



Teaching in Secondary Schools in Bosnia and Herzegovina - Failing the Grade¹

By Lidija Pisker

“We promise”

“We will ensure that students are taught by well-trained teachers, in properly equipped and efficiently managed schools.”² This is one of the five promises ministers of education made to the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) in 2002. Conditions in secondary schools classrooms across the country, however, do not correspond to what education authorities pledged eight years ago. In-service teacher training policies mirror in low quality teaching which is inadequate to cope with new education demands. Students are, therefore, leaving schools without the skills and knowledge demanded by the labor market.

While school systems in the European Union are decidedly moving forward, secondary schools in BiH are just marking time.

From form to reform

Given that quality education paves the way for the European Union (EU) to become more competitive in a global environment, the EU asks for quality teacher training policies from its member countries, and also requires that potential members implement similar policies.

Although BiH is looking ahead to EU membership, the current teacher training systems in BiH do not reflect EU standards.

A Bosnian language teacher from Velika Kladuša has not attended any teacher training program in her ten years of teaching. Her colleague from Posušje has been working as a Philosophy teacher since 2006 in several schools in Zapadna Hercegovina Canton. To date, she has never been invited to any training by the relevant ministry in her canton. They are two out of many teachers throughout the country whose professional development needs are being ignored due to extremely fragmented and incoherent in-service teacher training mechanisms.



Student learning depends a lot on a teacher's ability to share the knowledge.

Pedagogical Institutes (PI), the bodies responsible for the professional development of teachers, have not been established in every canton in the Federation of BiH (FBiH). In some of them, Ministries of Education (MoE) occasionally conduct training sessions, while in others, partner PIs from other cantons help out. In Republika Srpska, the Republic Pedagogical Institute supervises all schools on its territory.

The overlapping competencies of the PIs identified in several parts of the country only contribute to the chaotic imbalance in their coverage and performance. Žepče is the latest example. Although belonging to Zenica Doboje Canton, Žepče gained autonomy in education policy due to the decision of the Constitutional Court of FBiH to allow local self-governance.³ Accordingly, the authority over professional support for teachers in this municipality is divided.

While the Mostar Institute for School Affairs only offers its services to teachers who teach the Croatian curriculum, pedagogical support to teachers who teach the FBiH curriculum is supposed to be governed by PI Zenica. However, the director of PI Zenica Munevera Selmanović says this is an intentional attempt to divide teachers, which she does not want to support. Hence, teachers who teach the FBiH curriculum have been left out of the educational programs organized by PI Zenica since the beginning of the 2009/2010 school year. “We are left alone. We just want to


¹ This policy brief is based on the policy research “Professional Development of Teachers in BiH: From Promises to Ensuring Quality Teaching in Classrooms” conducted under the auspices of the Open Society Fund BiH. The complete study can be found at: www.soros.org.ba.

² Message to the People of BiH - Education Reform, Ministries of Education in BiH, 2002, 11.

³ According to the Constitution of the FBiH, competencies can be devolved from cantons to municipalities when the majority of the population in the municipality is of a different nationality/ethnicity than that of the canton as a whole.

Professional development of teachers in BiH - Lost in legislation



-  Pedagogical Institute Mostar
-  Institute for School Affairs

There are two Pedagogical Institutes in Herzegovina Neretva Canton: the Pedagogical Institute Mostar (responsible for schools teaching FBiH curriculum) and the Institute for School Affairs Mostar (responsible for schools teaching Croatian curriculum). The competencies of the the Institute for School Affairs, which has only 10 professional consultants, are spread to three other cantons: West Herzegovina Canton, Posavina Canton and Livno Canton, as well as to part of Central Bosnia Canton and part of Žepče municipality.

be treated like our colleagues from other parts of the country,” says one Žepče teacher.

The other serious obstacle to designing effective in-service teacher training is the understaffing of the respective institutions. In Bosnia Podrinje Canton, for instance, the PI has existed for more than 12 years and still has only one employee - the director. The other PIs are struggling with the same problem as well.

Even though the above-mentioned deficiencies are weakening any serious attempts at quality in-service training, cooperation between PIs is not very strong. It is usually related to exchanging consultancy expertise and appears to depend on individual PI needs, as well as on political alignments. To this day, there have been only a few meetings attended by all PI directors in the country.

Many of the interviewed teachers said that seminars organized by PIs were old-fashioned and not very useful in developing teaching skills. “The seminars they organize are monotonous, badly organized and officious,” said one teacher from Kalesija.

In light of the weak capacities of PIs and teachers’ general dissatisfaction with the programs offered by PIs, the teacher training system can be marked as a low-quality one, and one incapable of meeting teachers’ needs.

What can be done?

Teachers’ skills are the key factor in quality education. Since reforms of the elementary and higher education system failed to include quality teacher training, it is evident that a strategic approach to improving teacher training policies is needed.

In order to recommend the most suitable teacher training structure - one which is in accordance with identified teacher needs - two policy options are examined. The first one considers the establishment of a state-level body which would be responsible for professional development programs for teachers from the whole country. It would contribute to centralizing the efforts and creating a common teacher training strategy.

Another policy option considered recognizes the role of other providers of in-service programs apart from governmental bodies. In fact, NGOs play a significant role in training secondary teachers throughout the country. They deliver teacher training sessions in alignment with European standards, which means that formally incorporating these quality initiatives into the system can contribute to establishing a sustainable model for the professional development of teachers and open the door to successful education reform in BiH.

- **Policy option 1: Pedagogical institutes create a common strategy for standardized teacher training programs**

As far as teacher training systems are concerned, PIs and MoEs currently do not possess efficient mechanisms for cooperation and joint action. In order to foster such cooperation and encourage common projects, a “conference of education ministers”⁴ model should be applied to create a PI cooperation network, i.e. a conference of directors of PIs.

⁴ As the state-level educational advisory body established in 2008, the Conference of Ministers consists of all education ministers and the chief of the Education Department in Brčko District. It is in charge of the coordination of education policy at state level. The Chair is the Minister of Civil Affairs BiH.



In addition to managing the curriculum synchronization, the conference of directors would facilitate the creation of a common strategy for the professional development of teachers, thus enabling a standardized approach to in-service teacher training. This would enable expertise to be shared in the field and training capacities to be strengthened. PIs could specialize in certain training programs which take full advantage of their capacities, and target teachers' needs more effectively.

In order to establish common standards for educational and professional competencies, as well as for the professional training and monitoring of professionals in the field of education, a center or institute for professional training should be formed at the state level.⁵

However, political willingness is a key precondition to establishing any kind of meaningful cooperation, which is perhaps burdened by the fact that education is one of the most politicized areas of public policy in BiH. The viability of efforts to establish a single body for teachers of three different curricula is, for this reason, quite debatable. The same concern applies to the question of which authority would supervise the center or institute since there is no state level education ministry to coordinate any state-wide education strategy. While the Ministry of Civil Affairs BiH oversees education at the state level, it has no substantive competencies in "education", nor authority vis-à-vis cantons.⁶

Furthermore, the Conference of Ministers of BiH has not been too successful in achieving its goals since its establishment, as it is rare that all ministers are present at meetings. Hence, its credibility and power to make significant policy plans remain questionable.

- **Policy option 2: In-service teacher training programs are decentralized through a system of accredited service providers**

Professional development as a key factor in ensuring a quality education system is recognized in BiH legislation, including within the Framework Law and the 2002 Education Reform Strategy. This research, however, has showed that the promise made by legislators has not

been realized. Some of the main reasons for this failure have also been identified.

While the lack of institutional capacity to provide systematic teacher training mechanisms leaves a large number of teachers unsatisfied and unable to cope with the new teaching demands, external providers, such as International Organizations and Non-governmental organizations, are providing training outside of the system.

In order to include best practices in the overall education strategy, it is necessary to develop a system to authorize available programs and additionally, to plan their implementation together with the programs of respective PIs. This would ensure that the quality of all training programs was assessed and duplication avoided. The assessment and accreditation of all offered programs (regardless of their institutional background) would separate quality programs from those that are inadequately prepared. Also, the capacities of PIs would be strengthened as they could specialize in certain training programs which take full advantage of their capacities and target teachers' needs more effectively.

As in the case of the Republic of Slovenia, MoEs could, on the basis of a public tender, select the best quality programs. In this way, all offered programs would be monitored and chosen on the basis of a set of criteria (duration, compatibility of the proposed program with professional development goals, etc). Consequently, through the process of accreditation, the low-quality initiatives would be eliminated and a comprehensive database of all offered programs in the respective area would be compiled.

Governmental authorities and NGOs would cooperate as partners to achieve the common goal of raising teaching quality in BiH schools. The benefit would be shared as well. PIs would increase the implementation of new education standards, while NGOs would become a sustainable part of the overall education strategy in the country.

Accredited, good-quality programs would contribute to the professional development of teachers. They would also allow teachers to choose between different programs in accordance to their professional needs, and to motivate them to attend seminars not only for the

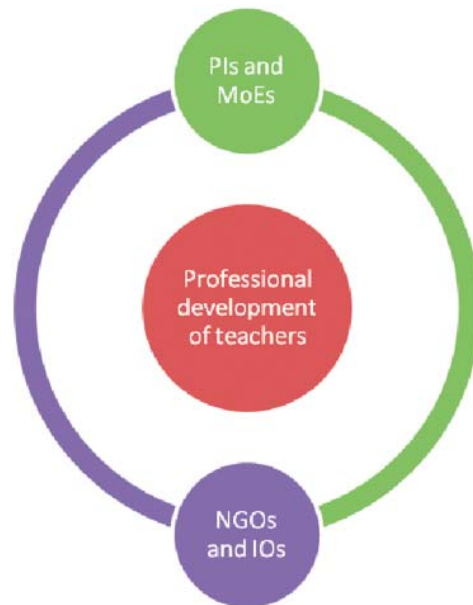
⁵ The Establishment and Development of the System of Professional Training and Advancement of Teachers in BiH. UNICEF BiH, 2004.

⁶ Raising Debate: Is BiH Respecting its International Commitments in the Field of Education - Questions for the Citizens of BiH, OSCE BiH, 2005, 5.



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sake of meeting formal requirements for a promotion but also for the purpose of meaningful professional growth. Being a more effective and realistic one, the second policy option is favored in this paper.



In-service teacher training model

Policy recommendations:

- **MoEs or PIs should develop teaching and professional development standards regulating the quality and basic principles of professional development for teachers.** This would establish teacher competencies required for education reform and EU accession.
- **On the basis of a set of criteria, MoEs should choose and accredit quality programs through public calls or tenders for the implementation of necessary training.** This would allow not only PIs but NGOs, IOs, private companies, etc, to compete to become accredited providers.
- **Through accreditation, catalogs of all approved quality training programs should be created.** This would enable transparency and a quality-based approach to teacher training.
- **The catalogs should be disseminated to teachers by competent MoEs.** This would allow teachers to be adequately informed about all the quality training programs available and be able to choose between them.

- **On the basis of the catalog offers, teachers should choose training sessions which reflect their development and training needs.** This would increase teachers' motivation, allow self-assessment and enable them to develop skills and knowledge that are required to increase their teaching competencies.

Sources:

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3. Teacher Matters - Attracting, Developing and Retaining Effective Teachers. OECD, 2005.
4. The Model for System Change in Secondary Education: Crafting a new education system in BiH. OSF BiH, 2002.



A "Policy Development Fellowship Program" has been launched by the Open Society Fund BiH in early 2004 with the aim to improve BiH policy research and dialogue and to contribute to the development of a sound policy-making culture based on informative and empirically grounded policy options. The program provides an opportunity for selected fellows to collaborate with the Open Society Fund in conducting policy research and writing a policy study with the support of mentors and trainers during the whole process. Sixty three fellowships have been granted in three cycles since the starting of the Program. All policy studies are available at www.soros.org.ba