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## **VOCATIONAL QUALIFICATION AND TRAINING OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION TEACHERS AT THE NATIONAL SPORTS ACADEMY IN BULGARIA**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The National Sports Academy has been and now is the only specialized higher school in Bulgaria for training of specialists in three main professional areas – Sport, Pedagogy of Physical Education and Social Health (National Sports Academy). From the founding of the Sports Higher School in Bulgaria until now, different curricula for vocational qualification of teachers in Physical Education (PE) and coaches were created (Higher Institute for Physical Culture). Different social, economic and political factors on national and international level, as well as the development of the society influenced the structure and the content of the curricula - names and number of academic hours of each separate course.

From the contemporary point of view, the processes of globalization and internationalization of the society has led to the transformation of the educational process. In this respect, the curricula for vocational training of PE teachers were changed (Mileva and Tosheva 2009) New modules and courses were introduced. At the same time, other academic subjects were excluded because of the changed social and political conditions and their connection with ideological theories and practices.

The process of the European integration and development of the Bologna process have led to the creation of the European space in higher education. This process was accompanied with many important initiatives such as accepting the Educational Qualification Network (EQN), European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), European Academic Programme ERASMUS, etc. They have had an important influence on the vocational training and the learning programmes for sports pedagogues at The National Sports Academy in Sofia.

The above mentioned processes in the area of higher education determined the necessity for aligning the curricula for vocational qualification of PE teachers. In this relation, different activities and initiatives on the European level were organized. One of these activities was the successful realization of the European Thematic Network Project AEHESIS („Aligning a European Higher Education Structure in Sport Science”) which was conducted between 2003 and 2008 (AEHESIS 2005). The

main result of the project for the area Physical Education was working out the model for PE curriculum as the Bachelor's degree.

### **AIM, MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The aim of the study was to compare the curricula for vocational qualification of Physical Education teachers at The National Sports Academy in Bulgaria across different historical periods. For the realization of the study, the main criteria according to the European educational model curriculum for PE teachers were outlined. The following educational areas were defined: Practical Activities (Theory and Practice), Educational and Teaching Sciences, Social Sciences/Humanities, Natural and Biological Sciences, Scientific Work and School-based Teaching Practice (Hardman 2007; Hardman 2008). Interesting for the research was the significance of each educational area in the total training of the specialists of physical education during separate historical periods.

For the realization of the study, the necessary educational documentation was investigated (Higher Institute for Physical Culture; Physical Education Major 2006; Hardman 2008). The following research methods were applied: content analysis and comparative analysis. For the processing of the data, alternative analysis was used.

### **ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Curricula from four different historical periods that were very important for the development of The National Sports Academy were chosen. The years were 1950, 1968, 1991 and 2005. The choice of each of the curricula had a logical argumentation. In 1950 after the new law for higher education was passed, the name of the higher school was changed from Higher School for Corporal Education to Higher School for Physical Culture (Higher Institute for Physical Culture). The creation of two faculties: Pedagogical and Sports pedagogical faculty were planned. The number of departments increased from 4 to 12. In addition, the term lecturer was replaced with the term pedagogue and the system of five grades was introduced for the evaluation of students' results. The first foreign students were admitted. A further positive novelty from this period was the possibility for electing a second major during the Internship.

Academic year 1967/1968 was also essential for the development of higher sports education in Bulgaria. Two new faculties (1) The Sports Pedagogical Faculty, which replaced The Coaching School, and (2) The Faculty of Mass-rehabilitation and remedial physical culture were created (Higher Institute for Physical Culture; National Sports Academy). From this moment on, two vocational qualifications sprang into existence: (1) physical education teacher and (2) sports trainer/coach.

1989 was the year of transmission from the totalitarian system of government to the democratic system in the country. The new social and political conditions affected significantly the structure and the content of the curricula. The compulsory ideological disciplines were excluded from the learning plan (National Sports Academy). The number of lectures of other subjects increased. At the same time, new modules and courses were created and were included in the curriculum for the vocational training of the sports pedagogues.

The curriculum for vocational training of physical education teachers adopted in 2005 is the last official document that accredited successfully the professional field of „Pedagogy of Physical Education” by The National Agency for Evaluation and Accreditation (Hardman 2007).

By the comparative analysis of the contemporary curriculum for the Physical Education Major with the learning plans of 1968 and 1991, the change of the name for the major should be underlined. The professional area is currently defined as „Pedagogy of Physical Education”, with „Physical Education” (Physical Education Major 2006) as the major and „Teacher of Physical Education” as the vocational qualification. In 1968 the major was defined as „Physical Education” (Higher Institute for Physical Culture). For the year 1991 it was named „Physical Education”, too while the vocational qualifications were defined subsequently as the „Lecturer of Physical Education” for 1968 and the „Teacher of Physical Education” for 1991.

It should be pointed out that the comparative analysis of the curricula according to different criteria based on the European model curriculum covered all subjects during the training course, both mandatory and elective. In this respect, it should be mentioned that the presence of the elective courses and modules was strengthened considerably in the curriculum after the introduction of the European credit transfer system (ECTS) at The National Sports Academy in 2005. The elective modules represented 15% of the overall curriculum during the last years (Mileva and Tosheva 2009, Physical Education Major 2006). There was a tendency to increase the theoretical and practical elective courses in the following years.

By analyzing the results according to separate European criteria and their presence in the unique curricula for training PE teachers at The National Sports Academy from four different historical periods, the following conclusions were made.

In all of the studied curricula there was a high relative share for the area *Practical activities (theory and practice)* which included the study of various sports pedagogical practical disciplines as handball, basketball, volleyball, football, gymnastic, track-and-field, wrestling, etc. It varied between 41% and 43% in the curricula from 1991 and 2005 to 53% and 54.5% for the former curricula (Table 1). Probably the main reason for the relative decrease in the number of lessons of sports disciplines was the

development of new areas of sports sciences and their inclusion in the new educational programmes. Overall, however, the presence of the practical sport disciplines was marked and far exceeded the number of lessons recommended in the proposed European model for the vocational field „Physical Education” (Table 1).

The percentage of *Educational and Teaching Sciences* was relatively low for all of the curricula. These educational areas included Pedagogy, and Theory and Methods of Physical Education. The percentage ranged from 4.5% for the former curricula to 7.5% for the present curriculum from 2005. It should be emphasized that the presence of these recommended courses in the European model curriculum for PE teachers was between 10% and 20 % of the total credits.

*Table 1. Comparison of educational areas in the curricula for PE teachers*

<b>Educational areas in European model curriculum for PE teachers</b>	<b>ECTS/ % of educational areas in European model curriculum</b>	<b>ECTS/ % of educational areas Curriculum 2005</b>	<b>% of educational areas Curriculum 1950</b>	<b>% of educational areas Curriculum 1968</b>	<b>% of educational areas Curriculum 1991</b>
<b>Practical Activities (theory and practice)</b>	36-48 ECTS 15-20%	104 ECTS 43%	54,5%	53%	41%
<b>Educational and Teaching Sciences</b>	24-48 ECTS 10-20%	17-18 ECTS 7-7.5%	4,5%	4.25%	8.6%
<b>Natural and Biological Sciences</b>	36-48 ECTS 15-20%	32 ECTS 13.3%	15%	18.8%	17%
<b>Social Sciences/ Humanities</b>	36-48 ECTS 15-20%	29-39 ECTS 15,4%-16,2%	20%	19.5%	17%
<b>Scientific Work</b>	12-24 ECTS 5-10%	19 ECTS 8%	-----	-----	3.7%
<b>School-based Teaching Practice</b>	24-48 ECTS 10-20%	29 ECTS 12%	-----	2.7%	12.7%
<b>Others</b>			6%	1.8%	

The place of the learning subjects in *Natural and Biological field* in all of the curricula for teacher training at The National Sports Academy was traditional and permanent and between 13.3% and 18.8%. This referred to the rich tradition that these learning areas have in the overall training and vocational preparation of the future sports professionals. The fact that one of the first deans of the Higher School of Physical Culture in Sofia was the renowned physiologist, Professor Dragomir Mateev, Ph.D., who for many years managed the academic institution successfully, probably played a considerable role in this respect.

The high relative share of the learning subjects from *Social Sciences/Humanities* in the curricula from 1950 and 1968 (respectively 20% and 19.5%) was explained by the fact that the ideological or political sciences as Foundation of Marxism and Leninism, Political Economy, Dialectical and Historical Materialism, History of the Bulgarian Communist Party and others held a significant place in higher sports education. Their failure after the changes in 1989 led to the significant reduction of the relative share of the social sciences in the general structure and content of the curriculum - between 15.4% and 16.2% for the current academic curriculum (influenced by the choice and the number of credits for elective modules of this area) and 17% for the curriculum since 1991.

As shown in Table 1, the recommended number of credits for the Social Sciences/Humanities, according to the European requirements for PE teachers, varies between 15% and 20% of the total load for all learning subjects. This means that the actual curriculum for physical education specialists was aligned with the European criteria for this educational area.

With regard to *School-based Teaching Practice*, it was clear that the teaching practice was not present in the curriculum of 1950, which was understandable as a fact. Its presence in the curriculum of 1968 was low - only 2.7 percent. However, it currently represents 12% of the whole study content and a similar presence of the teaching practice is in the curriculum of 1991 - 12.7 percent. The teaching practice at schools was enlisted in the European requirements for physical education teachers' training.

In the curricula of 1950 and 1968 courses and modules aimed at *Scientific Work* in sport were missing. From the analysis of the history of specialized higher school for physical education and sport in Bulgaria it was clear that such courses appeared only in the 1980s due to the needs of the sports practice and the expansion of the scale and importance of sports sciences (Higher Institute for Physical Culture; National Sports Academy). This fact was expressed in the curriculum of 1991, where the scientific work constituted 3.7 percent of the learning content. At this stage, the place of the scientific research in the entire number of credits was significantly higher - 8%. It was associated with the need to build knowledge and basic skills for future

sports professionals to conduct scientific and practical research in the area of physical education and sport. Thus the connection between the theory of physical education and sport and the sports pedagogical practice must be realized.

It is worth studying the „other” subjects in the former curricula for vocational training of PE teachers. Such were Music and Field production practices/Field farming (curriculum 1950) or Music and Civil Defence (curriculum 1968) (Higher Institute for Physical Culture).

## **CONCLUSIONS**

As a result of the study and of the provided comparative analysis, the following conclusions can be outlined:

- The learning disciplines from the educational area „Practical Activities” have a strong presence in the studied curricula. Methods of teaching separate sports disciplines are included here.
- The relative share of the learning disciplines in the area of Educational and Teaching Sciences for all studied curricula for vocational qualification of PE teachers is low in comparison with the European model curriculum.
- Overall, there is a correlation between the current curriculum for vocational training of physical education teachers at The National Sports Academy and the proposed European model curriculum for training of these professionals.

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### **ABSTRACT**

The aim of the study was to compare the curricula for vocational qualification of physical education teachers (PE) at The National Sports Academy in Bulgaria across different historical periods. For the realization of the study, the main criteria according to the European educational model curriculum for PE teachers were outlined. Content analysis and comparative analysis as research methods were applied. As a result of the study, the following aspects can be outlined: there is strong presence and expression in the studied curricula of the learning disciplines from the educational area „Practical activities”; the relative share of the learning disciplines in the area of Educational and Teaching sciences has been low; there is a correlation between the current curriculum for the education of physical education teachers at The National Sports Academy and the proposed European model curriculum.

**Key words:** *vocational qualification, training, physical education, teachers, curricula*