European teacher education policy: recommendations and indicators

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Abstract
International organisations show an increased interest in teachers. Reasons for this are feared future teacher shortages and new challenges meeting teachers.

Concerns about the quality of teachers have been raised as a part of the Lisbon process. Initiatives have been taken to develop policies related to teacher education and to monitor the development.

Discussions have lead to a proposal for a “Common European Principles for Teacher Competences and Qualifications”. Indicators have been developed which focus on teacher supply. To monitor the quality of teachers there is a need to further develop indicators in this field.

Key words: European policy, teacher education, recommendations, monitoring and indicators

1. Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to examine different activities within the European Union related to teachers, teacher education and teacher policy. The paper focuses on elements of teacher policies which can be identified in different documents and how these issues can be monitored at a European level.

2. A growing interest for teachers and teacher education

In recent years international organizations have shown an increased interest in questions related to teachers, teacher education and teacher policy. In 2002, UNESCO and ILO published the report "A statistical profile of the teaching profession" (Siniscalco, 2002)

EURYDICE has published four reports with result from the project "The teaching profession in Europe: Profile, trends and concerns"(Eurydice 2002a; 2002b; 2003; 2004a). Eurydice has also analysed the existence of quality assurance and evaluation practices for teacher education institutions in European countries (Eurydice, 2004b; 2006).

OECD has organised the project "Attracting, Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers" (OECD, 2005). OECD has also undertaken the International Survey of Upper Secondary Schools (OECD, 2004).

In additions to these projects there are also new projects being planned. OECD will organise TALIS - OECD Survey on Teachers, Teaching and Learning. The IEA (International Association for the Evaluation on Education Achievement) is planning a study on teachers
3. Reasons behind an increased interest for teachers and teacher education

Two main reasons for the interest in teachers can be discovered when reading the different reports. There is a concern about future supply of teachers and an interest to focus on the quality of teaching.

3.1. Teacher shortage

According to Eurydice (2002a), 13 countries out of the 31 EU, EEA and Candidate Countries experienced a shortage of teachers in general lower secondary education. OECD (2004) observed that 49% of students in the countries participating in the International Survey of Upper Secondary Schools were in schools which had major difficulties in hiring qualified teachers in computer science/information technology. The OECD study "Attracting, Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers" noted that half of the countries which participated reported "serious concerns about maintaining and adequate supply of good quality teachers" (p. 29, OECD, 2005).

Statistics from Eurydice/Eurostat show that teacher shortages were likely to increase in many countries. “In years to come, one important issue facing educational policies will be that of tackling the replacement of a very large proportion of teachers” (Eurydice/Eurostat, 2000, p.xviii). The report Progress towards the Lisbon Objectives in Education and Training noted the need for “more than one million qualified teachers over the next 10 years” (p. 14, European Commission, 2006).

Recently some reports have indicated that the teacher shortage may not be as drastic as earlier believed. The Swedish National Agency for Higher Education reported that a future shortage will be limited to teachers in early childhood education, while in other areas there may even be a surplus of teachers (Högskoleverket, 2006). An international study on teacher mobility (GHK, in press) came to similar conclusions and noted that only some countries will be faced with a teacher shortage in the coming years.

If these new observations are correct and if the risk for a future shortage has been the only reason for the interest in teachers and teacher education we may see less focus on these issues in the coming years.

3.2. The quality of teaching

A future shortage of teachers has not only raised concerns about future numbers of teachers, but also about the quality of future teachers. OECD has noted: “There are two broad concerns about the supply of teachers. One relates to teacher numbers: ( ...). The other concern is more qualitative, and reflects trends in the composition of the teacher workforce in terms of academic background, gender, knowledge and skills.” (p. 39, OECD, 2005).

In the report “Teachers Matter: Attracting, Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers” OECD noted “that of those variables which are potentially open to policy influence, factors
involving teachers and teaching are the most important influences on student learning” (p. 26, OECD, 2005).

There is also another aspect on this issue. OECD notes that demands on schools have become more complex. Schools have to deal "with different language and students backgrounds, to be sensitive to culture and gender issues, to promote tolerance and social cohesion, to respond effectively to disadvantaged students and students with learning or behavioural problems, to use of new technologies, and to keep pace with rapidly developing fields of knowledge and approaches to student assessment” (p. 97, OECD 2005).

4. Changes in European Education policy

In the EU context education has come to play a more important role than earlier. In the so-called Lisbon process education is recognised as an important factor and through and new tools for working with education has been created.

4.1. The Lisbon process

The Lisbon European Council 2000 decided about a new strategic goal for the next decade: "to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion" (Lisbon European Council: Presidency Conclusions, Paragraph 5).

The Conclusions recommends what to do in order to reach the strategic goal. The conclusions talk about completing the internal market and the application of an appropriate macro-economic policy mix. In addition to traditional economic measures, the need to invest in people is mentioned (Lisbon European Council: Presidency Conclusions, paragraph 5). Under the headline "Education and training for living and working in the knowledge society" a series of measures related to Europe's education and training systems are mentioned. For the first time in the history of EU summits, education and training is described as a major tool for implementing a strategic goal (Fredriksson, 2003).

4.2. The method of open coordination

The method intended to be used to follow and monitor the development is referred to as the method of open co-ordination. The Presidency Conclusions of the Lisbon European Council (paragraph 7) refers to is as the method that, together with existing processes, will be the tools to implement the new strategic goals. In the European Commission's White Paper on European Governance (European Commission, 2001b) the “open method of co-ordination”, is discussed: "It relies on regular monitoring of progress to meet those targets, allowing Member States to compare their efforts and learn from the experience of others. (...) it adds value at a European level where there is little scope for legislative solutions. This is the case, for example, with work at a European level defining future objectives for national education systems." (p. 21)

The Lisbon European Council called on education ministers “to undertake a general reflection on the concrete future objectives of education systems focusing on common
concerns and priorities while respecting national diversity (…) and presenting a broader report to the European Council in the spring in 2001” (Lisbon European Council Presidency Conclusions, paragraph 27). Following this mandate, a report on “the concrete future objectives of education systems” (Council of the European Unions, 2001) was presented to the Stockholm European Council in 2001 and a document entitled "Detailed work programme on the follow-up of the objectives of education and training systems" (Council of the European Unions, 2002) was adopted by the 2002 spring meeting of the European Council in Barcelona.

Ministers of education agreed on three major goals to be achieved by 2010:

- to improve the quality and effectiveness of EU education and training systems;
- to ensure that they are accessible to all;
- to open up education and training to the wider world.

The work programme was structured around these three principal objectives which were broken down into 13 associated objectives. In total 29 indicators were identified related to the objectives. The Council also added five benchmarks (Council of Europe, 2003).

Eight working groups were set up to focus on one or more of the 13 concrete objectives. The tasks of the groups were to find good examples in their respective area and further develop benchmarks and indicators. A Standing Group on Indicators and Benchmarks was also set up to develop indicators and benchmarks to monitor progress (European Commission, 2006).

To follow the implementation of the Education & Training 2010 work programme two Joint Council/Commission Reports (Council of Europe, 2004; 2006) and three staff working paper (European Commission, 2004a; 2005a; 2006) have been published.

5. Initiatives on teacher education in Europe

This interest in education in the EU has also included a concern to improve the quality of teachers in Europe. Some initiatives have supported the development of policies related to teacher education through a European discussion and peer reviewing and others to search for ways to monitor the development.

5.1. Improving teacher education

Already before the programme on concrete future objectives was decided an initiative was taken to create a forum for representatives from the education ministries to come together and discuss teacher education policies. During the Portuguese Presidency 2000 the European Network on Teacher Education Policies (ENTEP) was launched. ENTEP promotes cooperation among European Union Member States regarding their teacher education policies and has since 2000 organised 17 conferences to discuss different subjects related to teacher education (ENTEP, 2006)

As a result of Education & Training 2010 work programme a working group on “Improving the education of trainers and teachers” started to work in September 2002.

The first report of the working group focused on two issues: the changing role of teachers and trends in teacher education policies. The report identified “the changing dimensions in the role of teachers in a knowledge society” (p. 7, European Commission, 2003). It noted that
social changes in society have an impact on education and that schools today have a more diversified intake of students. This confronts teachers with new challenges. In order to meet these challenges a number of competencies have to be developed throughout teachers’ careers. A number of such competencies were listed: promotion of new learning outcomes, restructuring of work in the classroom, work “beyond the classroom”: with the wider community and social partners, integration of ICT in formal learning situations and in all areas of professional practice, growing professionalisation and increased individual responsibility for professional development (p. 9 European Commission, 2003). In the area of teacher education policies the report observed trends in four areas: “Defining a professional profile in order to ensure that teachers acquire the skills to respond to the challenges of their changing role and acquire the appropriate competencies” (p. 11, European Commission, 2003); partnerships between teacher education and schools; research-based teacher education and quality control.

The second report focused among other things on guiding principles for developing a common European framework. The working group identified a number of general principles which should be taken into account in the development of a framework. A common European Framework was described as “references and principles and aimed at supporting and encouraging national policies as well as providing an opportunity for system convergence where appropriate” (p. 7, European Commission, 2004b).

A conference was organised in Brussels on June 20 – 21, 2005 to test the ideas about common European principles for teacher competencies and qualifications. A draft document “Common European Principles for Teacher Competences and Qualifications” was presented. The conference agreed on the proposed recommendation, but suggested some changes. The draft recommendation (European Commission, 2005b) identifies four common principles:

- a well qualified profession - the need that all teachers are graduates from higher education institutions;
- a profession within the context of lifelong learning - that teachers should be supported in order to continue their professional development throughout their careers;
- a mobile profession - that mobility should be a central part of initial and continuing teacher education programmes;
- a profession based on partnership - the need for institutions providing teacher education to work in partnership with school and other relevant institutions (p. 9 – 10, European Commission, 2005b).

The recommendation also identifies three key competences:

- work with others, the ability to work with social inclusion and nurturing the potential of every learner;
- work with knowledge, technology and information, the need to be able to work with a variety of types of knowledge and to build and manage learning environments;
- work with and in society, the ability to contribute to preparing learners to be globally responsible in the roles as EU citizens (p. 10, European Commission, 2005b).

5.2. Monitoring the improvements

In order to know to which extent improvements in teacher education have taken place there is a need to monitor the development.
The European Commission’s reports Progress towards the Lisbon objectives in education and training (European Commission, 2004; 2005; 2006) contains a chapter on teachers. The indicators on teachers used in the progress reports are:

- Age of teachers
- Numbers of young people
- Ratio of pupils to teaching staff

It is obvious that these indicators have been designed to relate to the supply and demand of teachers. They give fairly little information on the development of the quality of teacher education. In the report from the Working Group it is mentioned that there is a need to “measure the quality of teachers” (p. 16, European Commission, 2004b).

The Council Conclusions on new indicators in education and training (European Council, 2005) invited the European Commission to further develop indicators in some areas, among them teachers. The Conclusions also suggested that the possibility to cooperate with OECD should be explored. The European Commission has initiated co-operation with EU member states that will take part in the OECD’s new survey on teachers, teaching and learning to ensure that information on teacher education and professional development are collected (p. 65, European Commission, 2006)

6. Discussion

This section discuss how to monitor teacher education.

6.1. New indicators

In order to get information about the extent to which the education of teachers is improved in Europe it is necessary to find indicators that measure development in teacher education.

One possible indicator is the length of teacher education. Such information can be collected from ministries and is already available from Eurydice in some of the publications (see for example Eurydice, 2002a).

It could be argued that it is not enough to know how long education teachers have, but to which extent they have received the education prescribed for a teaching position. The regulations concerning the education teachers are required to have could be regarded as a kind of minimum standard for teachers established by governments. It is known that far from all persons working as teachers in Europe have the teacher education nationally prescribed. By comparing over time how many of those working as teachers who actually have the prescribed teacher education it would be possible to observe whether the number of qualified teachers is increasing or decreasing.

This indicator does not give information about the relevance of the education that the teachers have received. One way of measuring the quality of teacher education is to ask teachers themselves to which extent they are satisfied with the education they have received. Another way of measuring teachers’ education could be to compare the content of teacher education with the skills and knowledge that could be regarded as crucial for teachers to have.
Teacher education can not only be regarded as initial teacher education, but has to include in-service training and professional development. These terms are perhaps sometimes used as synonyms, but there may also be reasons to make a distinction. Professional development can be regarded as a broader term not only referring to courses, but to all types of measures taken to support the professional development of teachers. It may include induction, peer support, mentoring, development projects, team building and other issues.

Unfortunately, it is difficult to find any kind of statistical information on professional development. According to OECD’s survey on upper secondary schools, teachers' participation in professional development varied from about 29% in Hungary to 84% in Sweden. On average, 48% of the teachers in upper secondary education in the participating countries participated in some type of professional development. Professional development was exemplified in the study as observation visits to other schools, mentoring, peer observations, participation in professional networks, participation in degree programmes (Masters and PhD.), conferences where research is discussed, visits to companies, collaborative research, regular collaboration among colleagues, courses and workshops (OECD, 2004). Eurydice (2003) notes that in-service training is growing in importance and an increased number of European countries are regarding participation in in-service training as compulsory. In about half of the European countries, it is compulsory for teachers to participate. Eurydice also notes (2003) that ICT skills seem to be a priority area in the field of in-service training.

The indicators suggested above are only measuring participation in courses and different activities. In order to know something about the usefulness of these activities the content of the activities themselves has to be analysed. Such analysis would need to relate to the real needs of teachers and their students as well as the extent to which these activities really help teachers to improve their teaching. In a short review of research on the effects of professional development OECD (2005) notes that “there is little evidence about the effects of teachers’ professional development on student outcome” (p. 127).

6.2. Problems to get international comparable indicators

The discussion above points out a number of possible indicators that could be used to follow the development of teacher education and teacher policies in Europe. The problem is that much of the data needed to construct these indicators do not exist in a way that would make them comparable at a European level.

Several of the concepts used in this paper are not always understood in the same way in all European countries. The more specific meaning of the concepts may vary.

Most countries do not collect on regular basis the type of information mentioned above. In order to get this information either agencies for statistical information would have to be convinced to do it or international surveys would need to be initiated. The OECD survey on teachers, teaching and learning that will take place in 2007-08 may provide some of this information.

Finally, the interest for data on teachers and teacher education is not primarily a matter of the teachers, but based on an assumption that better teacher education will lead to better teaching and then better learning. To be able to show this it is not enough to get numbers of qualified
teachers in a country or the percentage of all teachers who participated in professional development. It is necessary to know much more about which teaching practices that lead to the best results and how such teaching practices can be supported through teacher education. A large number of studies have over the years tried to look into this, but the results of this research is not always providing clear answers (OECD 2205a).

References


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