Challenges for Achieving Learning Outcomes of Languages and Communication Curriculum Area in Primary Education in Kosovo[*]

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Abstract

The education system in Kosovo is in the phase of implementing the curricular reforms which aim at changing the teaching and learning approach. The new curriculum is a necessary innovation in the pre-university education system and it has already started to be implemented in all schools in Kosovo, faces many difficulties, especially in achieving learning outcomes in some curricular areas. This research aims at analyzing the obstacles and challenges in achieving results in the Languages and Communication area and to recommend appropriate ways to facilitate its implementation. The representative group consists of 75 teachers who work in five primary schools in Kosovo while the data is collected through a questionnaire for teachers. The research findings show that most teachers have sufficient knowledge and have a positive attitude towards the new curriculum. Challenges arising from this process are: insufficient knowledge of the new curriculum, inadequate cooperation among the teachers, lack of ICT and supporting materials in schools, difficulties in planning the learning results, and non-regular monitoring of teachers, textbook compliance with the principles and requirements of the new curriculum The development of competences and the improvement of results in this area can be achieved through changing educational policies as well as monitoring and accountability of teachers.

Keywords: Kosovo's new curriculum, curriculum areas, languages and communication, learning outcomes, learning competencies.

1. INTRODUCTION

Reforms in education have existed since the existence of schools (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). With the change of political systems and governments, it is always aimed at implementing initiatives that are in line with their political ideology; often these changes are not based on reliable scientific research and are not based on the context and state that schools meet the conditions for planned reformation. This, according to Levin (2010), has resulted in the non-successful implementation of changes in the education system as governments generally do what is easier to control, such as finances, workforce, school management, and accountability or stimulation system.

With the end of the war in Kosovo, various local and international organizations and projects such as KEC, GIZ, USAID, KEDP, SWAP, BEP, KulturKontakt, European Commission etc. provided support in reforming the education system at all levels. The need for improvement of education in Kosovo has been studied and discussed extensively by both local researchers as well as by international experts. One of these education experts, Davis (1999), says that there is a need for significant improvements in education, teaching should be more active and reflective, and the culture of research in education should be created. In the following years, many training centers were

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established, where many training courses for professional development of in-service teachers were provided.

Educational reforms after the war in Kosovo were important for the fact that education had to break away from the former Yugoslav system, which was more education for survival and rescue of assimilation. During the isolation period in Kosovo, the quality of the school curricula had stalled due to various reasons and circumstances; the textbook became the main teaching tool (BEP, 2013). The need for improvement of education in Kosovo has been studied and discussed very much by both local researchers as well as by international experts. Initiatives undertaken by MEST are often not based on reliable scientific research and insufficiently analyzed the context and condition of schools in terms of fulfilling the conditions for planned reform.

One of the important changes in the education system in Kosovo was drafting a curriculum framework in 2001, which was considered as an approach focused on content and based on learning objectives for each subject area. The design of the Kosovo Curriculum Framework foresees the change in the structure of the education system from 4 + 4 + 4 to the 5 + 4 + 3 system. This structure also changed the period of compulsory education from 8 to 9 years. The new curriculum is focused on the content of the subject, curricular areas, competencies and learning outcomes. It is organized in seven curricular areas, but our research is focused on the area of Languages and Communication. Curricular area of Language and Communication is a broad category consists of subjects, such as Mother tongue, English language, and Albanian language for minorities, second language, and other languages, which aim at acquiring knowledge, skills, values and attitudes.

The materials that comprise it are the primary tasks of education, which aim to meet the five communication skills: listening, speaking, reading, writing and the proper use of language. The curriculum of pre-university education aims to enable students to provide and select information from different sources and in accordance with their purpose (MEST, 2012, a). All subjects in this area aim at the linguistic and literary development that is the key axis for the intellectual, social, aesthetic and emotional growth of students.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

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The term "Curriculum Framework" by Marsh (2009) can be defined as a set of interrelated subjects or themes that fit together according to a defined set of criteria, in order to cover better certain content. Kosovo Curriculum Framework aims to prepare citizens to face new challenges and produce competitive knowledge actively to the global labor market (MEST, 2011, a). In Kosovo, according to the CCC, subjects are grouped in curriculum areas (Languages and Communication, Arts, Mathematics, Natural Sciences, Society and the Environment, Health and Wellbeing, Life and Work), which means that the planning of the teaching process, should be done within the area, along with other teachers, despite previous practices, that each teacher has planned to teach only for his or her subject. It is based on competencies. According to MEST (2011, b), competencies are extensive skills to apply knowledge, skills, attitudes, values,and emotions in an independent, practical and meaningful way. Curricular changes are observed in many countries of Europe and beyond in the world, where competence is at the core of building knowledge. Competence is more than just knowledge and skills. It involves the ability to meet complex demands, using psycho-social resources in a given context (Rychen & Salganik, 2001). The competencies that this document has identified as necessary for the development of students' knowledge and skills are communication and expression competence, thinking competence, learning competence, life and work and environment-related competencies, personal competence, civic competence. Competency-based learning refers to the system of evaluation, assessment, and reporting of what students have achievedknowledge and skills that they have acquired, and knowledge that is expected to receive during their education. (Great Schools Partnership, 2014). The organization of the Learning Outcomes of the area contains the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that are developed and deepened gradually on the scale, taking into account the physical and psychomotor development of the students. These results enable the achievement of six competencies included in the Curriculum Framework. Area learning outcomes provide development and achievement of values for the Languages and Communication area: demonstrating communication skills, interpersonal communication skills, evaluating problem solving, implementing abstract ideas for concrete situations, utilizing appropriate technology, applying ethical principles in

decision-making, working as a team member to achieve common goals, discussing, comparing characteristics of a culture and different cultures. Learning outcomes for the Languages and Communication area enable integration and complete access to the teaching of individual subjects within the area. Learning outcomes can be developed by the teachers, but can also be taken from existing plans and programs. The results of the curriculum or the subject help us to determine the teaching units, which are in the function of the common theme of the curriculum area (PIK, 2014). PIK in close cooperation with the Curriculum Department and the MEST training office has prepared auxiliary resources, handbooks for curriculum implementation and also managed the training of school teachers involved in piloting the new curriculum (Çoçaj, 2014). But are all these enough for successful implementation of such a fundamental reform in education? Yurdakul (2014) says that teachers who are in the process of implementing the curriculum should be able to understand it, ask questions and raise issues that concern them, and draw parallels between the curriculum and content. According to Sargent (2011), teachers in implementing reforms face several barriers, such as inadequate resources and materials, large numbers of students in classes, increased need of using technology in classrooms, although a large number of schools are equipped with computers; they are not connected to the internet, which would allow teachers and students to access different and up-to-date materials. Textbooks in use are designed in accordance with content-based teaching rather than competency-based teaching. Also, they are often distributed to students with technical errors, scientific inaccuracies and, in some cases even violations of gender, national, racial, religious rights. According to MEST (2012, b) to achieve competence in the area of Languages and communication is important to use different materials and teaching resources for effective teaching.

3.METHOD

In this research is used quantitative method (Creswell, 2012).The study started by setting the research question, conducted a literature review, collected data, analysed the data and summarised the result (Litchman, 2006; Creswell, 2009).This is a quantitative research were a questionnaire was used to answer the research questions. The process started with a discussion with teachers were based on conversations with them we gathered a large amount of narrative data that described the challenges that they are facing in achieving the language and communication results in primary education. In addition to interviews with teachers, we also searched the literature for recent and historical, published and unpublished descriptions by other researchers. Using data derived from the discussions with teachers and by reviewing the literature, we developed a questionnaire that gave us quantitative measures and in-depth answers to the challenges that teachers are facing. The questionnaire allowed us to explore our interests in more detail and with a larger group of teachers.

The research aims to analyze obstacles and challenges in achieving the language and communication results in primary education during the pilot phase and to suggest appropriate ways to facilitate its implementation. To achieve this, we focused on the following research tasks:

- Determine the level of implementation of the KCF.
- Analyze barriers to achieving results in the Language and Communication area
- Collect data and analyze the results obtained
- Make the necessary conclusions and recommendations.

3.1. Research questions
The main research questions which encouraged us to implement this research are:
➢ What are the difficulties in achieving the learning outcomes in the Language and Communication area?
➢ What measures facilitate the implementation of this curriculum area?
➢ What teaching activity the teachers use during their implementation?

3.2. The representative group
In our study, the population is teachers of primary education that are engaged in the implementation of the new Kosovo Curriculum Framework. The representative group was selected through the random sampling method. It consists of 75 teachers who work in five pilot schools of primary education in some urban and rural regions in Kosovo.

3.3. Methods, techniques and research instruments

In order to conduct this research, the following were used: method of theoretical analysis - pedagogical and didactic literature and various studies in this area were consulted; comparative method - a comparison of the results obtained after the data collected in the piloting was carried out; statistical Method - the obtained results are statistically processed.

The key variables in this study were measured by a self-report questionnaire. It was developed based on Harlecher (2016) guide who provides a five-step process that teachers can follow to develop effective questionnaires. It is designed for teachers who need to make a decision on an education policy or practice but lacks the information needed to make that decision and do not already have a questionnaire that can be used to gather the information. The steps given in this guide are 1. Determine the goal or goals of the questionnaire. 2. Define the information needed to address each goal. 3. Write the questions. 4. Review the questionnaire for alignment with goals and adherence to research-based guidelines for writing questions. 5. Organize and format the questionnaire.

The first part of the questionnaire includes demographic characteristics of gender, age, year of experience as a teacher and qualification. The second part included the implementation of KCF. Third part had questions regarding the challenges of achieving learning outcomes in the curricular field. The second and third part had 10-Likert item questions responses ranging from 5-always to 1-never.

4. FINDINGS

In the research conducted with teachers, a total of 75 teachers of the selected research schools participated. Table number 1 shows the number of participants disaggregated by gender.

Table 1. Participation by gender

	Gender			
	Male	Female	Not declared	Total
Primary school "Faik Konica" Prishtinë	11	15	0	26
Primary school "Kongresi i Manastirit" Gllamnik, Podujevë	3	4	0	7
Primary school "Daut Bugujevci" Bresje, Fushë Kosovë	6	9	0	15
Primary school "Arif Shala" Korroticë e Poshtme, Drenas	5	3	0	8
Primary school "Shaban Jashari" Skenderaj	7	12	0	19
Percentage	43%	57%	0%	100%
Total	32	43	0	75

As shown in Table 1, a total of 75 teachers participated in the research, out of which 32 or 43% men and 43 or 57.3% females. Table 2 shows the working experience of teachers who participated in the research. The data shows that the largest number of surveyed teachers or 57.3% has experience of fewer than 10 years, then 21.3% have working experience of 11-20 years, with 21-30 years were 10.6%, the smallest number of participants have more than 30 years experience or 8% and 2.6% of participants did not declare their work experience.

Table 2. Experience of teachers in education

	Percentage
Up to 10 years	57.3 %
11 – 20 years	21.3 %
21 – 30 year	10.6 %
More than 30 years	8 %
Not declared	2.6 %

Table 3 shows the qualifications of the surveyed teachers. As presented below, the largest number of those who have completed university education is 49.3%, followed by those with a 22.7% Master degree, with 17.3%   High School and at the end those who have completed the Higher Pedagogical School with a total of 10.7%.

Table 3. Teachers qualification

	Percentage
High school	17.3%
Higher Pedagogical School	10.7%
Faculty	49.3%
Master degree	22.7%

The collected data below were then analyzed descriptively focusing on the analysis of the central tendency (mean, median, range, standard deviation,and Pearson correlation) and inferentially using one-way ANOVA to analyze obstacles and challenges in achieving the language and communication results in primary education.

Question 1: *Do you have sufficient knowledge of the Kosovo Curriculum Framework?* Question 2: *Does the Competency-based Teaching Prepares Students for the Challenges of the 21st Century?*

Table 4. Knowledge of the KCF and competency-based teaching

Descriptive Statistics	Mean	Std. Deviations	N
Teachers knowledge regarding KCF	2.80	.986	75
Competence-based teaching helps students to prepare for XXI century challenges	2.97	.838	75

Correlations		Teachers knowledge regarding KCF	Competence-based teaching helps students to prepare for XXI century challenges
	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Teachers knowledge regarding KCF	Pearson correlation	1	.239
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.039
	N	75	75
Competence-based teaching helps students to prepare for XXI century challenges	Pearson correlation	.239	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.039	
	N	75	75

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

From the ANOVA result with confidence intervals of 95%, with a sample of 75 respondents in response to the first question, results that the teachers do not have sufficient knowledge of the Kosovo Curriculum Framework because the standard deviation is high (about 98%) while the low score is only 24% positive. These data prove that there is a need to increase the level of knowledge of the teachers for the Curriculum Framework. Even in the second question, we do not have a high positive result because the standard deviation rate is 84% while the positive result is 24%. Competent teachers do not positively influence the student to face the challenges of the 21st Century, because there are many external and internal factors that hinder their teaching in this regard. Through the data in Table 4 we understand that most teachers have sufficient knowledge of the KCF, which is understandable because they have attended the training for the implementation of KCF in school level, but it is worth noting that a small number of teachers have been declared that they do not have sufficient knowledge, indicating that additional training is needed in this area. In the question "*Competency-based Teaching,*

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are they Prepares Students for the Challenges of the 21st Century", the results show that most teachers have stated that competency-based teaching, which is the basis of the new curriculum, prepares students for new challenges but it is worth noting that a small number of teachers disagree with this opinion.

Question 3: *Does the cooperation between teachers facilitate achievement of the results of the Language and Communication area?* Question 4: *Do you cooperate with Language and Communication area teachers during the process of planning?*

Table 5. Cooperation between teachers and the process of planning

Descriptive Statistics	Mean	Std. Deviations	N
Cooperation between teachers facilitates achieving learning outcomes in Languages and Communication curricular area	3.37	.749	75
Monthly plans are written in cooperation with other teachers of Languages and Communication curricular area	264	1.332	75

Correlations		Cooperation between teachers facilitates achieving learning outcomes in Languages and Communication curricular area	Bi-monthly plans are written in cooperation with other teachers of Languages and Communication curricular area
	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Cooperation between teachers facilitates achieving learning outcomes in Languages and Communication curricular area	Pearson correlation	1	.096
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.413
	N	75	75
Bi-monthly plans are written in cooperation with other teachers of Languages and Communication curricular area	Pearson correlation	.096	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.413	
	N	75	75

Based on the processed results, the cooperation between the learners and the students does not facilitate the achievement of results in the field of language and communication because the standard deviation is 75% while the impact of the cooperation is close to 10%. The reasons may be different, such as scarce knowledge of the new curriculum, insufficient training, lack of material resources and use of ICT etc. While the two-year plans are not realized in cooperation with the teachers this is confirmed by the result obtained because the impact of each other is only 10%. Causes of inadequate cooperation among teachers can arise from the unequal level of the education of the students, the competition between them, age, gender etc.

Question 5: *How often does School Directorate monitor the implementation of KCF?* Question 6:*Does the School Directorate supports teachers with the necessary materials that help achieve the learning outcomes?*

Table 6. Monitors and supports from school directorate

Descriptive Statistics	Mean	Std. Deviations	N
School principal monitors the implementation of the curriculum in school	2.91	1.176	75
School principal supports teachers with additional materials that facilitate achieving learning outcomes	2.74	1.021	74

Correlations		School principal monitors the implementation of the curriculum in school	School principal supports teachers with additional materials that facilitate achieving learning outcomes
	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
School principal monitors the implementation of the curriculum in school	Pearson correlation	1	.546
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	75	74
School principal supports teachers with additional materials that facilitate achieving learning outcomes	Pearson correlation	.546	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	74	75

Regarding the result in Table 6, in question 5 and 6, we find that we have a positive result. The answer to the question: How often does School Directorate monitors the implementation of KCF and does he supports the teacher with the necessary materials that help achieve the learning outcomes, resulting in that we have a positive impact of 55% as the result it is low, but compared to other questions is more positive.

Referring to the above results, we conclude that the continuous monitoring by the school director is not done ona regular basis. The role of the school principal is to provide leadership and management in implementing changes in the curriculum. School autonomy demands new skills and perspectives (BEP, 2013). The school director often with his negligence does not engage enough in monitoring the teaching staff. Lack of monitoring implies that the teacher does not regularly hold accounts for their work.

Question 7: *Does the correlation between subjects of the area facilitate achieving competencies for students?* Question 8: *To what extent do you agree that textbooks are appropriate for competency-based teaching?*

Table 7. Correlation between subjects of the area facilitate achieving students competences

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	10.698	4	2.674	5.511	.001
Within Groups	33.969	70	.485		
Total	44.667	74			

Table 8. Textbooks are appropriate for competency-based teaching

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	7.678	4	1.919	3.967	.006
Within Groups	33.869	70	.484		
Total	41.547	74			

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Referring to the results in Tables 7 and 8 we can say that we have positive results (credible significance). Correlations between subjects of the area facilitate achieving competencies for students. This way of teaching and learning requires new teaching texts. The texts that are currently being used by the pupils are not at an appropriate level with the requirements of the new curriculum. The cross-curricular approach cannot be realized without the revision of the textbooks that are designed according to the old curriculum. The adaptation of textbooks should be done by specialists and with great care. In these adaptations the procedure of engagement of specialists and teachers should be the same as the writing of these textbooks in the group: professors, teachers, people who know the local context of the country, e.g. culture, social level as well as our history. Adaptation is not a translation, as has happened so far; it is knowledge based on a certain educational, cultural and social background.

5. DISCUSSION

The new curriculum paradigm does not mean to replace the existing curriculum with a new one but to reshape, modify and remodel it. It is important that this reshuffle is made in accordance with the educational vision, which was not a casual design but based on the country's vision of development. Alongside the qualitative results, the collected data have highlighted a number of challenges to the implementation of the new curricula in compulsory primary education.

The collected data conclude that language and communication teaching is undergoing changes in line with the requirements arising from the new curriculum, setting the basis for raising quality and equality in service delivery for all students and linking the education system. The new curriculum focuses on increasing the role of learning as a key process for a school activity that produces and discovers knowledge. With the new curriculum, we moved from an emphasis on learning content to specific outcomes and from the memorization (rote learning) of facts to the demonstration of outcomes (Spady & Marshall, 1991). According to the KCF, language learning and communication aims to develop the knowledge, skills, attitudes,and values that democrat societies require. According to the content of this area, students will be able to use their knowledge and skills creatively in different situations and new contexts and to use the skills for independent and critical thinking. Opinions gained from the survey indicate that teachers' interest in KCF knowledge, especially in the area of language and communication, has been at high level, as though it, they are offered opportunities for exchanging experiences and different views about educational issues, and the need for changes in the educational system, which are necessary and also inevitable. In this respect, successful school development is dependent on the successful development of teachers (Day, 2002). Teachers need to engage more in the development of language competence because it contributes to the building of positive relationships through increased communication and the promotion of language understanding. As for the challenges and difficulties of the teachers during the training, they first became familiar with the problems and tasks that the KCF puts in order to implement it in schools. For teachers, it is clear that "an instructional leader provides curriculum direction for the team, inspires and energizes the team, motivates and mediates educational policy to the team, mentors and supports the team and monitors their progress" (Mason, 2004). The main difficulties have been in perceiving changes in competences and the possibility of the cross area and cross-curricular integration in different schools. Other challenges have been about reducing teaching hours and assessment according to curricular areas. There was noted a positive spirit of a teacher on cooperating both within the training group, also within the school, between different curriculum areas, and there was also a great cooperation between different schools that are piloting the Kosovo Curriculum Framework.

One of the difficulties encountered during the implementation of the KCF in the school are textbooks that are not suitable for achieving competencies, they should be modified and adapted to competency-based teaching. The existing literature does not shed light on this relationship between textbooks and teachers' actual practice. Lebrun et al. (2002) highlight this gap when they write: neither textbooks' classroom use…, their impact on practices, nor the effects of their use on school learning, are really known… literature is deafening in its silence on classroom methods of the use of textbooks by elementary-school teachers and, indeed, by high-school teachers. However, textbooks are not the only source that teachers should use for the implementation of innovative competency-based teaching. School textbooks are often accompanied by teacher manuals that suggest concrete learning

plans, different resource interpretations that are found in the book, provide more situations for an explanation, and they make the authors clearer.

One of the toughest debates, made by teachers and the most remarkable remarks, was the allocation of the teaching hours per curriculum areas. Bush and Bell (2002) indicate that the traditional welfare state model of school provision consists of state funding together with state provisioning. In addition to the Mathematics area, which has an increasing number of teaching hours, all other areas have expressed their remarks about the small number of hours within the curriculum areas, and as a result, the allocation of the teaching hours for certain subjects. Reducing the number of hours in certain areas hampers the achievement of results due to the lack of sufficient time to develop the planned material.

Based on the analysis during the drafting of the Kosovo Curriculum Framework, some of the methodologies are foreseen, which help to achieve learning outcomes such as student center teaching, inclusive education, differentiated teaching and learning, and competence based teaching. Each of these methodologies helps to achieve learning outcomes. As far as they depend on how the teacher provides techniques and strategies, which one is most suitable or brings better results in achieving these results in certain subjects or curricular areas. The use of modern teaching methodologies depends on professional preparation and dedication of teachers and the auxiliary material they have available. The findings also prove that in schools where there is a lack of technological equipment and ICT cabinets, projects can also be made with portfolio, flip-chart presentations and so on. Work through projects, multiple types of research, presentations in a variety of application programs enhances teaching. Knowledge acquired by ICT makes it possible for students to come to school with new ideas, judgments, opinions and questions that the teacher should consider as part of the curriculum in its entirety. Regarding teachers' planning and implementation of formative assessment, research results are not at the desired level, however, it is clear for teachers that the new curriculum is concentrated on improving the achievement of learning and contributes to the promotion of student's activities for more structured research tasks.

The new curriculum which is bringing changes in elementary schools is directed at the process, not only on learning results. According to Bertels (2003), change can be described as the process of analyzing the past to elicit present actions required in the future. The focus of change is to introduce an innovation that produces something better, hence the implementation of the new curriculum. The current difficulties in the language and communication area increasingly reinforce the conviction that this new culture of learning and thinking develops competencies and motivates them to learn throughout their lives.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results obtained from the research, we conclude that a significant proportion of pilot school teachers have sufficient knowledge about the implementation of the new curriculum. However they see it necessary to implement it and think that textbooks should be modified and adapted to competency-based teaching. The new Kosovo curriculum requires peer-to-peer cooperation at the Council of Classes and Professional Activities, continuing with the exchange of ideas and experiences in developing bi-monthly plans, weekly and daily plans. The cooperation between teachers is challenging, especially during the planning of the lessons, which would facilitate the achievement of results in the languages and communication curriculum area. It is also noted in the link between subjects within the area, the selection of common themes, sharing time allocation, drafting bimonthly plans, selecting the intended outcomes etc. Another difficulty presented in pilot schools is the lack of technological equipment and the supply with teaching and learning materials, which makes it difficult to achieve results in this area. The use of modern teaching methods as well as of formative assessment techniques facilitates and enables the achievement of learning outcomes of the curriculum area, by this the teachers have expressed that they use these techniques and methods during the teaching process. From the data analysis, it is also noticed that the directors do not do regular monitoring and therefore there is no teacher accountability for the results achieved. Based on the above-mentioned results, the following recommendations have derived:

- Improve teacher cooperation as it is one of the key links that facilitate achievement of learning outcomes of the Language and Communication curriculum area.

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• Schools should be equipped with ICT equipment such as computers and projectors, because using this technology opens up new horizons of knowledge, facilitates achievement of area learning outcome, and makes learning more attractive.

• The school management should carry out regular monitoring of the teaching staff during the implementation of the KCF at school and provide assistance if needed.

• MEST should organize additional training for in-service teachers who have not received trainingin implementing the KCF.

In the end we can say that during the implementation of the new curriculum the overcoming of many challenges such as the development of adequate texts books, the provision of technological equipment, learning plans based on learning outcomes, etc., will encourage the learner to build knowledge, skills, values and attitudes necessary for life in a society of knowledge. The new curriculum strengthens the role of students as active builders of new knowledge and core competencies, gradually increases the number of professional teachers and increases responsibility, accountability and transparency of education toward families and communities.

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