

Curriculum Development for Doctoral Studies in Education

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Abstract

Profound changes in high education which started in 1996 in Georgia have to be continued. We have to explore potentially more effective alternatives: changing the policy, revising curriculum, training the staff, in order to face new global challenges and remain competitive in the world market. The strategy which will best serve to solution of the set of current problems in education system is to prepare doctoral students for a career in education management, policy-making, academic administration, teachers training. The doctoral programs leading to either the Doctor of Education degree (Ed. D) or the Doctor of Philosophy (Ph. D) should offer different options, allowing students to vest their interests in scholarly research, education administration, a university level teaching.

The author offers her viewpoint on doctoral program development policy focusing on legal and administrative procedures. While discussing scientific degree and course requirements the article offers curriculum patterns and methodology of three different doctoral programs: education management, curriculum development, foreign language teaching. The article also raises the problems of quality assessment, research paper evaluation criteria, doctorate credit values, and patterns of study.

Questionnaires and interview survey methods were used in the study to highlight the attitude of academic staff regarding the stated problem.

Exploring different approaches to existed educational provisions will bring changes in policy and improvement of its practices.

Key Words: Changing The Policy; Revising Curriculum; Training the Staff; Education Management; Questionnaires; Interview Survey Methods;

Reforms in higher education brought about dramatic changes in policy, system, organization of education, as well as in curriculum and methodological approaches. To stay competitive in the global world, Georgia should rely on higher education and create its intellectual capacity.

As a consequence of reforms in high education, the former system has been completely changed. We have already adopted two-stage university education system: Bachelor's degree (4 years of study) + Master's degree (2 years of study), abolished 'Aspirantura', a three-year research and study program leading to Candidate Degree, and 'Dokurantura', leading to Doctorate Degree; we have introduced credit system, adopted new evaluation criteria and enriched teaching methods. Profound changes in higher education which started in 1996 have to be continued. We have to explore potentially more effective alternatives, changing management and leadership, revising curriculum, training the staff.

All post Soviet countries acknowledge the need for continuous improvement of higher education and are involved in complex reform and development processes. These processes are characterized by the same vices: lack of funding, ineffective education policy, poor management, old curricula, lack of experts, limited flexibility in career choices, corruption and elitism. It is typical for a small country in transition to have few sources both human and material to solve the huge problems that face the nation. A period of transition for me is just a chain of endless challenges, and for those who are committed to public service it is hard to respond to them.

Education is becoming a more and more a dominant social issue in a new information based world economy. It plays an important role in replacing the workforce for the market section, besides it prepares students to be informed, active and critical citizens who question the existing social arrangement in all sectors. Not surprisingly, we acknowledge that continuing education and the university is becoming a fast- growing international business. Georgia, with its rich historical,

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cultural and educational traditions strives for creating sustainable system of education which will ensure its compatibility in the developing world.

The so called Georgian ‘New Universities,’ which emerged during the last decade, face new challenges in the 21st century. The process of decentralization and democratization of the higher education opens new perspectives for creative approaches. The new vision of higher education development needs changing environment and new forces, which are rather controversial at present: positive and pragmatic on the one hand, and forces resisting change which are largely self-interested and internal on the other hand. ‘New Universities’ are supposed to carry out systematic organizational changes to meet present demands. Among number of problems that need to be solved we would address one – development of master and doctorate university programs in education. Significant changes have taken place in this direction. Until 2006 the central scholarly committees approved by the Government were responsible for the quality of dissertations, which granted a scientific degree after due revision and oral defense of the dissertation by the applicant. Now, the Universities are responsible for development of doctoral programs individually as they have acquired academic freedom. It gives them flexibility to develop curriculum and teaching methods, carry out researches, hire the staff and define university policy. PhD programs are one of those key issues, which undergo profound experimentation and innovation at present. The process also bears increased social accountability as it should ensure high quality education to meet social demands. On the other hand, the accountability to government is still strong, so the universities should strive for better performance in order to meet requirements set out by The Ministry of Education. To get a license, and consequently get income from the students’ grants, all new successful universities in Georgia are primarily focused on enhancement of teaching performance and curriculum development at recently accepted standards. They are least focused on research, because of limited resources, small academic staff and non- existence of doctorate – PhD programs, which is a guarantee of further and stable development of the Universities.

It is no coincidence that education as a field of study suffers from lack of academic staff as a very limited number of courses in education were developed during the soviet period. All education management instructions, curriculum, methodology was dictated from ‘Moscow’. As a result, Georgian school of education is in short supply of competent personnel and experts, who would be able to address the educational issues professionally. Few scholars are known to be engaged in contemporary education research in Georgia at present. Changes in education call for more scholars and experts, able to direct and affect the reforms by bringing experience and expertise at the decision making-level. Reforms should be accompanied by on-going research processes, due assessment and evaluation. Development of wide range of programs and courses in education is an issue of top priority.

Formerly, basic and applied researches were basically carried out by research institutions concentrated under the umbrella of the Academy of Sciences Georgia. The focus of fundamental research should be shifted from research institutes to the universities, which would offer to the society world competitive postgraduate programs, professionally trained personnel, academic staff, new patterns of education, scientific publications, conferences, comfortable environment for researches and more.

We have vested our interest in curriculum development of the following doctoral studies programs: ‘Management of Education’, ‘Teaching English as a Second Language’, ‘Curriculum Development’. A three-year doctoral studies programs aims to work simultaneously on the professional development of management and administrative staff, along with promoting advanced theoretical courses in education with strong philosophical and aesthetic foundation, thus making a stronger platform for further successful implementation of the reforms.

Initially a 2-year Master’s degree program in Education Management was designed three years ago and successfully implemented by me at Georgian University of Social Studies (GUSS). The program served as the basis in the design of PhD programs. The strategy which will best serve as a solution of the set of current problems in education system is to prepare doctoral students for a

career in education management, policy-making, academic administration, teachers training. The doctoral programs leading to either the Doctor of Education degree (Ed. D) or the Doctor of Philosophy (Ph. D) should offer different options, allowing students to vest their interests in scholarly research, education administration, a university level teaching.

GUSS in its first year offered a two year MA programs in American and European Studies. I started delivering lectures in American education which raised lively interest among students. Upon request of the students, it was decided to develop MA program in Management of Education. In the beginning, I really doubted I could find enough courage in myself to undertake the problem. The institution that intends to offer MA and PhD level education has to consider capacity of academic staff in the field. If I had not been an US sponsored education research program alumni, I would not been able to attract specialists in the field. I was able to outline a set of key questions to develop theoretical framework for our future studies. At our newly established institution the text books, reading and other educational materials were in short supply, so we had to work hard looking alternatives to effectively respond to our students needs.

The most difficult area was curriculum development. Supported by my friends and colleagues, I set contacts with universities in US, UK and Germany to see which model would be more appropriate for implementation. As it is widely known, even the most proven practices in other countries will not work unless they are adapted to host environment. Within ten months, I was able to revise syllabi in a number of study courses and deliver them to MA students. In November 2006, the first graduates of MA Program presented diploma works in Education Management. Broadening of the curriculum on MA and doctoral levels in education opens the doors to scholars and subject specialist to form qualified academic staff.

As a consequence of our courageous effort, with the help of our university administration, a masters degree program started to emerge, and as it is gaining more power and width, I have started designing doctoral studies program in education management, policy-making, academic administration, teacher training. I strongly believe we have to start thinking about it now. There is a need for exploring different approaches to existing educational provisions by carrying out surveys, researches, which will bring about changes in policy and in improvement of existing practices. .

We will present our view on Doctoral Program development at International Black Sea University. It can be viewed as an alternative scheme of those already offered and approved by other institutions.

The primary objectives of Doctoral Program in educations are: to prepare professionally trained personnel for administrative and professional staff positions in colleges, universities, and other educational agencies; to prepare graduate students for research, teaching, and service in the academic field of higher education; to contribute to the development of higher education as a field of advanced study through scholarly, practical, and applied research, as well as to analyze and interpret policy decisions and public issues affecting higher and post-secondary education.

Students may apply for degree programs leading to either the Doctor of Education degree (Ed. D.) or the Doctor of Philosophy degree (Ph. D.). The first allows students to prepare for a career in academic administration, while the second is more focused on scholarly research. Both programs prepare graduate students for position of leadership in colleges and universities and in other organizations. The programs offer two options: a) students interested in higher education administration are expected to develop professional competencies, skills and attitudes that are needed at higher levels of administrative responsibility; b) students interested in teaching and research are expected to develop competencies needed to contribute substantively to the field of higher education. In brief, course and degree differences between PhD and Ed.D programs are based on expressed differences in student interests, needs, and career objectives. No difference in the two programs should be interpreted as qualitative differences in content or substances. To assist in the attainment of their educational objectives, the doctoral programs are, when feasible, adaptive and responsive to personal needs and expectations.

The main shift in doctoral programs is from research-focused studies to theoretical subject and field work education. The former doctoral studies used to offer only a few (3-5) educational subjects, while the new programs focus on number of courses, core, obligatory and electives which are divided into three blocks. The First Block consists of seven 'General Core Courses'. This is a series of doctoral seminars in education (five sessions each) which is required of all doctoral students in their first two years. The seminars enable students to study an educational issue from a variety of perspectives and raise awareness in the area. This is the tentative list of subjects which we suggest as 'General Core Courses':

1. History and philosophy of education;
2. Legislative framework of education;
3. Education and Public Policy;
4. Continuing and Adult education;
5. Sociological aspects of Education;
6. Informational Technologies and computer applications in Education;
7. Assessment Issue.

Upon completion of each course the student presents a coursework (7-10 pp).

The Second Block which is obligatory for all researchers – Methodology Concentration involves three courses: research methods and academic writing. In order to develop problem-centered researchers, the program requires doctoral students to cultivate a professional level of competence in both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Students are also required to attain a 'specialist' level of competence in at least one of these approaches. What constitutes the specialist level beyond the core requirements is to be determined in each case in consultation with the student's advisor. Students are required to take a minimum of one qualitative and core quantitative courses.

The Third Block includes special courses, which are to be determined by the doctorate committee and faculty. For education management program I would suggest the following courses:

1. Education Planning, Governance and Administration;
2. Management of higher Educational Institutions;
3. School leadership and management;
4. Psychology of Teaching -Learning;
5. Evaluation and assessment Issues in Education;
6. Basics of Economics and Strategic Management;
7. Curriculum studies.

Under the third block we would like to offer a few optional courses which will be selected by student and his/her advisor: Gender, Education and International Development; Conflict Management; International Aspects of Organizational Management; Education for Sustainability; Project Cycle Management; Literacy difficulties; Managements of Change.

These subjects are supposed to raise students' awareness and meet their interests. Not all the subjects of this block might fit in to the limited-180 credit (ECTS) requirements, so some modifications could also be possible.

The first year introduces the student, both broadly and deeply, to significant concepts and methods in educational research. As different students may focus their work in different ways, it is crucial to choose all elective course work in consultation with the advisor, particularly in the case of research methods course for which the student may need to follow a pattern of sequential study.

Procedural Stages:

There are at least six major stages in the student's progression to the completion of doctoral degree requirement.

1. Applicants to the PhD program must submit three letters of recommendation from professors who are familiar with their work, and a three-page (double-spaced research proposal). The proposal should address the main research questions, sources and methodology and place the

topic in the context of previous research in the field. A short bibliography (one page) on the topic should be included.

2. Written and oral Preliminary entry examination scheduled upon approval of the student's proposal.

3. Admission to candidacy, and design of proper study program for the student. Also selection of a major professor-supervisor. The supervisor must be a member of the graduate Faculty and should have an active interest in the topic or issue that the student is considering for his or her dissertation.

4. Completion of study-courses, passing exams, submission of course works in three blocks.

5. Field work conducted either at one of the educational or governmental institutions.

6. Completion of Doctoral Dissertation and oral defense of the thesis after it has been positively reviewed and approved by supervisor and Faculty Commission.

The doctoral studies programs comprise two levels of courses. The first - provides courses of an introductory nature which offer a general overview of educational research. The second - provides a more specialized range of courses which build on the gained from level one and from which one can choose areas of most relevance to your own research.

To summarize what has been said above, we will come up with a few assumptions:

1. In the discourse of reforms research will become an essential function of Georgian universities and will absorb the expansion that would be required.

2. The students endeavor and motivation to take doctorate courses in education will increase every year, which is also dictated by market demand.

3. Establishment of doctorate level programs in education will assist to formation of qualified academic staff in the field able of raising a new generation of education specialists with knowledge compatible in the world market.

4. The program will be focused on teaching –learning process and enriched curriculum in theory, as opposed to the heavy reliance on individual research. The program will develop the skills of the scholar-practitioner.

5. The most innovative breakthrough will come through curriculum with the strong emphasis on research methods subjects and academic writing.

6. The flexibility of the program gives the student the opportunity to tailor the study course to his/her research goals and career objectives. IBSU is creating an effective research environment within which students research as scholarly work will be highly supported.

7. We view doctorate program development as a high investment. No doubt it will raise generation of education specialists who will shape the future of the nation and meet each individual's aspiration.

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