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**CRITICAL REVIEW OF TEACHER EDUCATION IN RUSSIA:
THE ROUTE TO PERFECTION**

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Abstract

Russia's integration into the Bologna process has led to the transition to two-level higher education, which eventually had an adverse impact on the quality of teachers' preparation. Academic programs requiring five years of studies at the specialist degree have undergone considerable changes to fulfil the requirements of four-year education. It in turn led to discrepancy between theory and reality and resulted in the lack of essential teaching practice. Subsequently, newly-qualified teachers were incapable of embarking on their careers and left the profession within their first year at school. The diversity of critical skills identified by various organizations in Russia and abroad signifies the emphasis on a teacher as a lifelong learner. Thus, education policy-makers need to consider those skills and design an appropriate teacher education framework to assist a novice teacher in coping with challenges and demands of the teaching profession. The paper demonstrates the evaluation of existing curricula both for Bachelor and Master Degree on the basis of the credit units per competence with special emphasis paid to credit unit number for teaching practice. The analysis made by the authors will facilitate 4T strategy to be incorporated into educational process smoothly and will assist educational authorities to form the new framework for teacher preparation.

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1. Introduction

The transforming reality influences all spheres of our life and the field of education is no exception. Teaching has become a more complex activity. New challenges require prompt actions to be taken both by the government and educational authorities. Government's massive education reform initiatives that began in Russia in the early 2000s transformed the institutional landscape of higher education. Education policymakers adapting the world's best practices tried to enhance the quality of Russian higher educational institutions (HEIs) while placing more pressure on schools and teachers. Intensification, bureaucratisation, higher accountability and constant scrutiny are just some challenges the teaching profession faces at the moment.

Russia's integration into the Bologna process has led to the transition to a new educational paradigm based on the two-level system of higher education. Bachelor-Master Degree structure is not the only key element of this transition. The introduction of new Educational Standard of the Third Plus Generation based on general-cultural and professional competences paradigm has prompted government and university authorities to observe critically how curricula for each major meet the demand of society (Ismagilova, & Polyakova, 2014). Academic programs requiring five years of studies at the specialist degree have undergone considerable changes to fulfil the requirements of a four-year education. This one-year discrepancy resulted in an increased students' exposure to the theory depriving them of essential teaching practice. Lack of experience apparently resulted in inefficient teaching methods implemented within the classroom by novice teachers as well as probable overestimation of their vocational aptitude to work in this field, as most pre-service teachers seemed unable to deal with the demands of the twenty-first century education.

Along with the urgency to increase hours spent in real classrooms a novice teacher needs various skills to become competent in his/her professional field. Russian Federal State Educational Standard 3+ in teacher education presupposes the following competencies to be necessary for students at Bachelor Degree: teaching competence, communication, civic, social and cultural competences, scientific competence, self- and time management, team-working, physical training, first aid treatment training (FSES, 2016, pp. 6-8). The issue of skills crucial for a twenty-first-century teacher has been in the focus of attention and concern of numerous scholars overseas, including England, the US, Japan, Australia, the European Union and the OECD (Binkley et al., 2012). Digital competence, critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, leadership and entrepreneurship, ethics and social impact act as key drivers of teachers' professional development in foreign countries along with those represented in the Russian list. Notwithstanding the diversity of critical 21st century skills identified by various organizations in Russia and abroad all of them promote the role of a teacher as a life-long learner. A modern school needs a teacher who has his/her own style which is based on the combination of subject content, educational forms and teaching methods (Biktagirova, & Valeeva, 2014). Thus, education policy-makers need to consider these twenty first century skills and design teacher education framework appropriately to assist a novice teacher in coping with challenges and demands of the profession.

With regard to the multidimensional nature of the phenomenon under discussion we should admit that the essential component of teacher education in the 21st century is knowledge: knowledge of the subject matter – *curriculum knowledge*; knowledge of teaching methods and techniques – *pedagogical*

content knowledge; knowledge of children and how they learn, what their needs are – *developmental psychology knowledge*; knowledge of social needs and context – *knowledge for sustainable development*, i.e. understanding of sustainable development phenomenon and having knowledge of making it possible through teaching. The latter form of knowledge is of an utmost importance in the transforming environment. Only by means of educational establishments, through teachers, future generations may learn about the role of the sustainable world. 4T CONCEPT, initiated and launched by the Institute of Psychology and Education of Kazan Federal University (<http://teacher21.kpfu.ru/en/about-sae/>) – transforming learner, transforming education, transforming teacher and, finally, transforming teacher education – is a vigorous solution to the issue, since it integrates all four dimensions to the strategy of 21st century teacher preparation (Valeeva, 2016, p.25).

2. Problem Statement

Novice teachers' career challenges

The quality of teaching has always been a priority issue in policy agendas in Russia and worldwide. The role of a teacher has exceeded the bounds of its traditional framework, as long as the importance of developmental psychology knowledge, the necessity to integrate into the lifelong learning environment and the urgency to satisfy community needs are of primary importance at the moment.

The prestige of teaching career, teachers' knowledge and skills development, teachers' recruitment, selection and employment and, finally, effective teachers' retention in schools are all among the basic concerns in teacher policy (OECD, 2005). We consider teacher preparation of paramount importance since it is the teacher and his/her core competences that make a difference in future generation upbringing.

As a rule, teacher education curriculum incorporates subject matter, pedagogical content knowledge and extensive teaching practice. Unfortunately, the study of Rivkin et al. (2005) indicates that student performance tends to demonstrate downward tendency in the classrooms of first-year teachers. This is mainly due to the transfer of a novice teacher from a university to a real classroom, which creates a plenitude of new challenges that a former undergraduate is unable to overcome. Pedagogical content knowledge or knowledge of teaching methods and techniques doesn't yet ensure that a novice teacher will be able to implement them accordingly. That might result in the growing feeling of being overwhelmed, ineffective and unsupported, which in its turn eventually leads to a decrease in teacher motivation, job satisfaction and general fatigue (Flores, 2017).

The results of the survey conducted by the authors show that novice teachers in Russia face a range of compelling issues in their daily teaching activities. A staggering 73% of teachers claimed the excessive amount of paper workload (including keeping attendance records, checking pupils work, preparing reports, completing the Individualized Education Program documents for a discipline, maintaining the online register) is one of the biggest burdens they were exposed to at the beginning of their teaching career. The second concern outlined by the respondents is the difficulty with classroom management and instruction skills. Approximately 40% admitted that at the university they were given much theory and scarce practice. This in turn provokes another frustration, namely lack of time on lesson planning. 33% confessed they did 'all-nighters' and spent Sundays preparing for the coming week classes

resulting in increased levels of fatigue and burnout. The next in the list is unsupportive environment at the workplace. Many first-year teachers (25%) emphasize the fact that they were neglected by their more experienced colleagues and had difficulties in interacting with them. The striving for collaboration with veteran teachers is obvious due to the fact that novice teachers need a meaningful feedback on their teaching, or lesson planning they fail to get. As a result, they struggle for the first three years and then nearly 10% (Teachers Matter, 2005) quit and go for higher-paying jobs.

There is another concern. Modern learning environment is constantly transforming the image of a typical student. Firstly, teachers are now dealing with newly emerging generation Z possessing a more global way of thinking, being better in multi-tasking, having higher expectations from life, more individual and independent lifestyle (Sungatullina et al., 2016; Tulgan, 2013). Secondly, the internationalization process directly affects the diversity of students' national background as well as their learning styles. Eventually, more and more teachers confess that commonly used teaching techniques are far from being effective. Subject matter knowledge as well as pedagogical content knowledge (proficiency in teaching methodology) doesn't necessarily mean that a novice teacher will ultimately become a high-performing one. Therefore, there is a great necessity in motivating future teachers for a constant professional development, involving hard and soft skills, along with immersion into research.

The concept of enquiring teacher has first emerged in the UK and declared the urgency of integrating a research approach into the teaching profession. The integral responsibility was laid upon the school administration, which in turn had to implement a particular policy encouraging teachers to undertake a systematic enquiry in their classrooms (Menter, 2010). Though Russian educational authorities initiated a series of grants aimed at stimulating teachers for a research, there is still low involvement of school teachers in science. The major argument against integration into research was lack or absence of skills crucial for initiating scientific enquiry (Strokova, 2016).

Thus, it is evident that the Russian Federation needs to launch a series of novice teachers' mentoring and tutoring programs to enhance the first crucial years during the adaptation period at schools and to incorporate and stimulate scientific research into their studies and future careers. Nevertheless, it is also essential to scrutinize the scope of pre-service training that student teachers experience during their tertiary-level education along with significance of science at schools.

3. Research Questions

Outlining the framework of novice teachers' concerns at the very starting point of their career development the authors have come up with the following research questions:

1. What are the key competences that undergraduate students get in the teacher education course at the university?
2. How sufficient is the amount of credit units allocated for teaching practice to guarantee students an adequate understanding of their future career challenges?

4. Purpose of the Study

Thus, the purpose of the study is to conduct a critical review of the existing curricula for teacher preparation academic programs both for Bachelor and Master Degree levels. A detailed analysis of the credit units per competence taught and scrutiny of the amount of credit units allocated for teaching practice will be carried out. The analysis made by the authors will facilitate 4T strategy to be incorporated into educational process smoothly and will assist educational authorities to form the new framework for teacher preparation.

5. Research Methods

The objective of the study defined by the research questions is to analyze existing curricula both for Bachelor and Master Degree Teacher Training to determine the roots of the discontent that novice teachers face while joining the real classroom and to suggest the course of actions, or the strategy to be undertaken by University management and government authorities to guarantee the smooth induction into profession. To meet the formulated goal authors conducted a survey among novice teachers (total 280) with the teaching experience from one year to three years. The main objective of this survey was to specify the gap between competences needed to come over the transition process from student to teacher smoothly and without stress and the so called “survival kit” formed during tertiary-level education.

To get the full comprehension of the gap origin and to suggest the ways to eliminate it the SWOT analysis of the Bachelor Degree for Teacher Training curriculum (code 44.03.01) and the Master Degree for Teacher Training curriculum (code 44.04.01) was done. The following criteria were under investigation: modules and the amount of credits prescribed for each of them, the competences formed in module and their validity for smooth induction and ongoing professional growth. The outcomes of the SWOT helped to formulate the strategy to alter Teacher Training Curriculum for Master Degree to help beginning teachers to guarantee professional development opportunities during the early years in the profession.

6. Findings

Taking into consideration the stress novice teachers undertake during their first years at school authors initiated the research which was conducted among teachers whose experience at school did not exceed three years. The total amount of respondents was 280 with 95% of female and only 5% of male aged from 23 to 27 and representing both city and rural schools. The gender disproportion is due to lack of males coming to profession and their uneven distribution among the subjects taught at school. Traditionally male teachers in Russia are biased to teach Physical Education and very rarely Maths and Physics.

The questions formulated in the survey helped the authors to identify the key complications teachers encounter while turning from a pre-service teacher into an in-service one. On the basis of these answers authors defined the gap hampering smooth transition and causing major stress that can even lead to their leaving teacher profession.

Answering the question: What difficulties did you come across during your first years at school? - the majority of respondents (73%) mentioned information overload and excessive paperwork as the main hurdles preventing smooth transition. The other significant issue that requires scrupulous attention is the

lack of support from more experienced colleagues (26%) and beginning teachers' poor time management abilities that result in inability to organize working day rationally (33%). All these issues lead to great pressure and loss of enthusiasm novice teachers are challenged with at the beginning of their career.

The next important aspect that was detected while conducting the survey and facilitated to find the gap was the question about the main reasons for teachers to leave the profession. Alongside with the answer that was quite a predictable one, namely low salary (58%), the emotional resistance to professional pressure (40%) and lack of professional competences necessary for the high job expectations (23%) made authors reflect on the alterations that have to be done in Teachers' Training Curricula to improve the situation.

The Gap Analysis (Figure 1) indicates that competences formed at the University level do not fully correspond to the challenges of the profession and some induction program is needed in order to bridge the gap and alleviate the stress of the transition period.

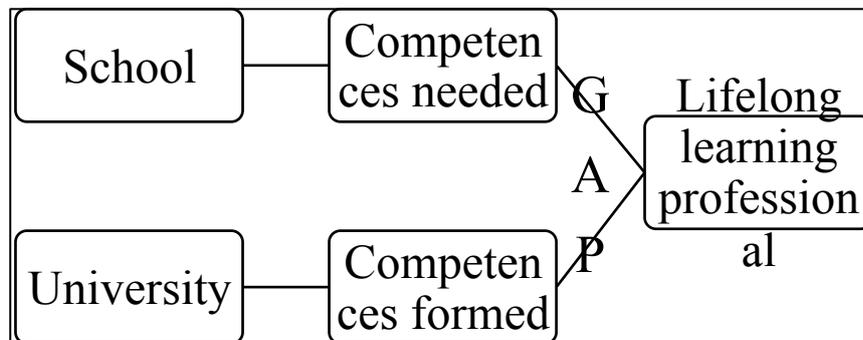


Figure 01. Gap Analysis

These findings proved the relevance of the SWOT analysis for the Bachelor and Master Degree Teacher Training curricular (Figure 2).

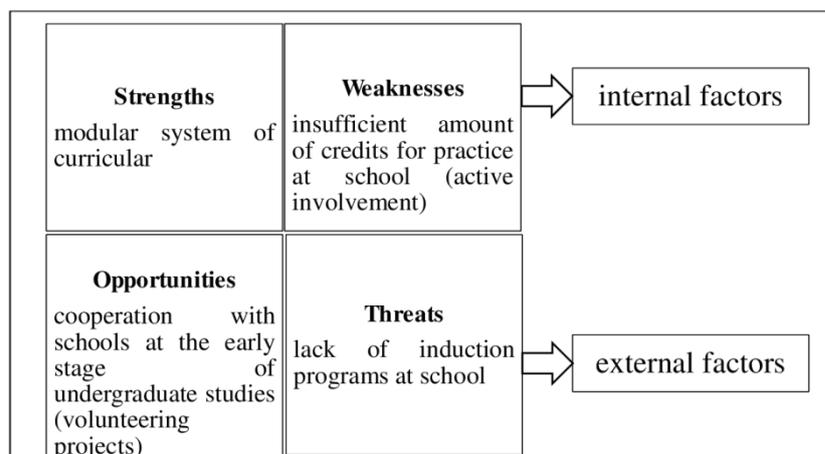


Figure 02. SWOT Analysis

The SWOT outcomes demonstrate the roots of the problems identified by the GAP analysis. The main reasons why novice teachers experience so many dilemmatic moments during their first years at

school are traced in the lack of certain components in their professional training. Despite extensive professional component included in the curriculum and proved by modular system of its organization there is no tight and ongoing collaboration between University and school which could help students to implement theory in practice from the very beginning of their education. The so-called on-site training in the real school environment integrated into curricula, joining volunteering projects at the first year in the University could help students to get a deeper sense of profession, to form emotional readiness and to foster the strive for professional development from the scratch of their career.

The lack of properly organized induction programs at schools hampers smooth transition and jeopardizes the quality of educational process. Mentoring programs if applied correctly maintain beginning teachers' motivation and help them to adjust to their new role. The results of these measures presumably improve pupils' achievement.

The authors developed the set of measures that can eliminate the gap and facilitate 4T strategy successful implementation. The first thing to be done is to incorporate academic course with the strong research component. It will form analytical and research competences of future teachers, which will serve as the basis for future professional development. The introduction of the courses like English for Academic Purposes and creation of Scientific Immersion Environment at the University via Reading circles or Research Societies will assist the progress in research competence formation.

The next important step that has to be discussed both with University and School authorities is the development and introduction of the induction programs on the national scale. Carefully planned and promptly implemented it can significantly reduce the amount of problems and stress teachers face. All these will help teachers stay and work and not think about different employment options. Volunteering at school, helping practicing teachers to organize extra-curricular activities at the first year at the University will form a clear vision of the future profession and will alleviate issues like lack of understanding what the main teachers duties are.

7. Conclusion

The shift in understanding the role of teacher training to guarantee sustainable development of the society proves the necessity to look at the Teaching Training Curricula critically and with reflection. The 4T model: "Transforming learner – Transforming education – Transforming teacher –Transforming teacher education" satisfies the main challenges of the modern society. This strategy meets the demand for the new cohort of teachers who can develop their own career track with the help of the research competence formed at the University level. Through recognizing students' talents as the priority value in the educational process, this model will help future teachers realize their intellectual potential, develop strong research and reflexive competences, and acquire the necessary set of knowledge and skills needed to achieve perfection in the teaching profession. The results of such transformation could be tremendous. The findings of the study may be helpful to better understand and develop ways and strategies to promote profound teacher education, high-quality school teaching in classrooms and both teachers' and pupils' critical thinking ability that in the long run will benefit the whole society.

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