implementation, that a careful process analysis and evaluation is carried out with the two-fold purpose of increasing stakeholders' participation and defining which potential path, or elements of it, are needed in our teacher education system. The contribution of educational institution networks in providing reciprocal assistance for the development of such reforms, is crucial.

5-Conclusion

The conclusions to follow are expounded on the basis of the scenarios proposed by the Green Paper on Education, and its application in the Albanian context.

• It is necessary to clarify which competences and attitudes prospective teachers should develop during initial teacher education. Initial teacher training standards need to be finalised and approved. However, it is noted that the first scenario has several implications in terms of the actions needed to be undertaken and readiness of the current model of teacher education to meet these requirements.

• Thorough analysis is required regarding teachers' roles, tasks and qualifications, as well as which specific models to adopt for equipping teachers with the proper qualifications needed.
• A key intervention in accordance with the second scenario includes changing how academic disciplines are introduced, organized and delivered, how they are transformed into human-knowledge structures and into clear teaching, studying and learning realities in classrooms. The need for integrated curricula is a clear and immediate pre-requisite for this to happen.
• Efforts for reforms need to focus both on the pre-university and university level in order to ensure coherence and continuity.
• The Green Paper on Education suggests that teacher education institutions should engage further in the production and design of scientifically validated practices and educational software that primarily lead to more efficient teaching and learning aids. This should be followed by establishing research-based structures.
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