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From Content- to Competence-Based Curricula – An Educational Account of Curriculum Policy in Kosovo

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study examines the changes introduced in curriculum policy in Kosovo in the latest curriculum reform of 2011. Framed by curriculum and didaktik education traditions theoretically, the findings reveal that introduction of key competences and associated learning outcomes in 2011 marked the most substantial departure from the previously content-based curriculum policy in place. It is concluded that European education trends provided the macro narrative and legitimation for the 2011 competence-based curriculum reform in Kosovo.

Introduction and Background

Curriculum policymaking is an open and continued battle of often opposing and contested interests within national boundaries, and increasingly within the transnational policy arenas. However, in developing contexts such as Kosovo, with persisting challenges that society has to tackle, soft issues such as education policymaking tend to end up on the desks of ‘international experts’, not least due to a lacking established national education tradition and expertise. Nonetheless, in the past 20 years ‘permanent reform’ (Dąbrowski & Wiśniewski, 2011, p. 332) has been the overarching mode of operation within the Kosovo education context, not dissimilar from other countries in Central and Easter Europe (Florian & Țoc, 2018). The reforms in Kosovo were (and are) associated with two waves in curriculum policymaking in 2001 and 2011 respectively (Tahirsylaj, 2018). While Kosovo context is unique, we argue the reforms follow international education trends, especially in 2011 reform, which mirrors the key competences- approach recommended by the European Union (OJEU, 2006, 2018).

Educational research on and about Kosovo is at a crescent phase, and little is published and known internationally and within European context about Kosovo education in general, and curriculum reform specifically. To this end, the article sheds light over curriculum policy making in Kosovo, as a developing and evolving policy context that lies within European boundaries geographically but at the same time remains an underperforming nation educationally. Despite education reforms, Kosovo students’ performance in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2015 and 2018 rankings was the lowest in Europe (OECD, 2019), implying that reforms did not translate in improved student learning. Specifically, the article examines two curriculum policy reforms in Kosovo in past 20 years—the content-based reform right after the war in 2000–2001, and competence-based reform after 2008 Kosovo’s independence in

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2010–2011—framed theoretically by Western-based education traditions of Anglo-American curriculum theory and Continental/Nordic European didaktik theory. Content-based curricula rely on the disciplinary knowledge as the basis for teaching and learning activities, while competence-based curricula are defined as ones focusing on the mastery of specific learning outcomes or competences that are not necessarily associated solely with a specific discipline (Anderson-Levitt, 2017). In both reforms, the curriculum framework development was heavily influenced and shaped by international actors active in the Kosovo donor community assisting the country to overcome its pressing challenges, most notably through UNESCO's expertise in curriculum making (Tahirsylaj, 2018). The main objective of the article is to gain a more nuanced understanding of the curriculum policy changes introduced into Kosovo education in past 20 years, by tracking the changes into curriculum policy making as a result of the shift from the content-based to competence-based curricula. One main research question drives our analysis: what changes in curriculum policy did competence-based curriculum framework of 2011 (revised as per MEST [2016]) bring into Kosovo pre-university education compared to 2001 framework? We address the question qualitatively and analytically relying on document analysis of three key curriculum policy documents, namely the Kosovo Curriculum Frameworks of 2001, 2011, and 2016 (DES, 2001; MEST, 2011, 2016). Ultimately, our goal is to delve deeper into the educational content of the curriculum reform as a result of educational policy flows into Kosovo's education reforms over past 20 years.

Considering Kosovo's declaration of independence in 2008 and its aspirations to move toward European integration politically, adopting a competence-based curriculum framework in 2011, appears to reflect an extension of policy from the EU level to Kosovo as a young European country. However, the curriculum policymaking was not straightforward and it begs a description of Kosovo background to place the education reform within the larger political processes that Kosovo went through in its most recent history. Thus, a brief background is offered next, to continue with a summary of previous research, an elaboration of theoretical perspectives, and followed with methodological considerations, findings and discussion, and ending with conclusions, implications, and further research.

Brief Background

Kosovo, a small landlocked country of about 1.7 million in the Western Balkans, has gone through an eventful trajectory in its recent history, most notably politically from being under Serbia's regime over 1990s that culminated with intense war over 1997–1999, then under the United Nations (UN) administration over most 2000s, and declaration of independence in 2008. As a geographic location and given its political history since the end of the World War II as part of former Yugoslavia, Kosovo fits the description of a 'post-socialist' context (Silova, 2010). When the war ended with assistance of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) intervention in spring 1999, infrastructure reconstruction and attending to basic human needs such as clear water and shelter were primary concerns rather than education. However, many international aid organizations, the United Nations' Children's' Fund (UNICEF) among them, arrived in Kosovo to provide assistance in a number of sectors including education. UNICEF as a UN organization assisted with development of a new Kosovo Curriculum Framework that was adopted in 2001, which was the first educational reform in Kosovo in the post-socialist, and postwar period. The 2001 Curriculum Framework (Department of Education and Science [DES], 2001) aimed to reform the 'outdated' curricula, and led to production of new textbooks developed in line with curriculum requirements. The objective was to break away from the old teacher-centered practices toward more learner-centered constructivist approaches to teaching, learning, and assessment (Tahirsylaj, 2018). Nevertheless, the curriculum still remained content- and subject-based with clear definition of learning objectives per topic within individual subjects (DES, 2001; Tahirsylaj

& Wahlström, 2019). UNICEF brought in UNESCO's International Bureau of Education (IBE) technical expertise to play a leading role in policy formulations stipulated in the 2001 framework, with involvement of a number of local education policymakers and consultants (Tahirsylaj, 2018). A similar set up consisting of international expertise from UNICEF, UNESCO, and the World Bank, with local policymakers and consultants was in place to develop the 2011 Kosovo Curriculum Framework (MEST, 2011), which explicitly shifted the curriculum focus from content to key competences. Since the 2001 and 2011 curriculum frameworks are central to the analytical focus of the article, we will return to them with a comparative analysis under the Findings and Discussion section.

Previous Research: Education Policy Flows

To understand curriculum change in Kosovo, the broader trends and developments internationally, and within Western European context specifically have to be considered. The turn toward competence-based education was initiated in mid-1990s primarily through the work of two international Paris-based organizations—the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) - the first through Jacques Delors' work 'Learning: the treasure within' and the second through the Definition and Selection of Competencies (DeSeCo) project (Halász & Michel, 2011). Delors (1996) focused on four dimensions: learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together, and learning to be. The DeSeCo project recommended three categories of competences, including using tools interactively, interacting in heterogeneous groups and acting autonomously in order for individuals to be successful in the 21st century (OECD, 2001). At the country level, Poland seems to be the first country in Europe to introduce the competence-based education into its national curriculum through the National Ministry of Education in 1997 (Dąbrowski & Wiśniewski, 2011). Further, administration of PISA study—relying on a competence-oriented assessment framework—by OECD in 2000, and recommendation of key competences for lifelong learning by the European Commission in 2006 (OJEU, 2006) created the momentum for the individual countries to adopt and implement competence-based education approaches in their national curricula (Halász & Michel, 2011).

As a 'post-socialist' context (Silova, 2010), Kosovo followed the education policy transfer path already established in literature regarding the transfer of policies to post-socialist contexts in line with Western-based education values, including for example student-centered teaching and learning approaches, introduction of curriculum standards, decentralization of educational finance and governance, privatization of higher education, standardization of student assessment, liberalization of textbook publishing, and many others (Silova, 2010; Silova & Steiner-Khamsi, 2008). To varying degrees, these policy solutions have been tried and are in place as part of education reform efforts in Kosovo over past 20 years (Saqipi, 2019; Tahirsylaj, 2010, 2013, 2018, 2020). In this regard, Kosovo has been part of the transnational policy flows to education originating from an external (global) source and transferred to a national (local) context. And in developing contexts such as Kosovo, the global players such as the World Bank, the UNESCO and so forth are directly involved in the transfer, and often also in implementation of the said policy. Still, regardless of the global players involved in the policy transfer, prior research has already established that the educational policy solutions offered or transferred to developing countries and contexts have almost always had a Western source, and primarily Anglo-Saxon (Verger et al., 2012). Further, Verger et al. (2012) argue that developing countries are most affected by global education policy precisely because of the increased external presence of international organizations and donor agencies.

Overall, global education policy has been addressed by two dominant, but not the only, research paradigms. The first developed around world society theorists who argue that a single

global model of schooling is emerging worldwide as a result of the spread of culturally-embedded model of the modern nation-state (Anderson-Levitt, 2003; Meyer et al., 1997). The scholars affiliated with this approach have pointed to curriculum convergence and isomorphism of educational policies as evidence of their claims. The second approach involves culture-centered theorists who argue that educational policy borrowing and traveling does not follow a linear path, instead the context in which those policies are implemented shapes what policies and to what extent they are implemented (Steiner-Khamsi, 2004). While the first group highlights convergence of education policies, the second highlights divergence, and an earlier study of the latest competence-based curriculum reform in Kosovo found that Kosovo is currently situated closer to the convergence end of the continuum (Tahirsylaj & Wahlström, 2019). While numerous studies have examined the global policy flows from the West to other regions of the world, including the Balkans where Kosovo is situated, less studies have focused on the content of the policies, and even less studies have applied education theories to explore phenomena under scrutiny (Tahirsylaj & Wahlström, 2019). To this end, the present study contributes to the small but growing research that frames education studies educationally (Tahirsylaj & Wahlström, 2019; Tahirsylaj, 2018), implying that educational theoretical perspectives are applied to frame and study the topic under consideration, and it focuses on analysis of the policy content, and understanding of competing policy processes that shape policy content.

Theoretical Perspectives: Curriculum and Didaktik Education Traditions

Diverse sets of theoretical frameworks originating from various disciplines have been influencing educational research since early 20th century. The multitude of frameworks in studying education phenomena has been attributed to the lack of education as a discipline on its own in Anglo-American contexts as opposed to education as a discipline on its own in Continental and Nordic Europe (Biesta, 2011). As a result, the scholarship on educational phenomena emerging from English speaking contexts is situated within such disciplines as sociology, psychology, philosophy, history, economics, political science and so forth (Biesta, 2011; Tahirsylaj, 2019). The rationale for the inter-disciplinary approach to education phenomena across Anglo-American contexts relies on the claim that educational theories cannot generate new understanding of education issues beyond what is generated through ‘fundamental’ disciplines such as sociology or psychology (Hirst, 1966). While it is worthwhile to ask psychological or sociological or philosophical questions about the education, we concur with Biesta (2011) that educational questions also need to be asked about education, which are aimed at understanding educational phenomena rather than explaining or predicting them. To this end and to offer an original contribution to the field of education policymaking in developing contexts, the study is framed theoretically by education traditions of Anglo-American curriculum theory and Continental/Nordic European didaktik theory (Deng & Luke, 2008; Hopmann, 2007; Tahirsylaj, Niebert & Duschl, 2015; Tahirsylaj & Wahlström, 2019) to trace the origins of curriculum policy in the light of curriculum ideologies and/or didaktik conceptions that permeate through two Kosovo curriculum frameworks of past 20 years.

Four main curriculum ideologies have been influential within the curriculum tradition, namely academic rationalism, humanism, social reconstruction, and social efficiency (Deng & Luke, 2008; Schiro, 2013; Schubert, 1986; Tahirsylaj, 2017). Each of the four ideologies varies primarily in the goals they promote for education and in how the subject matter is defined. First, *academic rationalism* focuses on transmission of disciplinary knowledge as primary goal, while the subject matter includes canonical body of disciplinary knowledge and way of knowing; second, *humanism*, which is sometimes referred to as learner-centered ideology, prioritizes development of individual learners who pursue personal development, self-actualization, innovation and creativity, while the subject matter is defined as learning activities; third, *social reconstruction* promotes the use of

education for social reform with the emphasis on sociocultural contexts rather than on individual needs of learners, while the subject matter is defined as a learning experience, where students are engaged in meaningful learning experiences that might generate social agency; and fourth, *social efficiency* supports preparation of future citizens with requisite skills, knowledge and capital for economic and social productivity, while the subject matter is defined as practical or instrumental knowledge and skills that possess functional and utilitarian value (Deng & Luke, 2008). Out of the four ideologies, social efficiency has been most influential in curriculum making in Anglo-American contexts (Tahirsylaj, 2017).

Didaktik, in turn, focuses on teachers' work directed by the concept of *Bildung*, concerning the formation of mind and habit of learners, while the subject matter is defined as curriculum content to realize its educative potential as interpreted and given life by teachers through didaktik analysis (Deng & Luke, 2008). Didaktik rests on three core elements, including *Bildung*, matter and meaning, and autonomy (Hopmann, 2007). The German concept *Bildung* does not have a direct translation into English, however, it is often referred to mean 'being educated', and in other cases it has been referred to as 'self-formation', 'cultivation', 'self-development' and 'cultural process' (Siljander & Sutinen, 2012). *Bildung* is the outcome of the encounter of the student with the content facilitated by the teacher (Tahirsylaj, 2019), thus depicting a formal education process taking place in formal educational institutions and relying on the three cornerstones of didaktik triangle: students, teachers, and content (Hopmann, 2007). Out of various didaktik models, critical-constructive didaktik advanced by Wolfgang Klafki has been the most dominant in Continental and Nordic Europe. Klafki's critical-constructive didaktik rests on the need of education to promote three dimensions of *Bildung*, including *self-determination* (being able to make autonomous decisions), *co-determination* (being collaborative and connecting with others to achieve common goals), and *solidarity* (being active in reaching out to those in need or underprivileged so that they too achieve *Bildung*) (Klafki, 1998).

The notion of didaktik analysis has also been developed by Klafki, who advanced five key questions that each curriculum maker and educator needs to consider when designing teaching and learning activities (Klafki, 2000). The five questions primarily focus on the choice of content and its significance for students' present and future. The five questions drive the design of teaching and learning activities for mastering *Bildung* dimensions of self-determination, co-determination, and solidarity (Tahirsylaj, 2019).

Prior comparative examinations of curriculum and didaktik traditions have shown that while they both deal with issues of educating the school children, the processes each follow vary, as do assumptions they rely on (Tahirsylaj et al., 2015; Westbury et al., 2000). In short, the main differences pertain to the role of content and its primacy in teaching and learning, the focus on *Bildung*, and professional teacher autonomy under didaktik, while curriculum tradition focuses on instructional methods, and the primacy of (often external) assessments (Tahirsylaj et al., 2015). Therefore, an examination of curriculum policy reform in Kosovo over past two decades from didaktik and curriculum traditions' perspectives enables us to better understand the content of the reform *educationally*, i.e. through educational theoretical perspectives rather than sociological or philosophical ones for example.

Methodological Approach

The study focuses on K-12 education in the Kosovo's evolving post-conflict context, and primarily on 'institutional' curricula, defined as connection between schooling and society, embodying a conception of what schooling should be with respect to the society and culture (Deng, 2011; Doyle, 1992) and 'programmatic' defined as translation of institutional curricula into school structures, subjects and courses, while it does not cover the other type of curricula namely 'classroom' curricula defined as activities of teaching and learning that teachers and students

Table 1. Curriculum components and main guiding questions.

Components	General questions related to components
Rationale	Why are they learning?
Aims & Objectives	Toward which goals are they learning?
Content	What are they learning?
Learning activities	How are they learning?
Teacher role	How is the teacher facilitating learning?
Materials & Resources	With what are they learning?
Grouping	With whom are they learning?
Location	Where are they learning?
Time	When are they learning?
Assessment	How far has learning progressed?

Source: Slightly adapted from van den Akker (2003).

engage in in classroom settings (Deng, 2011). In terms of curriculum levels, van den Akker (2003) differentiates between four levels: (1) system/society/nation/state (or macro) level; (2) school/institution (or meso) level; (3) classroom (or micro) level; and (4) individual/personal (or nano) level. Further, distinctions are made regarding curriculum representations, including ‘intended’, ‘implemented’ and ‘attained’ curricula, where the ‘intended’ representation focuses on vision, rationale, and intentions as stipulated in the curriculum policy documents, the ‘implemented’ representation covers understanding of curriculum by teachers as well as teaching and learning process in schools, while the ‘attained’ representation captures how learners experience the curriculum and learning outcomes they master (van den Akker, 2003). Considering these three different conceptualizations of curricula, the study is limited to ‘institutional’ and ‘programmatic’ that overlap with macro and meso curriculum levels and ‘intended’ curriculum representation.

To meet the study objectives, we analyzed three key curriculum policy documents in Kosovo in past 20 years—2001, 2011, and 2016 curriculum frameworks respectively—that have shaped curriculum policy formation and follow-up implementation. Document analysis is applied as the analytical approach. “Document analysis is a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents—both printed and electronic (computer-based and Internet-transmitted) material” (Bowen, 2009, p. 27). The three curriculum framework documents are in the public domain and thus freely accessible.

To conduct the analysis we use an established analytic tool, which drives the themes and categories the analyses capture. Specifically, we utilize van den Akker (2003) ten curriculum components perspective, including (1) rationale, (2) aims and objectives, (3) content, (4) learning activities, (5) teacher role, (6) materials & resources, (7) grouping, (8) location, (9) time, and (10) assessment to trace the changes introduced into the Kosovo curriculum policy from 2001 to 2011. Table 1 shows the main curriculum components and main driving questions associated with each component as proposed by van den Akker (2003).

The ten curriculum components refer to different curriculum levels. For example, the first three components, namely, rationale, aims and objectives, and content are primarily defined in main curriculum policy documents at the macro-level (van den Akker, 2003). As a result and since we focus on the two main Kosovo curriculum policy documents of 2001 and 2011 (and the slightly revised version of 2016), these three macro-level (or system/society/nation/state) components are best fitted for the analysis as part of the “intended” curriculum. On the other hand, the next three components—learning activities, teacher role, and materials & resources—belong to the micro-curriculum (or classroom) level (van den Akker, 2003), which we do not have direct observation or data from, however, we examine them, as well as the other four remaining components, to the extent that (and if) the three curriculum documents under analysis address them in some way in the form of guidelines for curriculum implementation. Since we rely on already existing theory-based categories of the curriculum components, we apply a deductive approach

through direct content analysis of the curriculum documents under scrutiny (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) for tracing the changes in the content of the curriculum reform in Kosovo over past 20 years. In turn, each of the categories of the curriculum components contains specific codes or concepts (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2013) found in curriculum policy documents from 2001 to 2011 (and revised version of 2016). The analysis that is guided by theoretical framing of curriculum and didaktik education traditions shows the changes in Kosovo's curriculum policy as a result of curriculum reform, and the shift in content of the reforms will reveal whether the latest curriculum reform is curriculum- or didaktik-inspired. The results of the analysis are summarized in Table 2 below, which we turn to in the next section.

Findings and Discussion

Overall, key findings identified through the analysis highlight two aspects of the curriculum policy reform in Kosovo over past 20 years; first, the most recent reform of 2011 (and revised in 2016) builds on the reforms initiated in 2001 since many policy aspects introduced in 2001 remained the same in 2011; and second, the most substantial change introduced in 2011 pertains to the content area of the curriculum components with introduction of competence-based curricula structured around six key competences. These and other findings are summarized in Table 2 divided into ten curriculum components, which are elaborated on and discussed in this section starting from *Rationale* and ending with *Assessment* components with the goal to answer our main research question on what changes in curriculum policy did competence-based curriculum framework of 2011 (revised as per MEST [2016]) bring into Kosovo pre-university education compared to 2001 framework.

Under *Rationale*, we find that a number of new and different concepts are used in curriculum framework of 2011 when compared to 2001, including the need to build a knowledge society, integration in the digital age, increased interdependencies, and mobility, sustainable development, and diaspora and emigration. These concepts reflect the political momentum that Kosovo found itself after declaration of independence in 2008. From the curriculum and didaktik perspectives, the concepts highlighted both in 2001 and 2011 frameworks do not pertain solely to a single ideology. Instead, a mix of ideologies are observed to be at play, as the concepts highlight academic rationalism and social reconstruction with focus on knowledge society; humanism with emphasis on learner-friendliness; social efficiency with reference to integration into the digital age and sustainable development; and didaktik with the focus on interdependencies, diaspora and emigration as a representation of the need to address self-determination, co-determination, and solidarity. The representation and overlap of all curriculum and didaktik perspectives in *Rationale* point to eventual use of curriculum policy as a practical tool for authorities to address the emerging challenges as a result of larger political and societal changes in the Kosovo context. In our analysis, the amalgam of all education ideologies reveals the lack of specific attention and consideration to any of the educational perspectives when *Rationale* was written. Instead, it seems that practical, political, and societal problems and challenges that needed to be addressed through education inspired the *Rationale*.

Under *Aims and Objectives*, we highlight in Table 2 an almost exact quote from the two frameworks of 2001 and 2011, which shows a number of revealing understandings. First, the curriculum policy reform in 2011 builds on the curriculum policy document of 2001, which in turn also reveals that same key authors and organizations (UNESCO, UNICEF)—as shown in contributions to documents - were involved in both processes. Second, the reference to knowledge, skills and attitudes in both documents is striking since the key competences introduced in 2011 framework are defined as a mobilization of these concepts. Third, the quote indicates that the 2011 reform despite being presented as a major departure from the previous 2001 reform in fact is only an extension of the similar ideas introduced in 2001. Indeed, the term 'key competences'

Table 2. Summary of changes in Kosovo's national curriculum policy from 2001 to 2011 (also slightly revised in 2016).

Curriculum Components	2001 Curriculum Framework	2011/2016 Curriculum Framework
Rationale Why are they learning?	<i>Pluralism</i> Adjustment to recent developments Learner-friendliness <i>Unity and diversity</i> Creativity Integrated and holistic learning Orientation Consultation School autonomy and accountability	The need to build a Knowledge Society Integration in the Digital Age Increased interdependencies and mobility <i>Learning to live together</i> Sustainable development Diaspora and emigration
Aims & Objectives Toward which goals are they learning?	Therefore, <i>one of the main aims of education in Kosovo should be the development of knowledge, attitudes and skills required by the exercise of a democratic citizenry. This will enable young people to engage competently in public affairs, and to be active and responsible citizens in a pluralistic and democratic society.</i> (DES, 2001, p. 20)	<i>One of the main aims of education in Kosovo is the development of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values required by a democratic society. This will enable young people to become active and responsible citizens so that they deal constructively with the challenges of diversity, as well as cultivating and respecting their own rights and the rights of others.</i> (MEST, 2011, p. 15)
Content What are they learning?	Content- and subject-based curricula Cross-curriculum issues Seven curriculum areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Languages and communication</i> • <i>Mathematics</i> • <i>Natural sciences</i> • <i>Social studies and civic education</i> • <i>The Arts</i> • <i>Technology</i> • <i>Physical education and sports</i> <i>Optional curriculum</i> Learning objectives	Competence-based curricula built around six key competences Seven curriculum areas <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Languages and communication • The Arts • Mathematics • Natural sciences • Society and environment • Physical education, Sports and Health • Life and work. <i>Optional curriculum</i> Learning outcomes
Learning Activities How are they learning?	<i>Problem-based learning</i> Group/team work Independent learning activities	<i>Problem-based learning</i> Group/team work Digital/ICT-based learning
Teacher Role How is the teacher facilitating learning?	<i>Learner-centered approach</i> <i>Diverse teaching methods</i> Teachers as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • learning facilitators • curriculum developers • epistemological authorities • moderators • actors • managers of classroom • mentors and counselors • educational specialists and researchers Orient, facilitate, and support learners to acquire and develop knowledge, skills, attitudes, and learning objectives.	<i>Learner-centered approach</i> <i>Diverse teaching methods</i> Produce customized learning resources Guide learners toward mastery of key competences and learning outcomes
Materials & Resources With what are they learning?	<i>Textbooks</i> <i>Learning & teaching aids</i> <i>Education software</i>	<i>Textbooks</i> <i>Learning and teaching aids</i> <i>Educational software</i> Digital/ICT tools
Grouping With whom are they learning?	<i>Whole class</i> <i>Comprehensive school until Grade 9</i> <i>Differentiation into Gymnasium and Vocational tracks in upper secondary schools (Gr. 10–12)</i>	<i>Whole class</i> <i>Comprehensive school until Grade 9</i> <i>Differentiation into Gymnasium and Vocational tracks in upper secondary schools (Gr. 10–12)</i>
Location Where are they learning?	<i>School & home</i> <i>Poorly resourced classrooms/schools</i>	<i>School & home</i> <i>Poorly resourced classrooms/schools</i>

(continued)

Table 2. Continued.

Curriculum Components	2001 Curriculum Framework	2011/2016 Curriculum Framework
Time (allocation) When are they learning?	Per individual subject <i>Largest chunk of time allocated to mother tongue and mathematics</i>	Per curriculum area <i>Largest chunk of time allocated to Languages and Communication and Mathematics areas</i>
Assessment How far has learning progressed?	<i>Internal and external evaluation</i> <i>Standardized external evaluation (at the end of Grades 5, 9, and 12)</i>	<i>Internal assessment</i> Formative and summative assessment Classroom- and school-level assessment <i>External assessment</i> <i>Standardized external evaluation (at the end of Grades 5, 9, and 12)</i> International assessments (PISA, TIMSS)

Source: The text in **bold** under 2011/2016 Curriculum Framework column indicates a change from 2001. The text in *italics* under 2001 and 2011/2016 Curriculum Framework columns indicates what stayed similar or same. Curriculum Components categories are based on van den Akker (2003).

itself is referred to throughout in 2001 document, as in the following where it is noted that, “The teaching and learning of knowledge, skills, and attitudes, as well as the development of different key competences (such as linguistic, methodological, cultural and social competences) can be provided in school in different ways” (DES, 2001, p. 57). In both 2011 and 2001 documents the main aims of education are aimed at development of Kosovo into a democratic society. From the educational perspectives, the aims that highlight key competences consisting of knowledge, skills, and attitudes show again an overlap of social efficiency, academic rationalism, and didaktik approaches to curriculum reform.

Next, under *Content*, and as noted in Table 2, the framing of the 2011 curriculum policy reform as competence-based as opposed to the content-based curricula of 2001 denotes the most striking change introduced in the latest curriculum reform in Kosovo. The 2011/2016 documents outline six key learning competences to be mastered by students during pre-university education, which are defined as follows: “Competences involve an integrated and coherent system of knowledge, skills and attitudes that are applicable and transferable. They enable students to cope with the challenges of the digital age and with the knowledge-based labor market in an interdependent world” (MEST, 2011, p. 16; 2016, p. 16). The six key competences include *communication and expression, thinking, learning, life, work and environment-related, personal, and civic* competences (MEST, 2011, 2016). The definition of competences as well as the wording in the six key competences reflects the curriculum policy promoted by the European Commission in 2006 (OJEU, 2006; Tahirsylaj, 2018). Another key conceptual and substantial difference between 2001 and 2011/2016 documents is the definition of 2001 content-based curricula in the form of *learning objectives*, and the definition of 2011/2016 competence-based curricula and key competences in the form of *learning outcomes*. Both learning objectives and learning outcomes serve as targets and goals to be achieved in schools as goal-oriented institutions, however they are different concepts and represent different starting points. While objectives are based on contents of teaching as inputs, outcomes are broad descriptions of long-term outputs of student competences irrespective of any particular curriculum content or pedagogy (Marsh, 2004). Viewed from the educational perspectives then, the competence- and learning outcome-based curriculum policy introduced in 2011 is closer to the social efficiency curriculum ideology which promotes the instrumental value of education long beyond schooling has been completed. Effectively this does not mean that content and subjects are less relevant in 2011/2016 since the curriculum areas remain almost the same as in 2001. The emphasis on key competences and learning outcomes highlights the long-term learning that spans different curriculum areas and subjects in order to

make education future-relevant and valuable in line with the social efficiency ideology ideals for using education as a tool for enhanced economic productivity. Framing educational content through social efficiency ideology toward mastery of specific learning outcomes and key competences puts pressure on teachers to sideline content and teaching and focus entirely on guaranteeing learning. From didaktik perspective, this is an impossible task as learning is a learner's responsibility, while the teacher is responsible for selection and coverage of content that is meaningful for the present and future of learners (Hopmann, 2007).

The next seven components of curriculum, namely *Learning Activities*, *Teacher Role*, *Materials and Resources*, *Grouping*, *Location*, *Time Allocation*, and *Assessment*, are not usually addressed in detail in curriculum frameworks as van den Akker (2003) noted, however we have been able to identify sections in the frameworks under examination here that address these curriculum components in the form of specifications or guidelines for curriculum implementation. Still, as noted in Table 2, and taken together the changes introduced in these seven components only reflect the overall framing of curriculum policy as competence-based as well as the rationale for curriculum reform in order to take into consideration the digital age. As a result, for example, we see introduction of digital/information and communication technology (ICT)-based learning under *Learning Activities*, guidelines for teachers how to guide learners toward mastery of key competences and learning outcomes under *Teacher Role*, and introduction of classroom- and school-level assessments as well as international assessments such as PISA under *Assessment*. Overall, the key educational concepts driving the 2011/2016 curriculum policy reform when considering these seven components remained the same as defined in the 2001 reform, especially when zooming into learner-centered approach under *Teacher Role*, and reliance on textbooks under *Materials & Resources*. Again, from the educational perspectives, an overlap of curriculum and didaktik perspectives is observed. For example, in elements that are in support of implementing competence-based curricula social efficiency ideals are observed, while regarding teacher role, the focus on humanism ideology is maintained from 2001 as represented by learner-centered approach. On the other hand, the reliance on textbooks as the key resource for teaching and learning, and considering that textbooks serve as academic content of given subjects part of the curriculum (Marsh, 2004), it can be argued that aspects of didaktik and academic rationalism constitute the basis for teaching and learning in classroom settings.

What is absent in all policy documents under analysis is specific references to the concept of *Bildung*, as one of the core elements of Continental/Nordic didaktik perspective. In this regard, the emphasis of mastery of future-oriented key competences based on specific learning outcomes disregards the Klafki-based conceptualizations of didaktik and the role of content and *Bildung* for the present and the future of students. To this end, the curriculum framing in Kosovo seems to have shifted toward curriculum ideology of social efficiency, as it has already been found when comparing assessment practices in Kosovo and a set of didaktik and curriculum countries using PISA data (Tahirsylaj, 2021). Also, the absence of references to *Bildung* in policy documents can be explained with the fact that the past didaktik model dominant in Kosovo relied on the didactical teacher authority-based model imported to former Yugoslavia via Russia's influence (Tahirsylaj, 2021). Subsequently, the absence of *Bildung* does not represent a situation where *Bildung* was lost as a result of the shift from content- to competence-based curricula, rather *Bildung* as conceptualized within *Bildung*-based didaktik of Western and/or Northern Europe tradition was never there in Kosovo's curriculum to begin with.

Finally, considering the curriculum policy content in the latest curriculum reform in Kosovo in the light of previous research around the global education policy flows, the findings confirm prior claims that developing countries adopt from the Western sources a set of well-established policy packages such as student-centered teaching and learning approaches, introduction of curriculum standards, and standardization of student assessment (Silova, 2010). Further, it is observed that curriculum policy reform in Kosovo was not only supported by the international

organizations in Kosovo present in the country, but they played a major role in authoring curriculum policy documents both in 2001 and 2011, which is in line with prior findings of Verger et al. (2012). Lastly, regarding the debate on divergence and convergence of global education policies, the present findings offer further evidence that Kosovo appears to fall toward the convergence end of the continuum as policy content introduced into the curriculum reform is in line with the key competence frameworks promoted at the European Union level. However, the alignment of these policy options with global policy trends seems to have been well-timed and well-matched with the emerging challenges and political changes in the Kosovo context both in 2001 and 2011.

Conclusions, Implications, Limitations and Further Research

The present findings suggest that overlapping curriculum policy actors, mainly associated with international organizations operating in Kosovo at the time of curriculum policy development processes, contributed to both recent curriculum reforms of 2001 and 2011. Precisely because of this, the content of the curriculum policy in 2011 expands to some extent from the 2001 reform, however much of the policies remain the same when all ten curriculum components as per van den Akker (2003) are taken into consideration. Still, one major change differentiates that two reforms, i.e. the framing of 2011 curriculum reform as competence-based and specific definition of six key competences and associated learning outcomes, which is a clear departure from 2001 content- and learning objectives-based framing. Interestingly, the references to key competences were identified already in 2001 curriculum framework defined as an integration of knowledge, skills and attitudes, indicating that competence-based approach introduced in 2011 was not entirely new—at least not in the curriculum policy discourse. The presence of references to key competences in 2001 document shows that authors of and contributors to the document were already then borrowing terminology from the ongoing work over 1990s on key competence approaches to curriculum at UNESCO and that OECD introduced into educational discourses internationally through the PISA study in 2000.

Next, the introduction of competence-based approaches to curricula seems to have been well-timed with the change in political situation after Kosovo's independence in 2008, when among other things, there was new political leadership in charge of education sector eager to be associated with the latest international trends in education (Tahirsylaj, 2020, 2018). Further, the findings highlight that the solution provided by competence-based framework marked the break of Kosovo's education tradition from being more didaktik-based, albeit not entirely Continental/Nordic didactic, toward curriculum tradition based on social efficiency ideology, specifically when considering the *content* component of the curriculum, while an array of all other curriculum and didaktik perspectives are evident when other curriculum components are taken into account. Furthermore, the international trends in education with the emergence of PISA study in early 2000s, and the European Commission recommendation of key competences in 2006 (OJEU, 2006) provided the macro narrative and legitimation for the 2011 competence-based curriculum reform in Kosovo.

Based on our findings of the study of curriculum policy framed by education perspectives, we draw two main rather contradictory conclusions: first, a richer and more complex understanding of curriculum policy content is uncovered; and second, obvious lack of consideration for education perspectives in curriculum policy making is revealed. This situation indicates that curriculum policy is often written by policy entrepreneurs under direction of policymakers/politicians, who might or might not have expertise in education traditions. Further, this situation reveals the inconvenient truth for educational community that educational expertise is not always at the core of decisions regarding curriculum policy choices, which are instead mostly politically-driven.

The findings and results of the analyses presented here have implications for curriculum policy-making in Kosovo as well as other developing contexts. First, the analysis shows that curriculum

policy making in Kosovo has relied on adoption and borrowing of a set of policies promoted by international organizations without much attention to the educational perspectives that historically and traditionally frame specific goals of education and definition of educational content. The policies that Kosovo adopted in its curriculum frameworks have been part of the global policy options that are more relevant for the European context, where Kosovo belongs geographically. Therefore, any future curriculum policy revision in Kosovo can benefit in terms of clarity and quality if policy choices made are more systematically grounded on educational perspectives in order to make policies more contextually and educationally sound. Such educational clarity contributes to better understanding of curriculum policy by teachers and other stakeholders involved in curriculum implementation, thus increasing chances for more faithful implementation and enhanced learning.

Still, no strong arguments can be made about implementation of competence-based curricula in Kosovo since we lack evidence from the classroom settings and only rely on policy document analysis here. Our reliance on van den Akker (2003) analytic tool proved useful as it made the study manageable and coherent, however at times we encountered its limitations, and as such it needs updating to reflect the latest curriculum policy document contents. For example, we suggest that adding another component on *Policymaking* (Who is writing the curriculum policy?) and another on *Leadership* (Who is leading curriculum policy making and curriculum implementation) would better capture the complexities of recent curriculum policy documents and contents therein.

Recognizing the limitations of lacking evidence from curriculum implementation, a number of avenues to pursue further research could be explored. Interview studies with curriculum policy-makers, school leaders, and teachers can capture the intricacies of curriculum policymaking and implementation in developing contexts such as Kosovo, while future classroom observation studies can identify how teachers translate key competences and learning outcomes as defined in the competence-based curricula into meaningful and relevant teaching and learning activities for their students. Such studies would offer further evidence and opportunities for researchers, and in turn, for policy-makers and other stakeholders, whether the intended curricula outlined in the curriculum frameworks make it into the classroom curricula in schools.

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