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Master thesis

*“Comparison of Teacher Training Curricula among Slovenia,
Kosovo, and North Macedonia”*

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Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my beloved parents who have sacrificed everything for the education of my siblings and me.

Declaration of Authorship

I hereby certify that this thesis has been composed by me and is based on my own work, unless stated otherwise. No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgement in this thesis. All references and verbatim extracts have been quoted, and all sources of information, including graphs and data sets, have been specifically acknowledged.

Date:

Signature:

Fortesa Hadja

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Abstract

The role of the teachers is crucial in reaching learning objectives and influencing learners' achievements. Teachers' qualifications and professional development depend to a great extent on the quality of teacher training programs which are expected to prepare teachers for their future positions by providing them with the opportunities to develop life-long teaching competencies and practices. This study aims to investigate what kind of English teaching profile is produced in Slovenia, Kosovo, and North Macedonia, highlight their qualities, as well as identify the innovations related to the implemented curricula in these countries. Moreover, it attempts to identify the areas for improvement in Kosovo and North Macedonia's education systems regarding teacher training curricula including teachers' standards, and professional qualifications with the goal of establishing consistent conditions for qualitative English teacher training programs based on the educational reforms in Slovenia.

To measure the above-mentioned objectives, both qualitative and quantitative research methods were used. In the first part of the methodology document analysis method was used to present and compare teacher training curricula of the above-mentioned countries. On the other part, a quantitative research was conducted. The sample consisted of 9 University professors and 45 in-service teachers graduated from the English teacher training programs at the University of Maribor, University of Prishtina, and South East European University. Data collection instrument include questionnaires that were filled out by novice teachers and University professors. The duration of the study was two months. In general, the study is a comparison between teacher training programs of the three countries by examining, analyzing and describing the similarities and differences among them. The results gathered from the questionnaires are expected to highlight novice teachers' perceptions upon the practical methodological knowledge gained during their studies. Additionally, it aims to indicate how English teachers evaluate teacher training programs they were part of and whether they are able to apply the obtained knowledge and skills during their studies in their teaching experiences. On the other hand, the questionnaire with University professors elicits their perspectives regarding the effectiveness of the English teacher education programs in preparing qualified English language teachers and whether students' needs are fulfilled during the program of study.

Keywords: *teachers, competencies, curricula, training, comparison.*

Abstrakti

Roli i mësuesve është vendimtar në arritjen e objektivave të mësimi dhe në suksesin e nxënësve. Kualifikimi dhe zhvillimi profesional i mësimeve varen në një masë të madhe nga cilësia e programeve të trajnimit të mësuesve të cilat duhet të përgatisin mësimeve për pozitën e tyre të ardhshme duke u ofruar atyre mundësi për të zhvilluar kompetencat dhe praktikën e mësimeve. Ky studim synon të hetojë se çfarë profile të mësimeve të gjuhës angleze dalin nga programet e studimeve në Slloveni, Kosovë dhe në Maqedoninë veriore, të nxjerrë në pah cilësitë e tyre, si dhe të identifikojë inovacionet e fundit lidhur me kurrikulat e zbatuara në këto vende. Për më tepër, kjo tezë synon të identifikojë fushat për përmirësim në sistemet arsimore të Kosovës dhe të Maqedonisë veriore lidhur me programet e trajnimit, standardet e mësimeve dhe kualifikimet profesionale me qëllim të krijimit të kushteve të qëndrueshme për programe cilësore në gjuhën angleze bazuar në reformat arsimore në Slloveni.

Për të matur objektivat e lartpërmendura, u zhvillua një hulumtim kualitativ dhe kuantitativ. Në pjesën e parë të metodologjisë u përdor metoda e analizës së dokumenteve për prezantimin dhe krahasimin e programeve të trajnimit të mësimeve të vendeve të lartpërmendura. Në pjesën tjetër, u realizua një hulumtim kuantitativ. Mostra përfshiu 9 profesorë të Universiteteve dhe 45 mësimeve që kanë qenë pjesë e programeve të trajnimit të mësimeve në Universitetin e Mariborit, Universitetin e Prishtinës dhe Universitetin e Evropës Juglindore. Instrumenti që u përdor për mbledhjen e të dhënave përfshiu pyetësorët që u plotësuan nga mësimeve dhe profesorët e Universiteteve. Kohëzgjatja e këtij hulumtimi ishte dy muaj. Në përgjithësi, ky është një hulumtim krahasues i cili shqyrton, analizon dhe përshkruan ngjashmëritë dhe dallimet në mes të programeve të trajnimit të mësimeve të të tre vendeve. Të dhënat e mbledhura nga pyetësorët do të nxjerrin në pah perceptimet e mësimeve të rinjë mbi njohuritë praktike metodologjike të fituara gjatë studimeve të tyre. Përveç kësaj, ky hulumtim synon të tregojë se si mësimeve i vlerësojnë programet e trajnimit ku ata kanë studiuar dhe a janë në gjendje të zbatojnë njohuritë dhe aftësitë e fituara gjatë studimeve në punën e tyre si mësimeve. Nga ana tjetër, pyetësori që u zhvillua me profesorët e Universiteteve nxjerrë në pah perspektivat e tyre lidhur me efektivitetin e programeve të studimit për përgatitjen e mësimeve të kualifikuar si dhe a plotësohen nevojat e studentëve gjatë studimeve të tyre.

Fjalët kyqe: mësuesit, kompetencat, kurrikula, trajnimi, krahasimi

Title of the thesis:

“Comparison of Teacher Training Curricula among Slovenia, Kosovo, and North Macedonia”

Translation of the title in Albanian:

“Krahasimi i kurrikulave për trajnimin e mësimdhënësve ndërmjet Sllovenisë, Kosovës, dhe Maqedonisë veriore”

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Kosovo and North Macedonia are newer countries which are aspiring to become members of the European Union (EU). For such countries, Slovenia is a role model in all educational reforms because formally the three countries once belonged to the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and used to have a similar higher education system. However, Slovenia moved forward in terms of better practices in teacher education in general and English language teaching in particular since it has developed its education system based on other European countries' positive traditions and good practices (Zgaga, Devjak, Vogrinc, & Repac, 2006). Nevertheless, Kosovo and North Macedonia's higher education system is close to that of Slovenia as a result of fundamental reforms in teacher education according to European integration and Bologna processes (Spasovski, 2010).

Socio-economic, political and cultural factors in most countries of the Western Balkans including Kosovo and North Macedonia which are still in the process of transition have affected the quality of education as well (Zgaga, 2013). Teacher education programs in these countries have been part of continuous changes in educational reforms throughout the years. However, there is still a need for improving the quality of teacher preparation and qualification based on European trends. It is argued that when it comes to adequate teacher preparation, there is a gap between theory and practice. A study by Zgaga (2006) has indicated that while student teachers are provided with the necessary subject and pedagogical knowledge, they lack practical methodological knowledge. Moreover, Spasovski (2010) claims that teacher education institutions in some Western Balkan countries need to better integrate teaching practices in their curricular reforms in order to help student teachers develop "the practical skills, attitudes, and values that underlie the teaching profession." (p.103). Furthermore, he also states that these countries lack on providing student teachers with adequate preparation towards the development of teacher competencies.

The comparison between teacher training programs among Slovenia, Kosovo, and North Macedonia is useful for providing an overview of the identified areas for improvement in initial teacher education programs of the latter countries as well as offering practical recommendations regarding teacher preparation practices and the integration of curricular reforms based on professional needs of student teachers.

In other words, highlighting the similarities and differences between the three countries may contribute to the improvement of teacher training programs in Kosovo and North Macedonia. Research of this kind is rare in these countries, therefore, the results of this study are of value to teacher educators and all others involved in designing English teacher education programs.

1.1 SIGNIFICANCE AND PURPOSES OF THE THESIS

Nowadays, teachers are faced with the challenge of reflecting the acquired knowledge and skills during their studies in their classroom practices. This issue is being more particularly highlighted in Western Balkan countries (in our case Kosovo and North Macedonia). The education systems in these countries still lack on equipping student teachers with adequate preparation, what consequently affects students' achievements and overall learning outcomes.

The importance of teacher professional development and preparation is being emphasized to a greater extent than ever before in the literature of teacher education. Research has proven that an effective teacher training program should continuously improve teachers' qualifications by providing student teachers with practical experiences and develop their professional knowledge and competencies by updating them with current European and international teaching trends.

Therefore, it is important to analyze what higher education institutions of the above-mentioned countries offer to prospective teachers, identify the areas for improvement, and also give a view of what aspects of teacher preparation curriculum designers need to focus on most by offering useful recommendations that would contribute to a better quality of initial teacher training programs. In this respect, we are taking Slovenia as a model because despite of implementing similar reforms, it has reached better results in the educational process including effective teacher preparation. Through this study, it is hypothesized that by highlighting the similarities and differences between the institutions of the three countries can contribute to the quality of teacher preparation in Kosovo and North Macedonia with the goal of establishing consistent conditions for effective teacher training programs.

1.2 STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

This paper consists of five chapters divided into introduction, literature review, methodology, findings and discussion and conclusion.

The first chapter includes introduction which provides an overview of the identified areas for improvement in Kosovo and North Macedonia's education systems regarding teacher training curricula including teachers' standards, and professional qualifications. Significance and purposes of the thesis is the following section, and finally general and specific objectives of the study.

The second chapter comprises literature review, the main focus of which is to define the ideal profile of a teacher that graduates from a successful teacher training program, the role of effective English language teacher training programs, the importance of integrating theory and practice in the curriculum, and the development of teacher competencies in English teacher training programs; language proficiency, content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge, as well as teaching skills. The third chapter discusses the methodology and study procedures. It presents the design of the study, research question and hypothesis, population and sample, data collection and instruments.

The fourth chapter reveals the similarities and differences among the three countries elicited by the document analysis method, the results from the University professors and novice teachers' questionnaires, followed by a discussion related to the findings.

Whereas, the last chapter provides a general conclusion, limitations of the study and recommendation for further research. The ending section constitutes the bibliography followed by the appendixes.

1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE THESIS

1.3.1 General objectives

- The aim of this study is to shed light on the quality of English language teacher training curriculum in Slovenia, which would be useful as a basis for improving English language teacher training programs in Kosovo and North Macedonia. Moreover, it attains to identify the areas for improvement in teacher training programs in Kosovo and North Macedonia by highlighting major factors that affect the efficiency of teachers' preparation and professional development in these countries. In other words, this study is going to find out what Western Balkan countries, particularly Kosovo and North Macedonia, need to change in their teacher training programs in order to achieve the desired results in preparing qualified and competent English teachers similar to countries that have a common higher education system, in our case Slovenia.

1.3.2 Specific objectives

- To define and describe the similarities and differences between the English language teacher training programs among Slovenia, Kosovo, and North Macedonia.
- To find out whether theory and practice are given equal importance in teacher training curricula of the above-mentioned countries
- To investigate how teacher training programs in these countries contribute to the development of teacher competencies and qualifications.

Summary

This chapter indicates the importance of establishing consistent conditions for redesigning effective teacher preparation programs in order to provide prospective teachers with adequate knowledge and skills that directly affect learners' accomplishments. Also, it highlights the general and specific objectives of the study.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. INTRODUCTION OF LITERATURE REVIEW

The role of the teachers is crucial in achieving learning objectives and improving the quality of education. According to Dean, Lauer, and Urquhart (2005) “without high-quality teachers, we cannot realize the goal of high achievement for all students. In turn, if pre-service teachers do not receive the highest-quality teacher preparation, then we cannot meet the demand for high-quality teachers.” (p. 284). Therefore, successful teacher training programs have the potential of preparing qualified teachers who thereafter reflect the acquired theoretical and practical knowledge efficiently in their future classroom practices.

The responsibility of teacher education institutions is to strive for the highest standards in teaching as well as to ensure that the students and the society as a whole derive the desired results from continuous development and enhancement of the quality of teaching and learning (Aylett & Gregory, 1996).

Teacher training programs have undergone major changes over the years due to economic, social, and political developments which have challenged previous educational reforms by redefining the role of the teacher through focusing on the importance of teacher preparation process (Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2001). Snoek and Zogla (2009) state that teacher preparation programs' main goal should be to provide prospective teachers with the necessary teaching skills and qualities. Moreover, the importance of defining what comprises the knowledge base of teaching and how it has to be related to the practice and content of teacher preparation programs has been a central issue in teacher education (Tedick, 2005). According to Elbaz, Carter, and Verloop (as cited in Oonk, 2009), the knowledge base of teaching includes theoretical knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, as well as practical knowledge which is an important element of the knowledge base that comprises all actions undertaken by teachers. Verloop, Driel and Meijer (2001) claim that approaches that integrate both theory and professional knowledge as necessary aspects of the knowledge base of teaching contribute to the enhancement of the quality of teacher education.

Furthermore, it has been suggested that a useful way of developing teachers' professional knowledge and skills is by defining an effective, well-structured and widely accepted teacher profile. According to the Organization for Cooperation and Economic Development (OECD) report (2005):

The overarching priority is for countries to have in place a clear and concise statement or profile of what teachers are expected to know and be able to do. This is necessary to provide the framework to guide initial teacher education, teacher certification, teachers' ongoing professional development and career advancement, and to assess the extent to which these different elements are being effective. (p. 131)

2.2. ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHER EDUCATION

The field of English Language Teacher training is particularly concerned with the professional preparation of EFL student teachers. According to Agudo and Dios (2014), the overall mission of English teacher training programs is to improve the quality of teaching by educating competent and skillful student teachers. In English language teaching, teacher preparation programs typically comprise the knowledge derived from linguistics and language learning theory as well as the practical element based on language teaching “methodology and teaching practice.” (Richards, 1990, p. 3)

Teacher training programs should be mainly concerned with equipping student teachers with the necessary professional knowledge and preparation for their future positions since “teachers with good professional preparation can make a significant difference in students’ learning.” (Tellez & Waxman, 2006, p. 101). Hunt (2009) emphasizes the qualities of a well-qualified language teacher as:

The collection of characteristics, competencies, and behaviors at all educational levels that enable students to reach desired outcomes, which may include the attainment of specific learning objectives as well as broader goals such as being able to solve problems, think critically, work collaboratively, and become effective citizens. (p. 1)

Various studies have explored and examined the content and procedures of English teacher training programs and have provided useful recommendations regarding effective teacher preparation. Richards (1990) suggests that a theory of the key principles of effective language teaching is necessary for preparing qualified language teachers. He further suggests that this theory should provide the basis for the content and principles of English language programs which should include a description of efficient language teaching processes, reflect the nature of effective language teaching, and develop principles for the preparation of student teachers.

In addition, Burns and Richards (2009) claim that there is an increasing requirement for greater accountability towards curriculum renewal, teaching standards, professionalism, and the improvement of language teachers' qualifications according to internationally recognized trends.

Furthermore, research in the field of language teacher education has continuously highlighted the importance of developing effective teacher preparation programs and the critical role of teacher ongoing professional development. Pennington (1990) suggests that a coherent language teacher education program which implements methods that provide student teachers with practical experiences based on obtained insights and skills through training that include theory and research contribute to their lifelong professional development. Moreover, Hudson, Zgaga, and Åstrand (2010) emphasize the need for advancing teacher professional development based on a career-long perspective including "initial teacher education, induction, and continuing professional development." (p. 9)

On the other hand, it has also been argued that adequate teacher training programs should include an evaluation procedure by obtaining feedback from students, teachers and the others involved in designing EFL teacher training programs. According to Peacock (2009), in order to reach professionalism in the field of English language teaching, English teacher training programs need to be subject to critical review. He claims that there is a need for incorporating an overall evaluation procedure that would contribute to the improvement of the training programs through providing feedback on the strengths and weaknesses as well as offering the necessary suggestions for continuous improvement.

2.3. INTEGRATING THEORY AND PRACTICE IN THE CURRICULUM

Due to the importance and impact of teacher education programs on effective language teaching, it is assumed that there is a need for more effective teacher education approaches towards teachers' professional development and preparation. (Agudo & Dios, 2014; Burns & Richards, 2009)

According to Korthagen et al. (2001) many research studies have indicated that for many decades teacher education programs have failed to provide prospective teachers with the necessary professional knowledge. As a result, teachers were not able to apply the acquired theory during studies into classroom practices. Kareva (2013) further refers particularly to teacher education institutions in Europe by indicating the gap between theory and practice as one of the biggest challenges they face nowadays. Similarly, Pennington (1990) argues that in most teacher preparation programs, the educational and the practical training aspects are strictly separated from each other, thus affecting the effectiveness of the programs. She addresses the gap between theory and practice by referring to the lack of students' practical experience throughout their training except for the formal teaching practicum at the end of the program.

Furthermore, Burns and Richards (2009) claim that the practical and pedagogical content knowledge, both of which refers to the knowledge that students teachers need for facilitating teaching in their classrooms, have often been excluded from the core content of English language teacher education programs.

In addition, Farrell (2012) also emphasizes the importance of bridging the gap between pre-service and in-service education more effectively by pointing out the need for a better understanding of what aspects of language teaching, especially those related to "teachers' subject matter and pedagogical content knowledge" should be integrated in English teacher training programs. (p. 446)

This situation has led researchers to investigate what kind of conditions teacher training programs need to provide for future language teachers in order to develop their life- long teaching competencies and practices.

In the book: *Theory and Practice in EFL Teacher Education: Bridging the Gap*, the authors present an approach according to which in order for students to develop their professional knowledge, the process of knowledge construction should start in theory classes and then leading to the application of the gained relevant theoretical notions in specific classroom settings (Huttner, Larcher, Reichl, & Schiftner, 2012).

Active learning is another model that can contribute to the enhancement of integrating theory and practice in the classroom. According to Wrenn and Wrenn (2009), the active learning model helps in arousing students' interest on acquiring knowledge, encourage their participation, and "maximizes learning through observing, reflecting, sharing, and applying course material in classroom and practice settings."(p. 263)

Consequently, the best learning environment is created if both classroom learning and field experiences are integrated within the curriculum. Wrenn and Wrenn (2009) further suggest that such integration provides students with the opportunity to more closely connect the practical value of learning theoretical frameworks in order to achieve better results in their professional practices.

2.4. THE DEVELOPMENT OF TEACHER COMPETENCIES IN ENGLISH TEACHER TRAINING PROGRAMS

The need for good quality language teachers and a comprehensive understanding of how to best prepare them have been broadly discussed in the literature of teacher education. Hammadou and Bernhardt (1987) suggest that the curriculum content offered to student teachers has a strong impact on their professional development. An important component of the professional preparation of English language teachers is to clearly define "what essential skills, knowledge, values, attitudes, and goals do language teachers need, and how can these be acquired?" (Richards, 2010, p. 101). From this, one can understand that the quality of language teaching is completely related to the teachers' professional competencies as well as their personal skills. As Fernández (2014) states that language teachers' classroom performance and the learning outcomes of their students are strongly influenced by teachers' professional preparation during their initial training, as well as their own learning experiences and their personality.

Today's teachers need a wide range of competencies in order to meet the demands of quality education. Teaching competency is a crucial component of an effective teacher education program. Therefore, the educational reforms in many teacher training programs worldwide are oriented towards the development of the competencies teachers need in their future classroom practices (Hammadou & Bernhardt, 1987).

It has been argued that the broader set of teacher competencies consists of both qualities and characteristics since they refer to the skills, knowledge, and abilities that a qualified teacher should have (Drakulic, 2013). Thereby, the duty of teacher education programs is to provide student teachers with the necessary knowledge, values, and instructional skills they will need to prepare their students in the future. According to Nessipbayeva (2012), for successful completion of a teacher training program, teacher- trainees must demonstrate the following competencies to prospective teachers: "effective classroom management, effective teaching practices, effective assessment, and effective technology skills."(p. 154)

On the other hand, Richards (2017) refers to the English language teaching competency by addressing three core dimensions of teacher knowledge and teacher professional development: teacher's language proficiency, content knowledge, and teaching skills. In the following sections, we are going to discuss upon the importance of designing the English language training curriculum in a way that would contribute to the development of these three basic teacher competencies in order to reach the desired results in preparing well- qualified language teachers.

2.4.1 Language proficiency

The majority of today's English language teachers are non-native speakers of English. Therefore, they are faced with the challenge of reaching higher levels of English proficiency in order to achieve their professional goals.

The enhancement of teacher language proficiency is an important aspect of EFL teacher training programs. According to Fernandez (2014), English language teacher education programs pay close attention to the improvement of target language proficiency by providing detailed descriptions of curricula designed to develop language competence. However, Snell-Hornby (as cited in Seseek, 2007) claims that the majority of EFL teacher training programs nowadays, especially in Europe, still base their training upon traditional language and literature materials. As a result, student teachers' English proficiency development is often isolated as a curricular objective and considered as English for general purposes rather than profiled according to students' professional needs.

Therefore, Seseek (2007) suggests that "a holistic, systematic, empirically based description of English for the profession" should be used to enhance students' linguistic and professional performance by providing them with a more effectively profiled English language competence (p.413). Moreover, Elder (2001) also claims that developing an ESP approach towards the preparation of student teachers would contribute to the enhancement of their target language proficiency and communicative competence. Thereby, curriculum designers should integrate approaches that provide students with the ability to teach English by using a range of specialized skills and knowledge instead of simply achieving higher levels of general target language proficiency.

Seseek (2007) concludes that English language teachers should be equipped with a broad language competence in order to be able to function appropriately in a wide range of teaching contexts. Furthermore, Richards (2010) states that prospective teachers can be competent classroom practitioners and teach efficiently in the target language after they have reached a threshold proficiency level in the English language. He further relates this level of proficiency with the ability to do the following things effectively and fluently in English:

1. To comprehend texts accurately.
2. To provide good language models.
3. To maintain use of the target language in the classroom.
4. To maintain fluent use of the target.

5. To give explanations and instructions in the target language.
6. To provide examples of words and grammatical structures and give accurate explanations (e.g. of vocabulary and language points).
7. To use appropriate classroom language.
8. To select target-language resources (e.g. newspapers, magazines, internet websites).
9. To monitor his or her own speech and writing for accuracy.
9. To give correct feedback on learner language.
10. To provide input at an appropriate level of difficulty.
11. To provide language-enrichment experiences for learners. (p.3)

It can be assumed that ELT teacher preparation programs have the potential of influencing the development of students' target language competence, which would consequently result in the effective application of the above-mentioned aspects in classroom practices.

2.4.2 Content knowledge

A significant area of study in English language teacher education research concerns what the content knowledge of teaching is and what English teachers need to know about their teaching subject in order to become competent language teachers. According to König et al. (2016), content knowledge refers to the knowledge of the subject matter and it is consequently related to the content teachers are required to teach to their students.

Despite the importance of equipping student teachers with efficient subject matter knowledge necessary for the improvement of teaching and learning, over the years researchers, educators, and curriculum designers have been mainly focused on how much preparation prospective teachers need in their future teaching practices rather than on what kind of content knowledge they really need to learn and be able to teach (Ball, Thames, & Phelps, 2008). It has been suggested that good quality teaching requires a highly sophisticated professional knowledge. Thereby, teacher educators need to provide student teachers with content knowledge that constitutes professional knowledge appropriate to the profession of teaching.

Shulman's work contributed in highlighting the importance of reframing content knowledge based upon the broader landscape of professional knowledge in language teaching. He claimed that subject matter content understanding of a prospective teacher must include more than knowing notions and facts. The teacher must also have a comprehensive understanding of the rules, structures and principles necessary for establishing what is acceptable to say and do in a particular discipline. Moreover, the teacher must not only understand that something is so; the teacher need to further realize why it is so, "on what grounds its warrant can be asserted, and under what circumstances our belief in its justification can be weakened and even denied." (Shulman, 1986, p. 9).

Furthermore, Richards (2010) refers to content knowledge as the disciplinary knowledge that is considered to be crucial to gaining professional recognition in teaching profession. This kind of knowledge today is acquired by special teacher training and includes a wide range of content such as: theories about teaching methods, language acquisition, phonology, syntax, discourse analysis and so on. Nevertheless, disciplinary knowledge as being part of professional education does not convert to teacher practical skills. Pedagogical content knowledge on the other hand is one of the content-related categories that ensures a basis for language teaching, the application of which can impact the resolution of different practical issues in teaching.

2.4.2.1 Pedagogical content knowledge

Pedagogical knowledge refers to as Richards (2017) suggests: "teacher's knowledge of teaching." (p.12). It encompasses the approaches, techniques, and activities that teachers implement in teaching including the principles, ideas, values and theories as their source. Moreover, Shulman (1986) defines pedagogical content knowledge as constituting "the most useful forms of representation of those ideas, the most powerful analogies, illustrations, examples, explanations, and demonstrations in a word, the most useful ways of representing and formulating the subject that make it comprehensible to others... Pedagogical content knowledge also includes an understanding of what makes the learning of specific topics easy or difficult: the conceptions and preconceptions that students of different ages and backgrounds bring with them to the learning of those most frequently taught topics and lessons." (p. 9)

2.4.3 Teaching skills

The third element crucial to teachers' professional development is the acquisition of the basic teaching skills necessary to present lessons and perform methods and techniques effectively in the classroom. Effective teaching is considered as the mastery of such skills or competencies. From teacher training perspective, competent language teachers are those equipped with a set of essential skills acquired through observing experienced language teachers as well as through controlled practice-teaching experiences. In this way, basic teaching skills are acquired by experiencing teaching through various teaching situations, with different kinds of students, and teaching various kinds of content (Richards, 2010).

Teacher qualification and professional skills play a highly important role on students' achievement. According to Tok (2010), in order for a teacher to be effective and promote learning in the classroom, he/she must be equipped with a set of skills including good planning, effective management and organizational skills, setting adequate instructional goals, providing fair evaluation, and setting higher and realistic expectations in order to help students learn better and achieve the desired results. Moreover, Rubio (2010) also emphasizes the importance of personal skills as a significant factor that together with professional skills contribute to teaching quality. In terms of personal skills, good teachers are enthusiastic and motivated to help students reach better results in learning. They are able to create a positive learning environment and interactive teacher-student relationship.

It has been argued that effective teacher training programs have the potential to prepare competent language teachers who thereafter reflect the acquired knowledge into teaching practices. Sharma (as cited in Ullah, Farooq, & Memon, 2008) argues that effective training is the main factor in assisting teachers to play their role efficiently in the classroom. He criticizes teacher education programs which base their training on obsolete approaches and methods of teaching since as a result of this, prospective teachers learn theoretically; they are not able to apply appropriate teaching techniques neither during their studies, nor during their teaching. From this, one can understand that useful skills and techniques can be inculcated only by well-designed teacher training programs. Through effective teacher preparation programs, prospective teachers are able to understand properly the theory, content knowledge, techniques, curriculum development and know precisely how to apply the acquired knowledge into classroom practices.

CHAPTER III: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1. INTRODUCTION OF THE RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the design of the research study regarding the comparison of teacher training curricula among Slovenia, Kosovo, and North Macedonia with the main goal of indicating the effectiveness of the curricula in preparing competent English language teachers, as well as what ought to be improved in order to achieve the desired results throughout the teacher preparation process. Moreover, the overall design of the study, a detailed description of the research questions, hypothesis, population and sample, data collection instruments, as well as procedure and findings from this research are extensively described.

3.2 DESIGN OF THE STUDY

In order to investigate the similarities and differences between English teacher training programs at Universities in Slovenia, Kosovo, and North Macedonia as well as identify areas for improvement in the latter countries, a qualitative and quantitative research was conducted. Furthermore, the research was conducted by using the inductive approach due to the nature of the study.

The research was divided into two parts. In the first part, document analysis method was used to present and compare teacher training curricula of the above-mentioned countries according to the information available online on the respective official web sites of the University of Maribor, University of Prishtina, and South East European University. The comparison included enrollment criteria, language proficiency requirements, content of the programs, number of courses per semester, years of study, and teaching practices. On the other part, a quantitative research was conducted. Quantitative data obtained from this research aimed to show the effectiveness of English teacher training curricula at Universities in Slovenia, Kosovo, and North Macedonia in preparing qualified and competent English language teachers.

3.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What are the similarities and differences between the English teacher training programs among Slovenia, Kosovo, and North Macedonia?
- Do teacher training programs of the above-mentioned countries provide students with adequate professional knowledge?
- What kind of English teaching profile is produced in the three countries, what are their qualities, and what are the areas for improvement?

3.4 HYPOTHESIS

- English teacher training programs in Slovenia, Kosovo, and North Macedonia provide adequate theoretical preparation for student teachers.
- Students that graduate from undergraduate teacher training programs in Kosovo and North Macedonia lack practical methodological knowledge.
- Teacher training programs in Slovenia produce more qualified and competent teachers as opposed to teacher training programs in Kosovo and North Macedonia.

3.5 POPULATION AND SAMPLE

The population of the research consists of all University English language professors and novice English language teachers graduated from the public Universities of Slovenia, Kosovo, and North Macedonia. Whereas, the selected sample of the population includes English language professors at the University of Maribor, University of Prishtina, and South East European University, as well as novice English language teachers who awarded a bachelor's degree at the above-mentioned Universities.

3.6 THE PARTICIPANTS:

The participants in this research were University professors and in-service English language teachers from Slovenia, Kosovo, and North Macedonia. The study included 45 novice English language teachers and 9 University professors from the English departments in three Universities in these countries. Novice teachers were intentionally selected since they were part of English teacher training programs, therefore, it was easier to investigate how prepared they are and what are their perceptions regarding the acquired teaching skills and professional knowledge during their studies.

3.6 DATA COLLECTIONS AND INSTRUMENTS

Data collection methods include document analysis and questionnaires. Qualitative data elicited from document analysis highlighted the differences and similarities between teacher training curricula among Slovenia, Kosovo, and North Macedonia.

On the other hand, questionnaires were distributed electronically to University professors and novice teachers. They consisted of both open-ended and closed-ended questions. The questionnaires were developed in order to collect data concerning University professors and in-service teachers' opinions regarding the quality of teacher training programs in their countries.

Quantitative data obtained from novice teachers' questionnaire indicated their perceptions regarding teacher training programs they were part of, the way their teaching competencies were developed during their studies, and whether they are able to apply the obtained knowledge and skills in their teaching careers. Whereas, the questionnaire with University professors elicited their perspectives regarding the effectiveness of the English teacher training programs in preparing qualified English language teachers and whether students' needs are fulfilled during the program of study.

CHAPTER IV: STUDY RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This chapter presents and discusses the results elicited from collecting data through the document analysis method and the results obtained from University professors' questionnaire and novice' teachers questionnaire.

The data gathered during this research study were qualitative (document analysis) and quantitative (questionnaires). Document analysis consists of the documents available online containing the information aimed to be searched. The data gathered from the documents presented in some aspects the differences and similarities between teacher training programs of Slovenia, Kosovo, and North Macedonia. Whereas, quantitative data obtained from University professors and novice teachers' questionnaires highlights their perceptions regarding the quality and efficiency of teacher training curricula in their countries in preparing competent English language teachers.

4.1 THE RESULTS FROM THE DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

Qualitative data were obtained through the document analysis method. Data were gathered on the respective official web sites of the University of Maribor, University of Prishtina, and South East European University. Document analysis method was used in order to shed light on the similarities and differences between the teacher training curricula among Slovenia, Kosovo, and North Macedonia in terms of enrollment criteria, language proficiency requirements, years of study, number of courses per semester, content of the programs, teaching practices, and graduation requirements. The data gathered are presented in Tables. Table 1 displays the required criteria for enrollment students must meet in order to be accepted in the English teacher training programs of the above-mentioned countries as well as language proficiency requirements.

Countries	Enrollment Criteria	Language proficiency requirements
Slovenia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High school diploma • High school grade point average • State Matura • Mastery of the language according to CEFR level 	B2
Kosovo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High school diploma • High school grade point average • State Matura • University entrance exam 	X
North Macedonia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High school diploma • High school grade point average • State Matura • English language testing (TOEFL, IELTS, or equivalent) 	X

Table 1. Enrollment criteria and language proficiency requirements for English language teacher training programs.

According to Table 1, the enrollment criteria in English language study programs in Slovenia and North Macedonia are similar to each other except for the entry language proficiency requirements. Even though students in North Macedonia must take a TOEFL, IELTS or equivalent exam for measuring four language skills, the testing does not have an eliminating character but is only needed to determine the language proficiency level. Whereas in Slovenia students' level of proficiency is expected to be at least at level B2 according to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). In the English language study program in Kosovo, the language proficiency requirements do not include a language mastery scale level as a criterion for enrolling students. However, the main difference between The English language study program in Kosovo and the two other countries is the University entrance exam that high school graduates need to pass in order to enroll in the English language study program. The exam intends to test students' English language knowledge and skills.

Countries	Years of study	Number of ECTS credit points
Slovenia	3	180
Kosovo	4	240
North Macedonia	3 or 4	180 or 240

Table 2 indicates years of study in the undergraduate English language teacher training programs in the three countries.

Table 2. shows the model of the undergraduate degree that the English teacher training programs of the three countries follow. In Slovenia the undergraduate English language study program lasts for three years. The number of ECTS credit points that the students must acquire during the study program is 180.

Whereas, in Kosovo, from the academic year 2013-2014, the faculty of Philology reaccredited the 180 ECTS undergraduate English language study program. The duration of the study program is four years. Students must earn 240 credit points (ECTS) in order to graduate from the English language teacher training program. The English language study program in North Macedonia as opposed to the above-mentioned countries, provides both options (three and four years of study) as suitable for the respective profile. Students may complete three years of studies at the undergraduate study program and earn 180 ECTS or complete four years of studies and award 240 ECTS.

Semesters	<i>Semester I</i>		<i>Semester II</i>		<i>Semester III</i>		<i>Semester IV</i>		<i>Semester V</i>		<i>Semester VI</i>		<i>Semester VII</i>		<i>Semester VIII</i>	
Mandatory/Elective	M	E	M	E	M	E	M	E	M	E	M	E	M	E	M	E
Slovenia	4	1	4	1	4	2	4	3	5	1	3	3	x	X		
Kosovo	6	-	6	-	5	1	5	1	4	2	4	2	4	2	4	2
North Macedonia	4	2	4	2	3	2	3	2	3	2	3	2	3	2	3	2

Table 3. Presents number of courses per semester in undergraduate English language teacher training programs of the three countries.

According to Table 3, the English language teacher training program in Kosovo dominates on the number of courses it offers to students by providing six courses per each semester. In the first two semesters students are required to take six mandatory courses each semester. For both third and fourth semesters, there are five mandatory courses and one elective course. Whereas, from the fifth semester to the eighth, students are required to take four mandatory courses per term and two elective offerings. The English language program of study in Slovenia is the second providing a greater number of courses per semester as opposed to the English language study program in North Macedonia. In addition, students can attend two of the provided courses either on the first or second semester of the first or second year. Moreover, students are also allowed to choose if they want to attend nine other courses in the first or second semester of the first, second or third year of studies. On the other hand, the first two semesters of the English language teacher training program in North Macedonia consist of six courses; four mandatory courses and two electives. Whereas, the other semesters are divided into three mandatory courses and two electives per each.

Countries	Slovenia	Kosovo	North Macedonia
Applied linguistics	✓	✓	✓
Comparative linguistics	✓		
Socio-linguistics	✓		✓
Grammar	✓	✓	✓
Literature	✓	✓	✓
Language skills	✓	✓	✓
Computer and instructional technology	✓		✓

Table 4. shows the content of the main subjects in English teacher training programs in Slovenia, Kosovo, and North Macedonia.

As shown in Table 4, the undergraduate English language teacher training programs in the three countries display similarities considering that applied linguistics, grammar, literature, and language skills are covered in the curricula of the above-mentioned study programs. Nevertheless, even though sociolinguistics as well as media and instructional technology are part of the undergraduate English language teacher training curricula in Slovenia and North Macedonia, there are no specific courses on these topics in the study programs of Kosovo. Whereas, comparative linguistics is covered only in the English language teacher training curriculum in Slovenia.

Countries	Teaching practice throughout the program of study
Slovenia	Three mandatory courses in the second cycle of studies; "Teaching practicum English 1", "Teaching practicum English 2", "Teaching practicum English 3"
Kosovo	Two elective offerings in the final year of undergraduate studies; "Teaching Professional Practice 1" and "Teaching Professional Practice 2"
North Macedonia	One mandatory course provided in the final year of undergraduate studies; "Teaching practice"

Table 5. Indicates teaching practices throughout the undergraduate English language programs of study in Slovenia, Kosovo, and North Macedonia.

According to Table 5, even though the English language study program in Slovenia does not incorporate teaching practice during the first cycle of studies, the second cycle study program is provided in the area of teacher education and training. Postgraduate students are required to take three mandatory courses "Teaching practicum English 1, 2, 3" in the second, third, and fourth semester. The aim of the first two courses lays on the principle of reflective practice by introducing students to teaching and pedagogical work of primary and secondary schools. Teaching practice comprises: observation of teaching, classroom teaching, monitoring and (self)evaluating teaching practice and one's own professional development, as well as keeping a reflective portfolio regarding teaching practice and doing various practice-related tasks. Whereas the content and the activities in "Teaching practicum English 3" comprises teaching practice in either a primary or a secondary school according to students reference. Teaching practice includes observation, a small-scale research project on English language classroom assessment activities, as well as designing a small-scale classroom research project aimed to integrate theoretical and practical knowledge.

On the other hand, the undergraduate English language teacher training program in Kosovo provide students with the opportunity to practice teaching through two elective courses in the final year of undergraduate studies. However, the students have the chance to use the target language professionally in situ, instead of real classrooms. Moreover, the postgraduate study program does not provide any course that integrates teaching practice.

Similarly, the undergraduate English language teacher training curriculum in North Macedonia provides one mandatory course "Teaching practice", which provides student teachers with theoretical and practical knowledge about lesson planning and teaching in general, ways of applying appropriate methodology in the classroom in order to meet the needs of the students, as well as ways of evaluating and selecting appropriate techniques, methods and materials for designated hours. However, throughout the course, students are not encouraged to apply the acquired knowledge in real classroom settings. In addition, this course is available only in the last semester of the final year of studies (4th year). Therefore, the opportunity to attend this course have only students who are part of the four year study program. On the other hand, the postgraduate study program reflects the current trends in second language acquisition. The main objective of the program is to provide prospective teachers with methodological knowledge and necessary skills for the application of theory into teaching practice. However, the practice is not conducted in real classrooms.

Countries	Graduation requirements for students
Slovenia	Attendance, passing the exams, gained 180 ECTS credits, diploma thesis
Kosovo	Attendance, passing the exams, gained 240 ECTS credits , diploma thesis
North Macedonia	Attendance, passing the exams, gained 180/240 ECTS credits, diploma thesis

Table 6. Displays the requirements students must meet in order to graduate from the undergraduate English language teacher training programs in Slovenia, Kosovo, and North Macedonia.

Table 6 shows that graduation requirements in the undergraduate English language study programs in Slovenia, Kosovo and North Macedonia are the same. Students are required to attend the classes, pass the exams, gain the required ECTS credits, and finally submit and defend the diploma thesis in order to graduate from the undergraduate English language teacher training programs in their countries.

In addition, teacher qualifications required for teaching positions in Slovenia and Kosovo are similar. In Slovenia, teachers must have five years of pre-service teacher education (master's level). Also, among teacher qualifications required in Kosovo, a master's degree is mandatory. However, another requirement in Slovenia is that all teachers must also pass the state professional examination. On the other hand, the prerequisite for the public school English language teachers in North Macedonia is to have at least a bachelor's degree.

4.2 THE RESULTS AND DISCUSSION FROM UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS' QUESTIONNAIRE

Questionnaire for University professors (Appendix 1) addressed English language professors' perceptions of how well their existing teacher training programs prepare English language teacher candidates. In this regard, the questionnaire was intended to collect data concerning two issues: how the professors evaluate the programs in terms of the development of teacher competencies and qualifications and whether students' needs are fulfilled during the program of study. Altogether 9 English language professors from the University of Maribor, University of Prishtina, and South East European University filled in the questionnaire.

In the first question of the questionnaire, English language professors were asked to indicate their general perceptions about the present system of the undergraduate English language study program in their countries. All of the respondents from Slovenia and two of the respondents from Kosovo claimed that teacher educators and all others involved in designing the English teacher training programs work continuously on improving the quality of the program towards teachers' professional development and preparation. However, two of the respondents from Slovenia and one of the respondents from Kosovo think that there is also a need for a gradual curricular reform in order to improve the quality of the program based on European and international trends. In addition, two of the respondents from North Macedonia also agreed on this matter. Whereas, one of them said that there is a need for a radical curricular reform due to the reason that the program still bases its training on obsolete approaches and methods of teaching. Moreover, one of the respondents from Slovenia further elaborated on his/her answer by giving an interesting statement: *"In implementing the Bologna process, we completely overhauled the undergraduate program in literature, writing, and speaking. What we did NOT change, was the perception that everyone has the right to train as a teacher. There is no test of aptitude, skill, or language knowledge before a student moves to the MA that will make them a classroom teacher."*

Another important finding was that almost all the respondents said that theory and practice should be given equal importance by integrating both of them in the core content of the undergraduate English language study program. Whereas, one participating professor from North Macedonia suggested that *“practice should be first, as much and as diverse as possible.”* Fig. 1 indicates professors’ opinions on whether theory and practice should be treated equally in the core content of the curriculum:

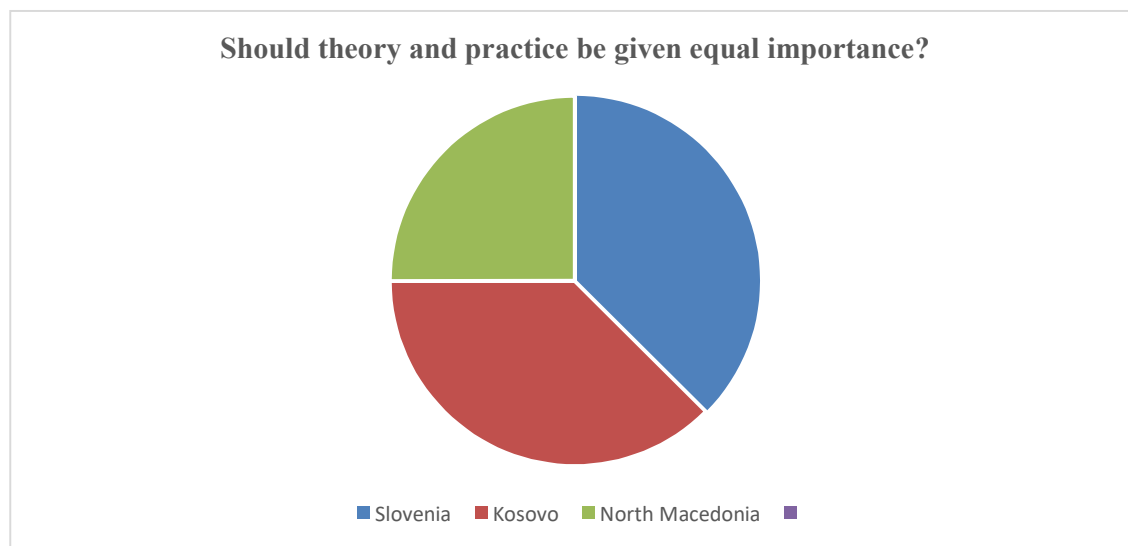


Figure 1. The integration of theory and practice equally in the core content of the English language study program.

On the other hand, when asked to indicate whether the study program provide prospective teachers throughout their training with the necessary professional knowledge and practical experiences needed for facilitating teaching in their future classrooms, all the participating professors from Slovenia and North Macedonia answered positively but they said that these two important aspects are provided in a very limited way. While one of the participating professors from North Macedonia claimed that *“the teaching practicum is not sufficient. There should be opportunities for more real class observations and actual teaching.”* Surprisingly, professors from Kosovo did not think the same. The three of the respondents claimed that professional knowledge and field experiences are integrated within the curriculum throughout the training.

When asked about the formats professors use to assess and evaluate student teachers' learning and competences, the answers were quite similar as displayed in figure 2.

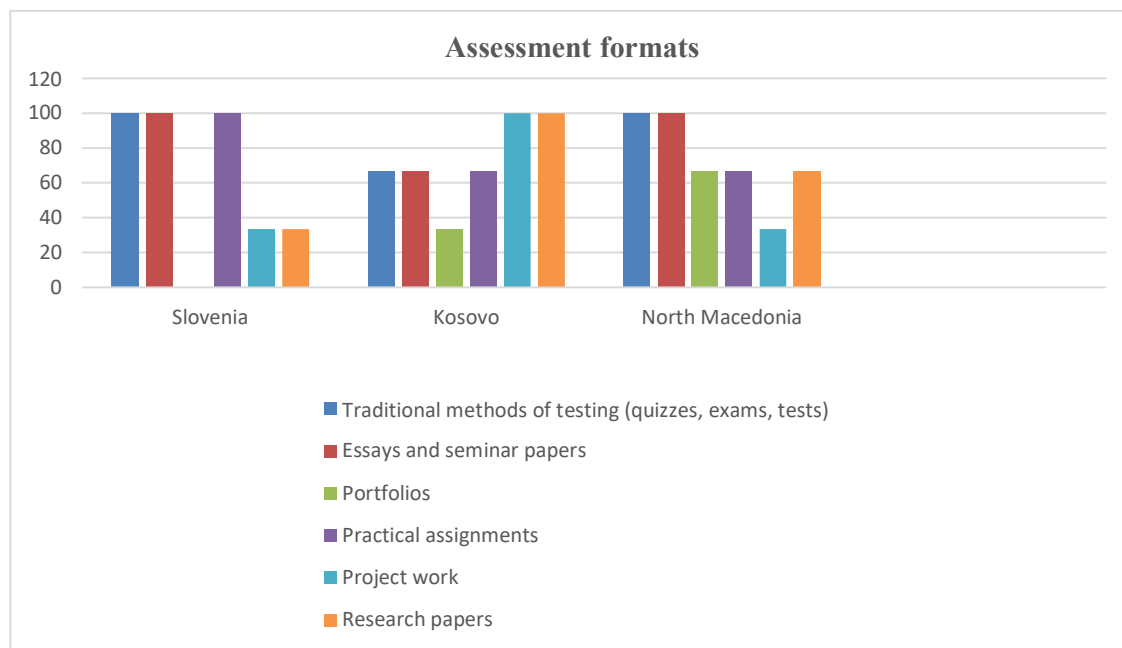


Figure 2. Types of formats used to assess and evaluate student teachers' learning and competencies

According to figure 2, professors use diverse methods to test students' knowledge and skills. Traditional methods of testing (quizzes, exams, tests), are one of the formats most commonly used at the English language departments in the three countries. Moreover, essays and seminars papers are also frequently used in the selected institutions. Portfolios are mostly used in Slovenia, followed by Kosovo. Furthermore, project work is most commonly used in Kosovo, followed by Slovenia, and North Macedonia. Practical assignments were considered very important and frequently used by all the participating professors from North Macedonia, two from Slovenia, and two from Kosovo. Whereas, all of the participants from Kosovo, two of the participants from Slovenia, and one participant from North Macedonia said that they also use research papers as an assessment format.

The following question directly inquired professors on how well-prepared they think students are in starting to teach after graduating from the undergraduate English language study program in their countries. The respondents from Kosovo were mostly confident that student teachers are very well-prepared (33.3%), and well prepared (33.3%) in starting to teach after graduation.

On the other side, two of the respondents from Slovenia, two of the respondents from North Macedonia, and one from Kosovo said that students are somewhat prepared. Whereas, while for one of the respondents from Slovenia students are well prepared, one participating professor from North Macedonia believed that students are not well-prepared to start a teaching career after graduation.

The next question considered in the study aimed to provide professors' opinions on whether the English language study programs should treat the target language as English for general purposes or as a more profiled English according to students' professional needs in order to enhance their language proficiency and professional performance. All of the respondents from Slovenia, two of the respondents from Kosovo and one respondent from North Macedonia said that both options should be taken into account equally. On the other hand, one participating professor from Kosovo and another one from North Macedonia selected English for general purposes as the right choice, whereas, the other professor from North Macedonia said that English language should be treated as English for the profession (ESP) in undergraduate teacher training programs.

Finally, University professors were asked whether they have any suggestions regarding the improvement of the quality of the undergraduate English language study program in their countries. *What ought to be done in order to increase the effectiveness of the programs in meeting students' needs.* The most frequent answer given by professors from the three institutions (44.4%) was related to a better integration of practice into the training program including effective practical experiences in primary and secondary schools, more practice oriented lectures/curricula, as well as practical assignments. Another issue highlighted by a professor from Slovenia and North Macedonia was the importance of testing students' language competence in order to select only those who can demonstrate a high level of ability in English. The participating professor from North Macedonia claimed that there should be *“very strict entrance requirements regarding proficiency and exit requirements regarding teaching practice.”*

4.3 THE RESULTS AND DISCUSSION FROM NOVICE TEACHERS' QUESTIONNAIRE

While University professors questionnaire addressed professors' opinions regarding the effectiveness of teacher training programs in preparing students for their future careers as English teachers, in order to collect different perspectives, questionnaire for novice teachers (Appendix 2) was designed to gather information regarding novice teachers' perceptions about the quality of the undergraduate teacher training program they were part of. Teachers were asked to reflect on the way their teaching competencies were developed during their studies, and whether they are able to apply the obtained knowledge and skills at the University in their teaching careers. Altogether 45 novice teachers who completed undergraduate studies at the University of Maribor in Slovenia, University of Prishtina in Kosovo, and South East European University in North Macedonia responded to the questionnaire.

First, novice teachers were asked to give a general evaluation of the undergraduate English language study program in their countries in terms of the way it contributed to their professional development as English teachers including classroom performance and teaching confidence. The participants from the three countries seemed satisfied with the effectiveness of the program in preparing qualified English language teachers. The majority of the participants from Slovenia (80%), 46.7% from Kosovo, and 93.4% from North Macedonia said that the program contributed to their professional development to a great extent. Moreover, when asked to indicate whether they apply the acquired knowledge during their undergraduate studies at the University in their actual teaching experiences, an overwhelming majority of the respondents from Slovenia (93.3%), 60% of the respondents from Kosovo, and 100% of the respondents from North Macedonia said yes.

However, the answers in the following questions revealed also the need for improvement. In the third question, novice teachers were asked to indicate if the undergraduate English language study programs in their countries provide students with the opportunity to develop core competencies for teaching: subject knowledge, teaching skills, language proficiency, effective classroom management, effective assessment, effective technology skills, etc. Fig. 3 indicates novice teachers' perceptions regarding the development of core competencies for teaching.

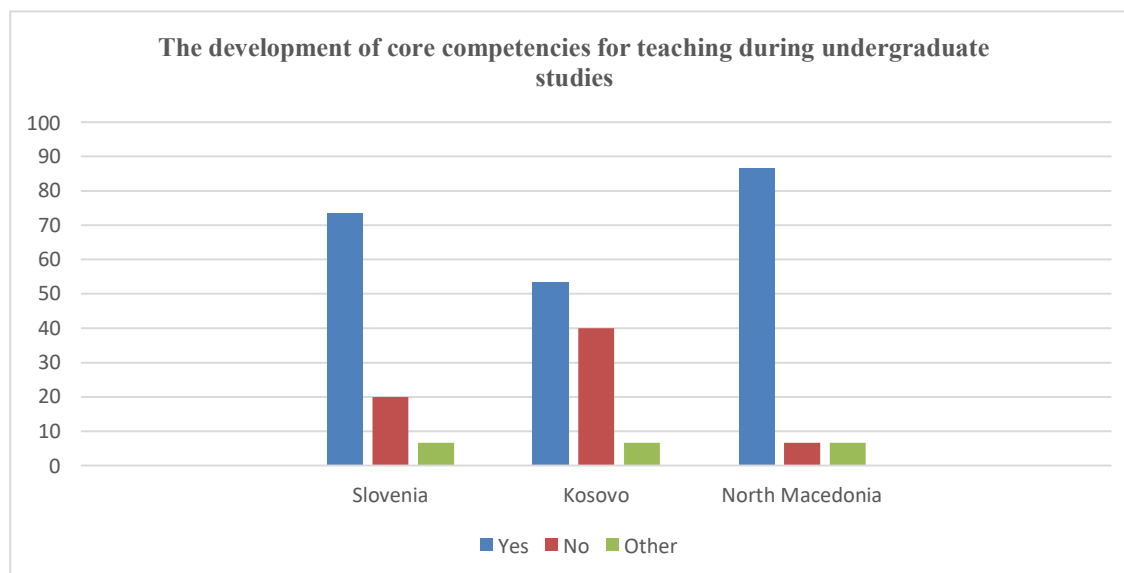


Figure 3. The development of core competencies for teaching during undergraduate studies.

As seen on figure 3, the number of respondents who said that the undergraduate program of study contributed to the development of their teaching competencies is greater in North Macedonia, followed by Slovenia, and Kosovo. Whereas, 6.7% of the respondents from Slovenia believed that the competencies that the program of study fail to provide to prospective teachers are effective classroom management and effective assessment. 6.7% of the respondents from Kosovo said that all of the mentioned competencies were not completely covered in the curriculum. Whereas, 6.7% of the respondents from North Macedonia selected subject knowledge and effective technology skills as the competencies that were not provided during the program of study.

The next important question referred to novice teachers' opinions about what was the main focus of the undergraduate English language study program they were part of. Less than one-half of the respondents from Slovenia (40%), 46.7% of the respondents from Kosovo, and 6.7% of the respondents from North Macedonia said that the main focus of the program was to provide prospective teachers with theoretical knowledge only. Whereas, 26.7% of the respondents from Slovenia, 20% of the respondents from Kosovo, and 26.7% of the respondents from North Macedonia considered that the main focus of the program of study was to provide prospective teachers with theoretical and practical methodological knowledge.

On the other side, 33.3% of the respondents from Slovenia, 33.3% of the respondents from Kosovo, and 66.7% of the respondents from North Macedonia said that the main focus of the undergraduate program of study was to provide prospective teachers with the necessary teaching competencies, theoretical knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, as well as practical knowledge.

Furthermore, novice teachers were asked to indicate the extent to which the undergraduate English language study program has helped them to develop the necessary teaching skills and knowledge.

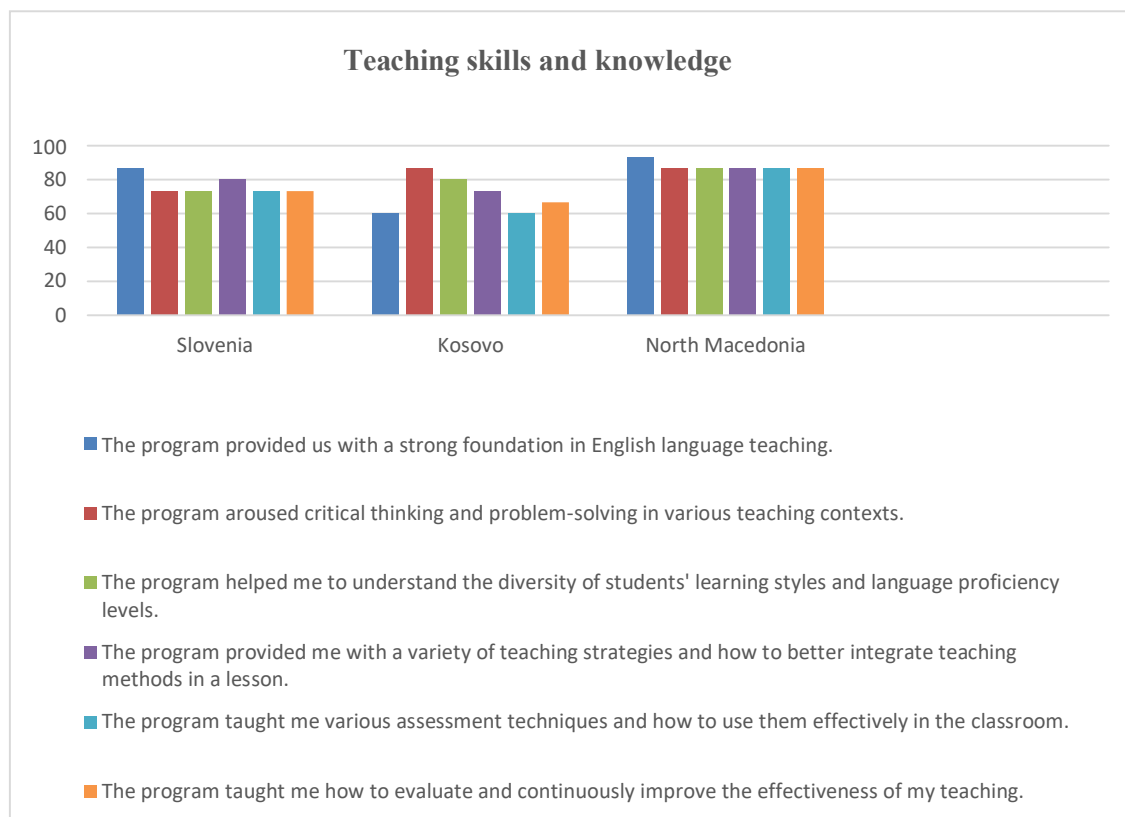


Figure 4. The effectiveness of the program of study in developing language skills and knowledge

According to figure 4, novice teachers from Slovenia mostly agreed that the program provided them with a strong foundation in English language teaching (86.6%) and that the program provided them with a variety of teaching strategies and how to better integrate teaching methods in a lesson (79.9%). The majority of the respondents from Kosovo (86.6%) agreed that the program aroused critical thinking and problem-solving in various teaching contexts. Furthermore, 79.9% of them said that program helped them to understand the diversity of students' learning styles and language proficiency levels. On the other hand, an overwhelming majority of 93.3% of the respondents from North Macedonia said that the program provided them with a strong foundation in English language teaching. Moreover, 86.6% of the participants responded positively to all other provided options.

Another important question was related to the evaluation of the quality of instruction novice teachers received at the University. The majority of them rated the instruction very high in the provided options. Fig 5 indicates the percentage of the respondents who agreed or disagreed upon the quality of the instruction received at the University.

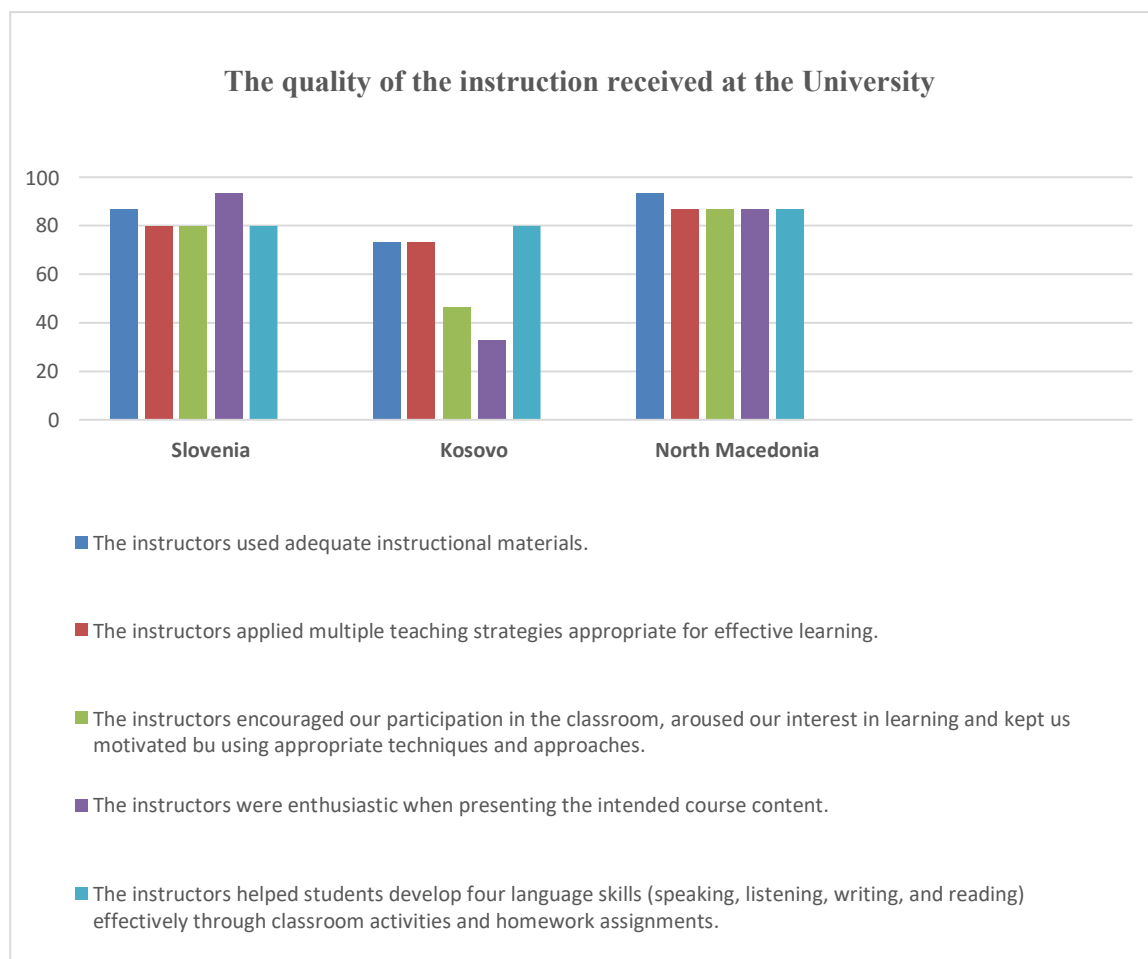


Figure 5. The quality of the instruction received at the University

According to figure 5, novice English language teachers from Slovenia mostly agreed that the instructors were enthusiastic when presenting the intended course content (93.3%) and that the instructors used adequate instructional materials (86.6%). Over 73.2% of the respondents from Kosovo also agreed that the instructors used adequate instructional materials.

Whereas, 79.9% of them said that the instructors helped them develop four language skills (speaking, listening, writing, and reading) effectively through classroom activities and homework assignments. Nevertheless, more than a half of the respondents (67%) disagreed that the instructors were enthusiastic when presenting the intended course content and 53.6% of them disagreed that the instructors encouraged their participation in the classroom, aroused their interest in learning and kept them motivated by using appropriate techniques and approaches. On the other side, an absolute majority of the respondents from North Macedonia (93.3%), evaluated the instructors approach towards their professional development positively. Also, the percentage of the respondents who agreed with all other provided options reached 86.6% in total.

When novice teachers were asked whether they have *any suggestions regarding the improvement of the quality of the undergraduate English language study program they were part of; what ought to be done in order to increase the effectiveness of the program in meeting students' needs*, they most frequently (40%) gave a quite similar answer: *the professors should be more concerned in providing us with practical experiences equally as theoretical knowledge*. One novice teacher from Slovenia particularly emphasized it by saying that:

“Students should spend more hours in real classrooms teaching and not sitting and listening to lectures 90 % of the time. They should have a mentor that would monitor their performance and give back useful, immediate and effective feedback with concrete examples and not just theoretical mumbo jumbo. Mentors should also provide students with exemplary lessons so that students themselves can observe lessons and learn from good examples.”

Moreover, 20.1% of the respondents from Kosovo said that the instructors should encourage students' participation in the classroom and 20.1% of them said that the professors should be less authoritative and more enthusiastic when presenting the intended materials.

Whereas, 40.2% of the respondents from North Macedonia did not have any suggestion regarding the improvement of the quality of the undergraduate study program, 6.7% of them said that the program should empower students to be active learners, and 13.4% suggested that the instructors should provide more learning activities during the classes.

While asking novice teachers whether they have been asked during their undergraduate studies to be part of an evaluation process by providing feedback on the strengths and weaknesses as well as offering the necessary suggestions for the improvement of the program, interestingly, the majority of the respondents from the three countries said *No* (84.4%), whereas 15.5% of them answered *Yes*.

In the last question, novice teachers were asked to indicate the problems or challenges they have faced at the beginning of their teaching experiences. The most frequent given answer (26.6%) was the challenge of implementing the theory acquired during the studies into classroom practices. Another challenge that the novice teachers from the three countries (Slovenia 20.1%, Kosovo 20.1%, and North Macedonia 13.4%) seemed to face at the beginning of their teaching careers was how to write efficient lesson plans, and how to navigate well through school bureaucracy and compulsory paperwork. Novice teachers from Slovenia also mentioned the challenge of maintaining discipline in the classroom (13.4%). Another challenge for novice teachers from Kosovo was integrating technology effectively in various classroom activities (13.4%), assessment and evaluation processes (20.1%), as well as providing effective feedback to the students (20.1%). Whereas, novice teachers from North Macedonia also mentioned the challenge of coping with students from different backgrounds (13.4%) and different language proficiency levels of the students (20.1%).

Chapter V: Conclusion and Limitations

5.1 CONCLUSION

This study was aimed to compare English language teacher training programs of Slovenia, Kosovo, and North Macedonia by highlighting similarities and differences between them in order to identify the areas for improvement in the latter countries. Furthermore, the study investigated how the programs contribute to the development of teacher competencies and qualifications and whether students are equipped with adequate teaching skills, professional knowledge and practical experiences during their training. Finally, the study revealed what kind of English teaching profile is produced at the three countries with the goal of contributing to the improvement of teacher training programs in Kosovo and North Macedonia.

Qualitative data obtained through the document analysis method revealed some similarities as well as differences among teacher training programs at the three countries. Entry requirements for teacher training program in Kosovo are compatible to those in Slovenia since only the students who pass the University entrance exam enroll in the English language study program. On the other hand, even though students in North Macedonia take some specific exams for measuring language skills similar to those in Slovenia, the testing does not have an eliminating character what can lead to enrolling students whose language competence is not at the level English students must have. Furthermore, the content of the main subjects provided by the study programs at the three countries is adequately adapted to students' needs. However, despite from displaying some similarities, sociolinguistics as well as media and instructional technology are covered only in the study programs in Slovenia and North Macedonia, whereas comparative linguistics was found to be part of courses in Slovenia only.

The study has also revealed that the undergraduate teacher training programs at the three countries provide students with professional knowledge, however they lack on providing them with the opportunity to practice this knowledge in real classroom settings. The programs in Kosovo and North Macedonia offer only elective courses concerning teaching practice. Throughout these courses, students do not have the opportunity to apply the acquired knowledge in real classrooms.

On the other side, even though the undergraduate study program in Slovenia does not provide any course that incorporates teaching practice, the postgraduate study program provides mandatory courses where the students are introduced to classroom teaching and pedagogical work in primary and secondary schools. Unfortunately, the postgraduate study programs in Kosovo and North Macedonia do not provide courses that integrate teaching practice what directly affects students' classroom performance and teaching confidence in their future careers as English teachers. From this, one can understand that students who graduate from undergraduate teacher training programs of the three countries might be equipped with adequate theoretical knowledge, fluency in the target language, as well as pedagogical methodological knowledge, nevertheless, they lack in converting the gained knowledge during studies into practical experiences in their teaching.

The results from University professors' questionnaire showed that the majority of professors from the three countries are conscious that the actual system of their teacher training programs need to be part of a gradual curricular reform in order to continuously improve the quality of the programs. They also agreed that theoretical as well as practical experiences should be given equal importance during the program of study. However, except for the professors from Kosovo, all other participating professors said that the programs of study in their countries provide professional knowledge and practical experiences in a very limited way. Professors from Kosovo were also mostly positive that student teachers are well- prepared to start to teach after graduation. Whereas, professors from Slovenia believed that students are somewhat prepared after graduation since only the second cycle of studies is provided in the area of teacher education and training.

On the other hand, the results from novice teachers' questionnaire showed that teachers from the three countries think that the programs of study contributed to their professional development. Nevertheless, almost half of the teachers from Kosovo said the program did not help them to develop core competencies for teaching. Moreover, teachers from the three countries claimed that teacher training programs they were part of need to better integrate practical methodological knowledge into the curriculum. On the other hand, when asked to evaluate the quality of instruction received during undergraduate studies, even though the majority of the teachers from the three countries gave positive answers, for a great number of teachers from Kosovo the professors were not enthusiastic when presenting the intended content and also they did not encourage their participation in the classroom.

Another concerning finding was that an overwhelming majority of novice teachers were never asked to be part of an evaluation process in order to give suggestions for the improvement as well as provide feedback on the strengths and weaknesses of the program. Finally, the most frequent problem for teachers at the beginning of their teaching careers was how to implement the theory acquired at the University into classroom practices.

In addition, part of this study were three hypotheses which were all confirmed. The data gathered through the documents as well as the results revealed from University professors' questionnaire support the first hypothesis of the study *"English language teacher training programs in Slovenia, Kosovo, and North Macedonia provide adequate theoretical preparation for student teachers."* Based on the data obtained through the documents, we can conclude that theory oriented courses cover the necessary theoretical knowledge to be transmitted to the students. Additionally, University professors from the three countries also confirmed that the programs of study provide prospective teachers with adequate theoretical knowledge.

The second hypothesis of the study *"Students who graduate from undergraduate teacher training programs in Kosovo and North Macedonia lack practical methodological knowledge"* was also confirmed since the results from the documents indicated the gap between theory and practice at the undergraduate study programs of the two countries. Despite from not offering formal teaching practicum at the end of the training, the practice oriented provided courses also do not integrate practical experiences in real classroom settings. In addition, the number of courses provided is not sufficient to effectively equip students with the necessary professional knowledge and preparation.

The third hypothesis suggested that *"Teacher training programs in Slovenia produce more qualified and competent teachers as opposed to teacher training programs in Kosovo and North Macedonia."* Even though the undergraduate study program is not provided in the area of teacher education and training, the content of the main courses cover a wider number of topics and issues necessary for effective learning. Moreover, all prospective teachers who want to have a career in the field of English language teaching, must also complete the second cycle of studies which lasts for two years. Throughout this time, practice oriented courses provide student teachers with the opportunity to develop their teaching skills and gain adequate practical and pedagogical content knowledge needed for facilitating teaching in their future classrooms.

In conclusion, teacher training programs in Kosovo and North Macedonia should continuously work on improving the quality of instruction by integrating practical methodological knowledge in the curriculum of the programs, as well as providing student teachers with adequate professional knowledge, teaching skills, as well as competencies for effective teaching. Additionally, practical training should be given greater importance in the undergraduate teacher training programs by incorporating it as equal as theoretical knowledge in the core content of the curricula. In this way, the prospective teachers would be able to better apply the knowledge gained during their studies in their future teaching experiences. In other words, the overall goal of teacher training programs should be to prepare qualified language teachers who thereafter are able to reach learning objectives and achieve better results with the students.

5.2. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Although the study has successfully reached its aims and objectives, it has to be considered in the light of two main limitations. The first limitation is related to the lack of previous research studies addressing the current study problem concerning the present conditions, issues, areas for improvement, and challenges teacher training programs (including the academic staff and students) face in Western Balkan countries, especially programs in Kosovo and North Macedonia.

The second limitation lies on the final results gathered from University professors and novice teachers' questionnaires which at some point contradicted the results obtained through the analysis of the documents. While the data gathered from the documents proved that initial teacher training programs of the three countries lack in providing student candidates with the necessary professional knowledge and practical experiences throughout their training, University professors from Kosovo said that both professional knowledge and field experiences are integrated within the curriculum throughout the training. On the other side, some of novice teachers from Slovenia, Kosovo, and North Macedonia also claimed that the main focus of the undergraduate study program was to provide prospective teachers with the necessary teaching competencies, theoretical knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, as well as practical knowledge even though the results from the documents showed that the practical component is not treated as equal as theory. Therefore, it might be possible that some of the reported results gathered from the questionnaires were not completely realistic since some of the respondents might not have been honest in giving some of the answers.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

According to the above-mentioned results, teacher training programs at the three countries should provide prospective teachers with practical experiences throughout undergraduate as well as post-graduate studies. Since the undergraduate teacher training programs do not provide even formal teaching practicum at the end of the training, student teachers are not able to practice the skills needed in their future teaching careers. By integrating the practical experiences as equal as theoretical knowledge in the programs' curricula, students have the opportunity to effectively apply the methodological and pedagogical content knowledge acquired during studies into classroom teaching. In addition, in order to produce qualified language teachers, the second-cycle of studies in Kosovo and North Macedonia should be basically dedicated to the professional preparation of student teachers by offering various courses that provide extensive practical experiences and observations at real classroom settings. On the other hand, the institutions in North Macedonia need to set strict entry requirements for enrollment at English language teacher training programs in order to admit only the students who can demonstrate the adequate level of ability in English. Whereas in Kosovo, a greater importance should be given to the way professors deliver the intended content to the students. The professors need to be more enthusiastic during the classes and also must encourage the students to be active learners through participating continuously in different classroom activities. This would contribute to the development of their communicative competence and teaching confidence. Also, there should be made greater efforts to implement effective teaching methods that stimulate exploratory learning by developing approaches and materials that arouse students' interest and motivate them to learn.

Finally, there is a need for enhancing networks of teacher training programs between less developed countries such as Kosovo and North Macedonia and other European countries such as Slovenia that has proven to have more qualitative teacher preparation programs and consequently more well-prepared teachers. The cooperation among the three countries with the goal of promoting knowledge regarding effective teacher preparation process concerning teaching strategies and practices would contribute to quality improvement of the existing teacher training programs in Kosovo and North Macedonia. This could be done through visits of experts from Slovenia in higher education institutions in Kosovo and North Macedonia, as well as offering exchange programs for teachers in order to share experiences and reflect on what needs to be improved or changed in actual teacher training programs in their countries.

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Appendix I

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS

The aim of this survey is to collect information regarding University professors' perceptions of how well their existing undergraduate English language study programs prepare student teachers for their future careers as English teachers. In this respect, this questionnaire is intended to collect data concerning two issues: how the professors evaluate the programs in terms of the development of teacher competencies and qualifications and whether students' needs are fulfilled during the program of study. All data will be confidential and will be used for research purposes only.

SECTION 1: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Name of the Institution:	
What course/s do you teach?	
Years of experience:	

SECTION 2: QUESTIONS

1. What is your general perception about the present system of the undergraduate English language study program in your country? Please circle the option that best describes your opinion.
 - a) The program has proven to be quality, effective and well-related to students' needs.
 - b) Teacher educators and all others involved in designing the English teacher training programs work continuously on improving the quality of the program towards teachers' professional development and preparation.
 - c) There is a need for a gradual curricular reform in order to improve the quality of the program based on European and international trends.
 - d) There is a need for a radical curricular reform due to the reason that the program still bases its training on obsolete approaches and methods of teaching.
2. According to your opinion, should theory and practice be given equal importance by integrating both of them in the core content of the undergraduate English language study program?
 - ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
 - ☐ If your answer is No, please specify the reason:

-
-
3. Does the undergraduate English language study program provide prospective teachers' throughout their training with the necessary professional knowledge and practical experiences needed for facilitating teaching in their future classrooms?

- a) No, not at all
- b) Only during the formal teaching practicum at the end of the program.
- c) Yes, but very limited
- d) Yes, both professional knowledge and field experiences are integrated within the curriculum throughout the training.

*Please elaborate on your answer (optional)

4. To what extent the undergraduate English language study program provide student teachers with the opportunity to develop the following core competencies for teaching?

	No attention is given to this	Attention occasionally paid to this	This competence is regularly covered	This competence is usually covered well
Subject knowledge				
Pedagogical content knowledge				
Language proficiency				
Teaching skills				
Effective classroom management				
Effective assessment of student learning.				

Effective technology skills. (The ability to use technology and other media for professional and instructional purposes)				
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5. What kind of formats do you use to assess and evaluate student teachers' learning and competencies? (you can select one or more answers)

- ☐ traditional methods of testing (quizzes, exams, tests)
- ☐ essays and seminar papers
- ☐ portfolios
- ☐ practical assignments
- ☐ project work
- ☐ research papers

6. How well-prepared do you think students are in starting to teach after graduating from the undergraduate English language study program in your country?

- ☐ Very well-prepared
- ☐ Well prepared
- ☐ Somewhat prepared
- ☐ Not well-prepared

7. In order to enhance students' language proficiency and professional performance, do you think English language study programs should treat the target language as English for general purposes or as a more profiled English according to students' professional needs? Please circle the appropriate option below.

- ☐ English for general purposes
- ☐ English for the profession (ESP)

- Both

8. What do you think are the main challenges or problems that University professors face in your country?

9. Do you have any suggestions regarding the improvement of the quality of the undergraduate English language study programs in your country? What ought to be done in order to increase the effectiveness of the programs in meeting students' needs? Please be specific.

Thank you very much for your cooperation!

Appendix II

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR NOVICE TEACHERS

The aim of this survey is to collect information regarding novice teachers' perceptions about the obtained teaching skills, competencies, and professional knowledge during their undergraduate studies. All data will be confidential and will be used for research purposes only.

SECTION 1: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Gender:	M / F
Age:	
Bachelor's degree program, University, Country:	
Years of experience:	

SECTION 2: QUESTIONS

1. To what extent do you think the undergraduate English language study program you were part of contributed to your professional development as an English teacher including classroom performance and teaching confidence? Please circle the option that best describes your level of satisfaction.
 - a. To a very great extent
 - b. To a great extent
 - c. To some extent
 - d. To a small extent
 - e. Not at all

2. Do you apply the acquired knowledge during your undergraduate studies at the University in your actual teaching experience?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

3. Does the undergraduate English language study program in your country provide students with the opportunity to develop core competencies for teaching: subject knowledge, teaching skills, language proficiency, effective classroom management, effective assessment, effective technology skills, etc.?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Other: (if you have ticked other, please indicate which of the above-mentioned competencies you believe the program fail to provide)

4. According to your opinion, what was the main focus of the undergraduate English language study program? Tick the appropriate box.

To provide prospective teachers with theoretical knowledge only	
To provide prospective teachers with theoretical and practical methodological knowledge.	
To provide prospective teachers with the necessary teaching competencies, theoretical knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, as well as practical knowledge.	

5. In order to enhance students' language proficiency and professional performance, do you think English language study programs should treat the target language as English

for general purposes or as a more profiled English according to students' professional needs? Please circle the appropriate option below.

- ☐ English for general purposes
- ☐ English for the profession (ESP)

*Questions 6 and 7 were adapted from Akcan (2016).

6. Please reflect on the extent to which the undergraduate English language study program has helped you to develop the following aspects of knowledge and teaching skills by ticking the appropriate box in the table below.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The program provided us with a strong foundation in English language teaching.				
The program aroused critical thinking and problem-solving in various teaching contexts.				
The program helped me to understand the diversity of students' learning styles and language proficiency levels.				
The program provided me with a variety of teaching strategies and how to better integrate teaching methods in a lesson.				
The program taught me various assessment techniques and how to use them effectively in the classroom.				
The program taught me how to evaluate and continuously				

improve the effectiveness of my teaching.				
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7. Evaluate the quality of instruction you received at the University by ticking the appropriate box in the table below.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
The instructors used adequate instructional materials.				
The instructors applied multiple teaching strategies appropriate for effective learning.				
The instructors encouraged our participation in the classroom, aroused our interest in learning and kept us motivated by using appropriate techniques and approaches.				
The instructors were enthusiastic when presenting the intended course content.				
The instructors helped students develop four language skills (speaking, listening, writing, and reading) effectively through classroom activities and homework assignments.				

8. Do you have any suggestions regarding the improvement of the quality of the undergraduate English language study program you were part of? What ought to be

done in order to increase the effectiveness of the program in meeting students' needs? Please be specific.

9. Have you ever been asked during your undergraduate studies to be part of an evaluation process by providing feedback on the strengths and weaknesses as well as offering the necessary suggestions for the improvement of the program?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

10. Did you attend any kind of in-service training program relevant to your continuous English language professional development after graduation?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

If you have ticked *yes*, please select the appropriate box(es)

Conferences	
Workshops	
Seminars	
Visits and demonstrations (observation of actual teaching techniques).	
Other	

If you have ticked *other*, please specify:

-
11. What are the problems or challenges you have faced at the beginning of your teaching experience? Please indicate the problem and the cause if appropriate.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey!