



Preschool teacher
education curricula
harmonization
framework
in Serbia



Impresum

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Design, prepress and layout: de:work studio

Printing: DC Grafički centar

Circulation: 300

ISBN: 978-86-89873-02-3

For citing this publication please follow

the format: Title, place, publisher, year.

This document has been published in the framework of TEACH project funded by the European Commission through TEMPUS programme. The content of this publication does not reflect the official opinion of the EU. The responsibility for the information and views expressed therein lies entirely within the authors.



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Introduction

This document is primarily intended for preschool teacher education colleges in Novi Sad, Vršac, Kruševac and Sremska Mitrovica which adopted the preschool teacher education curricula harmonization framework in January 2015. Preparation of this document makes the first phase of the process of curricula harmonization.

It is also a precondition for beginning of the second phase, in which the task forces of 4 preschool teacher education colleges will develop institutional curricula harmonization plans which must be in line with framework set in this document. After formal adoption of institutional curricula harmonization plans by the educational councils of 4 colleges and their implementation, the college authorities will initiate accreditation procedure harmonized curricula with the Commission for Accreditation and Quality Assurance of the Republic of Serbia (hereinafter KAPK). After reception of Accreditation Certificate, preschool teacher education curricula harmonization process will be successfully completed.

This process will contribute to fulfilling the following 2 objectives:

a) to decrease the gap in competences of students and graduates between partner institutions and thus enable better horizontal and vertical mobility of students and graduates,

b) to modernize the curricula so that they better fit European preschool teacher education standards.

On the bases of jointly agreed methodology, the framework had been developed throughout the period from March 2014 until January 2015 through the set of activities including: comparative analysis of 4 curricula, 4 international workshops including the one held in Crewe-Manchester (UK), conference with employers, parents and students, etc.

This activity is being implemented under 1st work package of "Harmonization of Preschool Teacher Training Education in Serbia" (TEACH) project which is being implemented by preschool teacher education colleges in Vršac, Novi Sad, Kruševac and Sremska Mitrovica in cooperation with the Metropolitan Manchester University (UK), University in Maribor (SLO), University in Baja (HU) and Belgrade-based NGO Western Balkans Institute (WEBIN). The project is funded by the European Commission through the TEMPUS programme.

Basis for harmonization



Necessary input on similarities and differences between preschool teacher education curricula at 4 colleges was provided in publication Comparative Analysis of Preschool Teacher Education Curricula, created within TEACH project, as well as from other sources and materials developed through the course of introduction conference and project workshops.

Other relevant sources include:

- Regulation on Work Permit for Teachers, Preschool Teachers and Associates, Official Gazette of RS 22/2005 and 51/2008;
- Guide to Introduction to Preschool Teacher Occupation, Belgrade, 2006 (available at <http://www.scribd.com/doc/>);
- Law on Preschool Upbringing and Education, Official Gazette of RS 18/10;
- Regulation on General Basis of Preschool Program
- Introduction to Harmonization (tuning) of Educational Structures in Europe – Contribution of Universities to the Bologna Process;
- Law on the Foundations of the System of Education and Upbringing, Official Gazette of RS 72/09;
- Standards of Competences for Teachers and Their Professional Development and Working Document on Changes of the Standards Prepared by the ZUOV;
- various written materials developed throughout the IMPRESS project, Ministry of Education of RS;
- various written materials developed throughout the ISLANDS project, Association BAZAART;
- Strategy of Development of Education in the Republic of Serbia until 2020;

Process

The process of curricula harmonization brought together task forces from 4 preschool teacher education colleges coordinated by a team from Metropolitan Manchester University, University of Baja and the Western Balkans Institute teams had an advisory role. Each college task force was composed of professors, teaching assistants and students.

Novi Sad college task force encompassed 11 professors (3 teaching assistants and 3 students), Kruševac college task force encompassed 12 members (7 professors, 2 teaching assistants and 3 students), Vršac college task force 20 members (10 professors, 3 lecturers, 1 teaching assistant and 6 students), while Sremska Mitrovica college taskforce 11 members (including 6 professors, 1 lecturer and 4 students).

Task forces were involved in the process from the very beginning through initial analysis of actual teaching plans and programs at their institutions, collection and reviewing of materials and writing of contributions for publication Comparative Analysis of Preschool Teacher Education Curricula at Colleges in Vršac, Novi Sad, Kruševac and Sremska Mitrovica, and finally, through preparation of materials for harmonization workshops.



Development of this document encompassed several steps:

- a) Comparison of preschool teacher education curricula and syllables at 4 colleges;**
- b) Comprehension of the labor market and student needs and perceptions;**
- c) Workshops on definition of framework elements;**
- d) Creation of official project document entitled: Preschool teacher education curricula harmonization framework.**

Comparison of preschool teacher education curricula and syllables at 4 colleges was, as a first step, carried out in order to identify the existing similarities and differences. This activity started on 25 March 2014 at the meeting in Novi Sad at the College of Professional Studies in Education of Teachers. The subject matter and methodology of comparative analysis, the division of responsibilities between the teams, as well as deadlines were agreed at this meeting. In April a comparative review of materials used in previous accreditation process was carried out. The analysis encompassed the quantitative and qualitative elements of the curricula. The quantitative elements relate to basic structural elements of a preschool teacher education curriculum, while the qualitative elements refer to the competencies students should acquire the study cycle. In the first group of data, for each college the following data were considered:

Duration and type of studies

Purpose and objectives of study programs

Content of entry exam

Expected general and specific outcomes

Ratio between compulsory courses and electives

Number of courses per year and number of ECTS

Ratio of courses from different fields (general academic, theoretical-methodological, specialist courses)

Ratio of practical training (duration and number of ECTS per year and per semester)

Final paper and number of ECTS

Each task force has contributed to the collection of data which were then jointly analyzed. This was followed by comparison of the qualitative and quantitative elements and drawing up conclusions on similarities and differences and what elements could and should be subjected to the harmonization process.

The second level analysis referred to the **competences**. Given that there is no generally accepted framework for comparison in this field, the first step was to create the initial set of competencies that are desirable in the context of contemporary preschool teaching. Comparison of competences was built on this framework. The draft report with the findings



was presented on 24 April 2014 in Novi Sad at the Coordination Meeting. At this meeting the elements and dynamics of the harmonization process were agreed. The final comparative analysis report was published in May 2014 under the title Comparative Analysis of Preschool Teacher Education Curricula by the Preschool Teacher Education College in Novi Sad.

The second step referred to **understanding of the labor market needs and perspectives of students**. This assessment was conducted during the introduction conference with stakeholders held on 12 and 13 May 2014 in Vršac. The purpose of this conference was to gain insights into the needs and comments of the employers and perspectives of students. More than 50 representatives of different stakeholders took part in the conference.

The **conference** consisted of the opening plenary at which professors and speakers from various institutions and organizations (local government, the Provincial Executive Council, parents association, pre-schools, etc.) gave introductory statements conveying key messages regarding the improvement of curricula and competences of teachers. In this part the students addressed the audience as well, presentations of good practices from foreign partner institutions were delivered together with the findings of a comparative analysis of study programs. During vivid discussion many open issues concerning perspectives of students, labor market, profession and parents, entrance exams, practice, final exams, student mobility, the work of teachers in the context of inclusion, and the need for the introduction of new competences (IT, English, adaptability to increasingly intense changes, research practices, continuing professional development and the like) were debated.

After the plenary 5 parallel open space method workshops were held (simultaneous delivery of several workshops in which participants engage by choice and have the freedom to leave the workshop whenever they want without anyone's consent. Topics of parallel workshops were as follows:

Workshop 1	Organization competence of preschool teacher in the lifelong learning process – challenges of the inclusion
Workshop 2	What are the needs and expectations of parents from the preschool teacher education and upbringing? Creativity in preschool education and upbringing system; Kindergarten as an open system
Workshop 3	Preschool teacher and ICT; Preschool teacher occupation in the changing world
Workshop 4	Students about their studies and mobility; How well are graduate students prepared to begin the profession of preschool teacher?
Workshop 5	State of affairs and employment perspectives of vocational preschool teachers

Results of work of parallel workshops were presented in final plenary part of the first day. Particularly noted were students' representatives from all four HEIs who acquainted the audience with their vision of harmonization of curricula, emphasizing the segments that are most important to them. The second day was opened only to representatives of the institutions participating in the TEACH project. All contents and conclusions of the conference are available on the official project website.

Insights gained through presentations, workshops and discussions at the conference were to be presented at the latter activities and curricula harmonization workshops.

The third step were harmonization workshops which defined the process framework. There were a total of 4 workshops held in Kruševac (June 2014), Sremska Mitrovica (September 2014), Manchester (November 2014) and Novi Sad (January 2015). The purpose of these workshops was for participating institutions representatives to agree on the elements of the school curriculum and their ranges of values within which each school will work on the harmonization process.

The first workshop was organized from 16 to 18 June 2014 in Kruševac at the College of Professional Studies in Education of Teachers premises. Topics of the workshop were stakeholders' needs and the segments that make up each curriculum, and refer to the name of the program, the purpose and objective of the study program, entrance exam, practice (structure and usage) and final project (form, structure, and volume). In addition, the requirements and standards of accreditation of teaching staff employed in VET HEIs

and their quality and potential, and the possibilities of harmonizing curricula were discussed, as well as the need to introduce teachers with generally acceptable way of formulating competencies and learning outcomes.

The second workshop was held from 15 to 17 September 2014 in Sremska Mitrovica at the premises of the College for Vocational Studies of Educators and Business Informatics - Sirmium in Sremska Mitrovica. During the three-day workshop through intensive discussion a consensus about several elements of the curriculum harmonization was reached. On the one hand, the participants agreed on the segments that make up the curriculum for teacher training, referring to the name of the program, the purpose and objective of the study program, entrance exam, practice (structure and usage) and final project (shape, structure and scope). On the other hand, colleges came to a consensus that refers to the relationship between the compulsory and optional/elective subjects, expressed in ECTS points, as well as equal representation from certain compulsory subjects in the curriculum relevant areas (i.e. pedagogy-psychology, methodical, language and literature, medical-health, socio-philosophical, ICT, art, practice). In addition, there was a constructive discussion of the other

important segment of harmonization, which is closely related to the equitable representation of the compulsory subjects, and refers to the recognition of desirable competences that the curriculum should be established for, i.e. those the students should acquire during their studies. At this workshop working groups involved in the identification of desired competences related to the relevant group of subjects in the curriculum were agreed on.

The third workshop was organized from 10 to 14 November 2014 in Crew and Manchester in the UK. The host and organizer was the Manchester Metropolitan University and most of the activities took place in the university campus in Crew. During this workshop, the representatives from Serbia presented their work on developing lists of desirable competences related to individual subjects or groups of subjects (subject-specific competencies). The list of these competencies was adopted at the workshop. It was agreed that the next step would be the making of a list of generic competences, which should permeate the harmonized curriculum.

The fourth workshop was held from 15 to 17 January 2015 in Novi Sad. It was hosted and organized by the College of Professional Studies in Education of Teachers in Novi Sad. This was a final

curricula harmonization workshop at which representatives of colleges adopted the final curricula harmonization framework. During the three-day meeting of presenting the results from previous activities and discussions the final conclusions and consensus on all relevant elements of the curriculum were made. In addition, through analysis, systematization, generalization and abstraction related to competencies specific to individual subjects, a list of preferred generic competencies was conceived and adopted.

It is important to note that the student representatives were involved in all the above activities carried out with the aim of creating a curricula harmonization framework and that their views and needs were taken into account. The process of curricula harmonization was facilitated by the Metropolitan University of Manchester team consisting of Dr. Geraldine Li - Treweevik, Dr. Jennifer Fischer and Dr. Julia Bennett. Their role was highly appreciated given the fact that they contributed to the development of group work dynamics, directed the participants, their experiences and practice with their university, gave suggestions and provided specialist expertise when it comes to identifying and formulating competencies and learning outcomes. All materials, activities, conclusions

Framework

The framework for the curriculum harmonization is the result of joint work of representatives of all the participating colleagues, their teachers and students, as well as EU partner institutions on the project.

On the one hand, the colleagues involved in the project TEACH agreed on the segments that make up each curriculum, referring to the name of the program, the purpose and objective of the study program, entrance exam, practice (structure and usage) and final work (shape, structure and scope). On the other hand, colleges came to a consensus on the relationship between the compulsory and optional-electoral subjects, expressed in ECTS points, as well as equal representation from certain compulsory subjects in the curriculum relevant areas (pedagogical-psychological, methodical, language and literature, medical-health, socio-philosophical,

ICT, art, teaching practice). At the end of the reconciliation process, compulsory courses, or competencies that students acquire through them, should match at least 75%. Thus, a significant segment of harmonization, which is closely related to the equitable representation of the compulsory subjects, referring to the recognition of desirable competences that should be established through curriculum, i.e. that students should acquire during their studies. In this regard, a list of preferred generic competences was adopted by all colleges involved in the project.

Harmonization elements

Structural and quantitative curricula elements

The curricula harmonization framework is presented in the matrix below and will be used in harmonization process at 4 partner colleges.

By the adoption of this framework, the first phase in the harmonization process has been completed, the second phase has started including the development and implementation of institutional harmonization plans and accreditation process.



Element	Harmonization framework
Profile	Professional preschool teacher
Study program	Preschool teacher (the name should be harmonized, if there are certain specific features, they can also be stated)
Purpose of the study program	Education for the profession of a preschool teacher
Aim of the study program	Education and training of students for work with preschool children (aging between 6 months and 7 years) through acquisition of general and professional knowledge and relevant competencies
Entrance examination	Consists of 2 tests of prior knowledge and abilities check: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mother tongue and general knowledge test, including questions regarding bon ton) - Check of speech, musical and physical abilities;
Mandatory courses	Total number of points ranging between 130–150 ECTS
Optional courses	Total number of points ranging between 30–50 ECTS (including final paper)
Portion of professional practice	Minimal number of days should be 30
Final paper	Mandatory (recognizing various forms of final paper: written final (theoretical, small scale empirical or action research) paper, dealing with a profession related topic defended before a commission, final practical work realized through practice, elaborated and defended before a commission, drama form...)
Diploma supplement in English	Yes
Harmonization at qualitative level	Competencies: at least 75% of harmonization, referring to adopted list of generic and subject specific competencies permeating the curriculum, both mandatory and optional courses.

List of generic competences

Area

Competencies

1. Professional competence for the organization of learning and teaching

- Creating a stimulating social and physical learning environment in the classroom.
- Able to observe and then document children's behavior, development and learning.
- Able to use co-operative and interactive methods and techniques in learning and teaching to develop children's knowledge and skills.
- Able to develop program and activities stimulating and supporting development in each upbringing-educational field included in preschool curriculum, i.e. speech development, literacy, basic mathematical and science notions, development of motor skills, music, visual art, as well as creativity.
- Able to formulate clear rules to create and maintain appropriate and acceptable behaviour in the group.
- Able to adjust chosen teaching methods to learning aims within child-oriented teaching.
- Able to organize a safe physical setting for children and adults.
- Is familiar with legislation regarding preparatory preschool programs and can apply this in practice.
- Is aware of the importance of creating an understanding of the relationships between socio-cultural and economic background and learning.
- Understands and has knowledge of the way early learning, and education more broadly, is organized and structured in the Serbian context.

2. Professional competence for team work

- Understands and has knowledge of groups and teams and the ways in which they are formed, maintained and work.
- Knowledge and experience of establishing partnerships with key stakeholders (children, families, community, schools).
- Recognizes the value of professional co-operation across disciplines and professional roles.
- Able to recognize and carry out role in a pre-school educational team, working closely with other colleagues as well as with child's family

3. Professional competence for planning, monitoring and documentation of educational activities

- Applying knowledge of planning and implementation of educational programmers in pre-school classrooms.
- Monitoring and documenting the development of individual and groups of children, either alone or in teams with other colleagues.
- Has the knowledge and skills to stimulate curriculum that enhances children's cognitive, emotional, social and physical learning.
- Integrates knowledge, skills and abilities in specialized fields and understands them in the context of comprehensive children's development
- Can create educational conditions that integrate all communication activities (language, verbal and written).
- Knowledge of how to use pre-school documentation systems.

Area	Competencies
4. Organizational skills and pedagogical guidance of groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to use various strategies for the planning and realization of pre-school educational programs. • Is able to apply knowledge of group learning to support social interaction, asymmetric and reciprocal learning. • Respecting group learning while recognizing the individual needs of all children within groups. • Able to manage inappropriate behaviour in children. • Valuing the needs and contributions of parents/careers in their child's learning. • Recognising and valuing the unique characteristics of preschool institutions.
5. Knowledge of developmental and learning needs of children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Able to design and develop group activities that differentiate children's learning needs. • Manages group activities that differentiate children's learning needs and respond to these. • Is able to identify and understand developmental characteristics of preschool age children. • Recognizes differences in all areas of development in children (emotional, intellectual, social, and physical). • Differentiates between children's behavioral and development concerns. • Encourages children's socio-emotional development including co-operation, social skills and pro-social behaviour. • Has knowledge of, and can apply, methods for monitoring and stimulating cognitive development. • Is able to articulate and encourage ways in which pre-school children learn and develop through play. • Encourages children's personality development. • Is able to use good practice to include, and integrate into class, children with special educational needs.
6. Knowledge of the system of preschool education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has knowledge of, and ability to use, community resources to support children's learning and teaching. • Understands, and can apply in context, the laws and regulations in relation to preschool education. • Recognizes and applies the code of ethics for the education profession. • Is able to co-operate with regional institutions and other professionals relevant to pre-school learning.

Area

Competencies

7. Ability to use information and communication technologies in education

- Utilizes ICT and digital media as a source of information for programmer planning and implementation.
- Ability to competently present professional achievements using ICT.
- Has the ability to share knowledge and skills with colleagues through the use of ICT.
- Is familiar with, and understands, ethical and legal obligations, as well as personal responsibilities in communication and use of digital sources.
- Has a high level of awareness of the need to use ICT in a sustainable, innovative and efficient way, both in education and in society generally.
- Ability to use the Internet and social media appropriately for learning in pre-schools.

8. Ability to plan own professional development

- Aware of and understanding of the importance of Continuous Professional Development/ lifelong learning and how to plan professional development to enhance own practice.
- Ability to self-motivate for own Continuing Professional Development.
- Supporting the roles of creators, evaluators and practitioners in their practice.
- Ability to make critical and independent judgment on oneself and the profession of a pre-school teacher.
- Is open to the application of new knowledge, permanently reflecting on, innovating and improving one's practice.
- Able to reflect upon, think critically about one's role in the pre-school classroom, and adapt practice appropriately

9. Specific competences, knowledge and skills – arts, music, speech, drama, physical and health competence

- Understanding of how to use arts, music, speech, drama or texts in the classroom to meet learning needs.
- Ability to utilize skills and knowledge in their own specialist subject areas to enhance pupil learning experiences.
- Recognising the contribution of physical education to child development, health and wellbeing, and how to integrate physical activity in pre-school contexts.
- Understanding and recognising the impacts of socio-cultural factors as they relate to health, wellbeing and young children.
- Ability to use Serbian and/or other languages effectively in the classroom context.
- Qualified in preventing abuse and neglect – (should that be, knowledge of prevention and ways of responding to suspected abuse and neglect in young children).
- Knowledge of health and safety rules and regulations, as they relate to Early Years learning.
- Ability to provide first aid within classroom and learning settings.

Area

Competencies

10. Social Inclusion, difference and diversity

- Understands and can explain the importance of equal opportunities within pre-school learning.
- Sensitive to and shows respect for differences in family structures, cultural origins, ethnicities, beliefs and ways of life.
- Ability to design, and integrate in the classroom, pedagogic and methodical procedures for groups of children from diverse backgrounds.
- Creating a supportive learning environment for children, which respects differences and diversity.
- Respects and engages with, the principles of diversity and multiculturalism in education.
- Respecting, and understanding of, the individual socio-cultural backgrounds of children, and parents/carers.

11. Transferable/Transversal Skills

- Able to read, analyze and integrate academic literature.
- Ability to communicate in diverse settings to a high standard in relation to written work and documentation, oral presentations and online contexts.
- Able to apply critical reasoning to practice evidence and research within the field of early childhood studies.
- Ability to undertake either a final exam or extended piece of work at the end of studies.
- Possessing high-level skills in group work but also the capability to work independently on projects.
- Able to plan professional and career engagement within the field of employment.
- Ability to use ICT, the Internet and social media, in professional, for research and knowledge updating contexts.
- Understanding of the principles of equality, diversity and inclusion in broader society and professional contexts.
- Confident in presenting oneself in a professional manner, and as appropriate to circumstance.

Further steps in curricula harmonization process

Following the framework defined by this document, vocational education teachers colleges should by the end of March 2015 prepare individual school plans for curricula harmonization and syllabi innovation, and in April 2015 plans should be submitted to key educational instances for consultations to ensure the widest professional and institutional support.

After the consultation process and obtaining the views and comments of the most important educational instances, the final version of school plans with specific deadlines for the implementation of harmonization will be sent to colleagues councils for adoption. Following the adoption of the plans, colleges are required by June 2015 to carry out 20% of the planned harmonization, and during the last quarter of the same year to submit documents for the accreditation of the study programs to the Commission for Accreditation and Quality Assurance.

Monitoring and evaluation of implementation of individual plans for harmonization of curricula and syllabi innovation will be organized at three levels:

a) at the level of college

b) at the project level (monitoring by the

Board and the Committee for Quality Assurance)

c) at the inter-colleges level in the form of criticism (i.e. a peer review method)

It is important to note that raising the quality of teaching, apart from improving the curriculum certainly influences empowerment of teaching staff competencies through training, seminars and workshops for the acquisition of soft skills, as well as modern methodological knowledge and skills that include interactive methods. In addition, the colleges in Vršac, Kruševac, Sremska Mitrovica and Novi Sad will be equipped with a considerable amount of the latest technical and computer equipment, software, teaching materials and literature, which will contribute to improving the quality of teaching and better conditions for studying at these colleagues.

About the project

Project Harmonization of Preschool Teacher Education Curricula in Serbia (acronym TEACH) should facilitate the harmonization of preschool teacher education curricula at four vocational colleges in Serbia. The project has started in December 2013 and will last until November 2016.

Specific objectives of the project are:

(a) to harmonize curricula through identification of role model and to develop curricula harmonization action plans; **(b)** to implement harmonized curricula through process of accreditation and to enroll first generation of students to newly-accredited programs; **(c)** to improve transversal skills of teachers through ToT and spill-over teacher training sessions; **(d)** to improve teaching methodology and entrepreneurial skills of teachers through identification of learning outcomes and methods.

The project consists of 8 work packages including:

1 Curricula harmonization;

2 Improvement of teaching methodology and entrepreneurial competences;

3 Improvement of teachers' transversal skills;

4 Accreditation and enrollment of students;

5 Dissemination of project results;

6 Sustainability;

7 Quality assurance and monitoring;

8 Management.

The project partnership encompasses 4 preschool teacher education colleges in Serbia (from Vršac, Novi Sad, Kruševac and Sremska Mitrovica), University in Maribor (SI), The Metropolitan Manchester University (UK), Vocational College Baja (HU) and Western Balkans Institute from Belgrade (RS). The Project coordinator is the Preschool Teacher Education College "Mihailo Palov" in Vršac.

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