Curriculum Reform as a Political Statement in Developing Contexts: A Discursive and Non-affirmative Approach

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Introduction

Powerful international organizations such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), The World Bank, and the European Commission (EC) have contributed to a shift in the global educational policy arena from content-based to competency-, standards-, or skills-based curriculum/education approaches. The target of these reforms of past 20 years has been to address the issues of curriculum overload and tailoring curriculum towards specific student 'key competencies' or learning outcomes so that the shift happens from an input-based education (content) to output-based results (learning outcomes). These approaches are considered as "[…] pathway to employability and prosperity" (EC, 2016, p. 2), or such that will produce needed learning outcomes among students who will be able to address major global challenges such as climate change and sustainable development (OECD, 2018). This article aims to show the complexity of developing 'learning competencies' as one of the often-cited 21st century skill or competency. The analysis is conducted within national education system of Kosovo, and within Grades 6 and 10 mathematics teacher education and curriculum specifically. To do so, the article adopts from discursive institutionalism (Schmidt, 2008) and Bildung-centered non-affirmative theory of education (Uljens & Ylimaki, 2017) to theoretically frame the analysis and discussion. First, some Kosovo contextual information on recent policy flows and curriculum reforms is provided.

Transnational policy flows in Kosovo education

Since the end of Kosovo war in 1999, Kosovo has initiated two cycles of curriculum reform. The first was dubbed the New Kosovo Curriculum Framework of 2001, and the second the Curriculum Framework for Pre-University Education in the Republic of Kosovo of 2011 (also revised in 2016). The international donor organizations such as UNESCO, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the European Union, and the Work Bank, in collaboration and consultation with local education officials and experts contributed both in development of both core documents, as well as in the follow-up implementation of them. While the focus of this article on the second cycle of curriculum reform initiated in 2011, it is worth noting that the New Kosovo Curriculum Framework (Department of Education and Science [DES], 2001) was the first effort to reform the 'outdated' curricula from the past, most often dated to 1970s and 1980s as Kosovo was completely isolated from international curriculum developments due to Serbia's occupation of Kosovo during 1990s. The 2001 Framework aimed to shift the focus from teacher-centeredness to more learner-centered constructivist approaches to teaching and learning, however the core curriculum still remained content-focused with learning objectives defined per topic within individual subjects and no efforts were made to generate either general or specific standards or competencies (DES, 2001; Tahirsylaj & Wahlström, under review). UNICEF with expertise from UNESCO's Geneva-based International Bureau of Education

(IBE) led the efforts of the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology (MEST) to write and finalize the document. After the evaluation of this first wave of curriculum reform in Kosovo, the London Institute of Education (2005) assessed that, ''The Curriculum Framework for the National Curriculum produced by MEST with the support of UNICEF and the technical expertise of UNESCO/Institute of Education is an excellent, modern, high quality document and an excellent model for education in Kosovo'' (p. 3). Regardless, in 2009, the MEST, again with support from UNICEF and technical expertise of UNESCO and the World Bank, initiated the next round of curriculum reform that resulted with the new document adopted in 2011.

The 2011 document was labelled the Curriculum Framework for Pre-University Education in the Republic of Kosovo, which was also revised in 2016 as a result of lessons learnt through piloting of the new curriculum in a select number of schools across the country. By this time, Kosovo had declared its independence in 2008 and had its Ministry of Education in place and had control over decision-making in all key domains of the government, including economy, energy, and education. The 2011 Framework departed from the previously content-based curricula and subject-based curriculum and fully embraced a competency-based approach to curriculum-making taking into consideration the 2006 European Commission Reference Framework recommendations on the eight key competences, including

> 1) Communication in the mother tongue; 2) Communication in foreign languages; 3) Mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology; 4) Digital competence; 5) Learning to learn; 6) Social and civic competences; 7) Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship; and 8) Cultural awareness and expression (OJEU, 2006, p. 13).

EC has recently updated the Reference Framework, slightly revising the labelling of the competences, and keeping the same number of them, including

> 1) Literacy competence; 2) Multilingual competence; 3) Mathematical competence and competence in science, technology and engineering; 4) Digital competence; 5) Personal, social and learning to learn competence; 6) Citizenship competence; 7) Entrepreneurship competence; and 8) Cultural awareness and expression competence. (OJEU, 2018, pp. 7-8).

EC uses 'competence/competences' in its documents when referring to educational key competences proposed to its member states, while OECD and UNESCO use 'competency/competencies' in its curriculum and educational consultative and technical work. Varied and somewhat similar definitions for 'competences' or 'competencies' are found across EC, OECD, and UNESCO documents. EC defines key competences

> […] as a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes, where: a. knowledge is composed of the facts and figures, concepts, ideas and theories which are already established and support the understanding of a certain area or subject; b. skills are defined as the ability and capacity to carry out processes and use the existing knowledge to achieve results; c. attitudes describe the disposition and mind-sets to act or react to ideas, persons or situations (OJEU, 2018, p. 7).

OECD, on the other hand, uses labelling 'transformative competencies' to refer to competencies, and notes that "The concept of competency implies more than just the acquisition of knowledge and skills; it involves the mobilization of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values to meet complex demands" (OECD, 2018, p. 5). This conceptualization is in line with the overall approach promoted by the OECD to make education revolve around student agency. Further, OECD lists three categories as relevant to 'transformative competencies', namely, creating new value, reconciling tensions and dilemmas, and taking responsibility, which in turn, require student agency, amongst else, to come about in students' lived experiences. Lastly, in UNESCO's technical work, "'Competency' can be defined as the capability to duly apply acquired knowledge, skills and attitudes built upon appropriate, underpinned values of the society in the real situation" (Opertti, Kang & Magni, 2018, p.

12). Recently, UNESCO uses designation 'key competencies' to refer to competencies needed to achieve sustainable development goal 4 on quality education, emphasizing that competencies are "[…] cognitive, affective, volitional and motivational elements; hence they are an interplay of knowledge, capacities and skills, motives and affective dispositions" (UNESCO, 2017, p. 10). Overall, 'competence' or 'competency' contains a set of knowledge, skills, and attitudes within the context of basic education provision.

In Kosovo, after some adaptations of the 2006 EC key competences, six key competencies – the plural term 'competencies' here matching UNESCO's designation as per UNESCO IBE's consultants involvement - were introduced into the 2011 Curriculum Framework, including 1) Communication and expression competencies; 2) Thinking competencies; 3) Learning competencies; 4) Life, work and environment-related competencies; 5) Personal competencies; and 6) Civic competencies (MEST, 2011). Since this article focuses on Kosovo, in the following sections 'competency/competencies' is used. Six key competencies in the 2011 Framework were linked to producing effective communicators, creative thinkers, successful learners, productive contributors, healthy individuals, and responsible citizens respectively. This approach of linking key competencies to specific learner capacities matched with and borrowed from Scottish Curriculum for Excellence (Scottish Executive, 2004). The 2011 Framework defined that "Competencies involve an integrated and coherent system of knowledge, skills and attitudes that are applicable and transferable. They enable students to cope with the challenges of the digital age and with the knowledge-based labour market in an interdependent world" (MEST, 2011, p. 16). Further, it was noted that the key competencies envisaged in the Kosovo Curriculum Framework (KCF) derived from the general aims of pre-university education in Kosovo and defined the main learning outcomes that learners need to achieve in a progressive and consistent way throughout the pre-university educational system, despite the fact that the key competencies were primarily adapted from the EC documents, and as shown above, the definition of competencies is closely aligned to EC, OECD, and UNESCO definitions. The 2016 revision of the Framework only incorporated some slight modifications based on the piloting of curriculum in a limited number of schools and still fully maintained the focus of the curriculum on key competencies.

In addition to curriculum reform, other aspects of Kosovo education have also been influenced by and shaped through transnational education policy flows and intensive and consistent involvement of donor community in Kosovo. As an example, Kosovo introduced external standardized testing at the end of Grades 5, 9 and 12 during 2000s with technical and financial support from the World Bank as an initiative to increase school accountability and regularly monitor student performance. The World Bank also assisted in decentralization process of Kosovo education with delegation of decision-making from central government to municipalities. More recently, Kosovo participated in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) for the first time in 2015 - and performed poorly being the third from the bottom in the ranking – however, Kosovo's participation in PISA was financially and technically supported by The World Bank and German International Development Cooperation (GIZ). Other donor organizations have also contributed into other educational sub-systems – The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has been involved in reforming school-based assessment by focusing on assessment for learning instead of assessment of learning approaches, and the European Commission through its European Agency for Reconstruction in Kosovo has assisted in curriculum implementation and teacher professional development (Tahirsylaj & Wahlström, under review). After piloting in select schools, full implementation of 2011 competency-based curriculum started in Grades 1, 6 and 10 across all schools in Kosovo in 2017-2018 school-year.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framing

Prior studies focusing on educational and curriculum policy changes within and across developing contexts have applied a multitude of theoretical and methodological lenses, including, but not limited to, those falling in the domains of sociology, political economy, policy, comparative education, culture, and anthropology. Of particular interest in this area has been the influence and interrelation between local and global policy actors, where local actors primarily include national policy makers in charge of education sectors, while global actors most often including powerful

international, or supranational, organizations such as the World Bank, the OECD, UNESCO, and so forth. Irrespective of the global players involved, the educational policy solutions offered or transferred to developing countries and contexts have almost always had a Western source, and primarily Anglo-Saxon (Verger, Novelli, & Altinyelken, 2012). Overall, two dominant research paradigms have been at the core of global education policy transfer, one developed around world society theorists who argue that a single global model of schooling has taken shape worldwide as a result of the spread of culturally-embedded model of the modern nation-state (Anderson-Levitt, 2003). This group of theorists has offered in-depth arguments for curriculum convergence and isomorphism of educational policies. On the other end of the spectrum stands the second approach of culture-centered theorists who argue that educational policy borrowing and travelling does not follow a linear path, instead the context in which those policies are implemented shapes what policies and to what extent they are implemented (Steiner-Khamsi, 2004). While the first group highlights convergence of education policies, the second highlights divergence.

The backbone of intensification of diffusion of global education polices, as Verger et al. (2012) argue, has been globalization. They further convincingly note that developing countries are most affected by global education policy precisely due to increased external presence of international organizations and donor agencies. This certainly was the case in Kosovo as a developing country, as shown in the brief description of policy flows above, where all major international organizations and donor agencies were involved in both first (2001) and second (2011) curriculum reforms. Additionally, as it will be argued later, the political landscape and climate in Kosovo, in particular that associated with 2011 reform, prompted the push for competency-based curriculum as a substantial departure from previous content-based curricula. As to why certain educational policies are adopted in developing countries, in many of them aid conditionality provides for external imposition, binding international agreements set forth a reform agenda, or they are adopted voluntarily (Verger, 2014). In Kosovo, as it will be shown later, competency-based curriculum reform was adopted as a result of convergence of local political readiness to initiate new reforms and availability of international technical expertise through aid agencies.

The present article frames the discussion on latest 2011 competency-based curriculum reform and potential of Kosovo education system to develop learning competencies of students specifically relying on two theoretical underpinnings that are gaining attention in the field of curriculum change. The first is discursive institutionalism (Schmidt, 2008), an import from political sciences, and the second, Bildung-centered non-affirmative education theory (Uljens & Ylimaki, 2017), which as name suggests is homegrown within education. These two frameworks offer new and useful perspectives on better understanding educational policy-making as a battleground among various institutional policy actors, and Bildung-centered non-affirmative education theory complements it with education-based discourse.

Discursive institutionalism concerns substantive content of ideas and interactive processes of discourse in institutional context (Schmidt, 2015). Schmidt differentiates among three levels of ideas, in terms of policies, programmes, and philosophies, and between cognitive and normative idea types, where "Cognitive ideas elucidate "what is and what to do," whereas normative ideas indicate "what is good or bad about what is" in light of "what one ought to do."" (Schmidt, 2008, p. 306). In turn, discourse has two forms: coordinative and communicative. As Schmidt notes, in the policy sphere "[…] the coordinative discourse consists of the individuals and groups at the center of policy construction who are involved in the creation, elaboration, and justification of policy and programmatic ideas." (p. 310), while "The communicative discourse occurs in the political sphere. It consists of the individuals and groups involved in the presentation, deliberation, and legitimation of political ideas to the general public" (Schmidt, 2008, p. 310). A number of curriculum scholars have turned to discursive institutionalism recently to further build on it for developing a more precise language in describing policy change between and across institutional levels and policy actors (Nordin & Sundberg, 2018; Wahlström & Sundberg, 2018; Uljens & Ylimaki, 2017; Uljens & Rajakaltio, 2017; Uljens & Ylimaki, 2015). For example, Wahlström and Sundberg (2018) have put forth a conceptual framework integrating discursive institutionalism and curriculum theory with the aim to better understand education policy borrowing and lending transnationally, as well as nationally and

locally; Nordin and Sundberg (2018) turned to discursive institutionalism to build a conceptual framework to better understand curriculum change in the globalized world; while Uljens and Ylimaki (2017) incorporate discursive institutionalism to gain a better understanding of educational leadership, school development, and teaching through a multi-level approach. In the case of latest Kosovo curriculum reform, discursive institutionalism will be primarily useful to discuss the curriculum policy from coordinative and communicative discourses perspectives.

Bildung-centered non-affirmative education theory, as the name suggests, is an extension of Bildung tradition, first developed by Dietrich Benner in Germany, and recently brought to the front by Michael Uljens and Rose Ylimaki (cf. Uljens & Ylimaki, 2017; Uljens & Ylimaki, 2015; Uljens, 2015). Uljens (2015) defines the non-affirmative position by contrasting it to the affirmative approaches to education, where "Affirmative approaches typically intend to transform given values, while a non-affirmative approach allows for critical discussion on also the values lying at the foundation of democratic education" (Uljens, 2015, p. 25). Building on prior work of German theorists (Fichte, Hegel and Honneth), Uljens highlights three core concepts on which non-affirmative theory rests on, namely *recognition*, *summoning to self-activity*, and *Bildsamkeit*. Uljens notes that recognition

> […] refers to how the Self is aware of the Other as being indetermined or free (ontological assumption), not only as an awareness of the Other's situation or reality (epistemological relation) but also to a moral relation in terms of the Self's responsibility for the Other's worth, dignity and inviolability as person and individual (ethical relation) (Uljens, 2015, p. 28).

Further, as Uljens explains, Bildsamkeit and summoning to self-activity are necessary in the process of being and becoming in the modern world, where "Bildsamkeit refers to the individual's own conscious efforts aimed at making sense of the world and his/her experiences while 'summoning' may be seen as the leader's or the teacher's invitation of the Other to become engaged in a self-transcending process" (Uljens, 2015, p. 28). For the Kosovo curriculum reform case presented here then, it is useful to consider the non-affirmative position, as well as concepts of recognition, summoning to self-activity and Bildsamkeit when discussing the competency-based curriculum approach in general and learning competencies in particular.

Methodological approach

The article employs document discourse analysis to address three research questions: first, to what extent does 2011 curriculum framework in Kosovo offer opportunities to students to develop learning competencies?; second, how do Kosovo teacher education programmes preparing mathematics teachers cover learning competencies?; and third, what are opportunities for Kosovo students to master learning competencies in Grades 6 and 10 Kosovo mathematics school curriculum? The context of the study is Kosovo, a young and developing state in The Balkans region that declared independence from Serbia in 2008. The article primarily focuses on dissecting policies and documents related to national curriculum, teacher education, and school curriculum in the developing and evolving Kosovo context. The designation of Kosovo as a developing context takes into consideration its political transition from occupation to freedom at the beginning of 2000s, and from emergency development to long-term sustainable development since 2008. In addition, The World Bank lists Kosovo as a lower-middle income country making it a candidate among developing countries, aspiring to join the European Union (The World Bank, n.d.).

Findings

As it has already been argued elsewhere, the emphasis of the EC/EU on key competencies, learning outcomes and skills-based education has influenced education policies across EU member states (Pepper, 2011; Gordon et al., 2009). If the first round of EC key competencies of 2006 were influential, it can be expected that the EC's latest revision of key competences will aim at affecting national education policies further within the European context and beyond. As a result, it might be expected that next round of curriculum revision in Kosovo will take into consideration the latest list of

key competences proposed by EC in 2018. Next, findings from analyses of coverage of learning competencies in curriculum documents, mathematics teacher education programmes, and mathematics syllabi in Kosovo are presented.

Learning competencies in latest Kosovo National Curriculum Framework and educational policies

The Kosovo Curriculum Framework (KCF) for Pre-University Education in the Republic of Kosovo (MEST, 2011) is an umbrella document that stipulates first, the overall role, function, and structure of the curriculum, and second, the implementation of the reforms contained therein. Upfront, the KCF declares *Knowledge Society* both as an aspiration and as a challenge for Kosovo, however, it is noted that schools contribute to building the knowledge society through students' mastery of competencies. Therefore, the term 'competencies' is central in KCF, and knowledge is understood only as a sub-component of the competencies. The emphasis on competencies and accompanying knowledge, skills and attitudes focusing on application and transferability mark the transition of Kosovo curriculum approach from a content-based to competency-based curriculum. *Learning competencies*, as noted above, is the third out of the six key competencies listed in the KCF, and it is focused on developing students' lifelong learning skills with the final outcome of producing *successful learners*. KCF defines learning competencies to include the following sub-set of competencies

> Learning to learn; Knowing, selecting and making use of learning instruments and methods; Mastering reading, writing, mathematics, science, and information and communication technology; Identifying and processing information in an independent, effective and responsible way; Learning in teams and exchanging positive experiences. (MEST, 2011, p. 17).

The definition clarifies that learning competencies are not only meant as generic or transversal skills associated with lifelong learning or learning to learn, but in addition, it points to mastery of content areas such as reading, mathematics, and science, as a prerequisite to identify and process information independently, effectively, and responsible. Comparing the conceptualization of learning competencies with the eight key competencies as defined by EC in 2006, similarities are identified with the fifth EC key competence *Learning to learn*, defined as follows

> 'Learning to learn' is the ability to pursue and persist in learning, to organise one's own learning, including through effective management of time and information, both individually and in groups. This competence includes awareness of one's learning process and needs, identifying available opportunities, and the ability to overcome obstacles in order to learn successfully. This competence means gaining, processing and assimilating new knowledge and skills as well as seeking and making use of guidance. Learning to learn engages learners to build on prior learning and life experiences in order to use and apply knowledge and skills in a variety of contexts: at home, at work, in education and training. Motivation and confidence are crucial to an individual's competence. (OJEU, 2006, p. 16)

Comparing and contrasting the two definitions of KCF and EC above, and recognizing that the EC list of competencies was the inspiration for KCF competencies, it is clear that KCF's definition of *learning competencies* is a compressed version of EC's *learning to learn* competency. Still, the KCF does not make any direct reference to the EC key competencies as a point of departure, but the claim is made instead that key competencies in the KCF derive from the aims of schooling for pre-university education in the Republic of Kosovo. However, relevant EC and OECD documents as well as Scottish Curriculum for Excellence are listed in the bibliography reviewed during 2011 KCF development.

The KCF defines six key competencies that cover and permeate entire pre-university schooling experience; the principles for curriculum development; how KCF restructures education levels by introducing key stages as intermediate phases within each primary, lower-secondary, and upper-secondary education levels; curriculum areas and subjects; hierarchy of curriculum documents from KCF to core curriculum per education level to syllabi per subject; and the internal (school-level) and

external (country-level) student assessment. The key competencies are the ground on which all learning that takes place in schools has to build on. Learning competency, in particular, is promoted as the foundation through which schools will prepare students for lifelong learning, highlighting that schools should adopt a lifelong perspective through which curriculum prepares students to deal with present and future challenges. In the rest of the KCF document, learning competencies are not directly referenced, however 'learning to learn' is integrated in each education level as a competency that schools need to focus on progressively as a preparation of students for the next level, for example, when moving from primary to secondary education.

Kosovo Education Strategic Plan (KESP) 2017-2021 (MEST, 2016) is another policy document that affects provision of schooling and curricula in Kosovo. It addresses seven main objectives for the education system, including 1) Participation and inclusion; 2) Education system management; 3) Quality assurance; 4) Teacher development; 5) Teaching and learning; 6) Vocational education and training and adult education; and 7) Higher education. The document primarily focuses on challenges under each of the seven objectives and activities that could be undertaken to address them, however no reference is made to development of learning competencies specifically. Instead, it refers to lifelong learning in two contexts: one as an approach to be incorporated into schooling of students under Quality assurance objective, and the other, as a measure for inclusion of adults in learning opportunities. Still, KESP recognizes that the shift of curriculum from content-based to competency-based approach is a major challenge for Kosovo education system. Next, coverage of learning competencies in mathematics teacher education is provided.

Learning competencies in Kosovo teacher education programmes preparing mathematics teachers

The Ministry of Education in Kosovo has restructured pre-university teacher education programmes in public universities, requiring a bachelor of arts (BA) degree with 180 ECTS in a content/academic area, and a master of arts (MA) degree at the Faculty of Education as pedagogical and practice teacher training (Faculty of Education, 2017). As a result, those interested to become mathematics teachers first have to complete a BA programme at the Department of Mathematics within the Faculty of Mathematics-Natural Sciences, and an MA programme with specialization in mathematics at the Faculty of Education, both within University of Prishtina. A review of these two programmes is provided next. Unfortunately, the study plan for the BA degree in mathematics language only contains information about the titles of the specific courses, but lack any elaboration on the goals and objectives of the individual courses or programme as a whole. The brief information available indicates that almost all of the courses in offering focus on mathematics content and disciplinary knowledge, such as algebra, geometry, and functions (Department of Mathematics, n.d.). Subsequently, no claim can be made whether learning competencies are specifically addressed and taught to mathematics student teachers in BA programmes.

The Catalogue of Programmes of the Faculty of Education provides more detailed information about the contents of specific programmes offered at the Faculty, including a two-year professional MA Programme in Teaching Mathematics (Faculty of Education 2017). The overall goal of the MA programme is to advance modern teaching and pedagogical practice competencies in addition to academic competencies obtained in previous BA programmes. Since students' prior focus was on academic development, the professional MA in mathematics teaching is more narrowly focused on courses such as mathematics teaching and learning, curriculum and learning theory, and student assessment. Learning competencies are not explicitly mentioned or addressed in the goals and expected outcomes for students who will complete the MA mathematics programme, however implicitly the key competencies set out in KCF seem to be embedded within the MA programme overall, and specific references are made to new Kosovo Core Curriculum in a course titled Mathematics Teaching and Learning. Therefore, it may be assumed with some certainty that since the MA programme is in line with the latest KCF requirements, students in the mathematics MA programme will be exposed to learning competencies. For example, one of the outcomes for students is for them to be able to consider relationships between applicable educational policies and legislation and their teaching practice, and another highlights setting up conducive learning environments for all students based on the understanding of relationships between pedagogical theories and teaching

practice (Faculty of Education, 2017). Overall, only in few cases references are made in course descriptions to key competencies in general and learning competencies in particular, but the underlying principles of KCF seem to have been embedded into the programme for preparing mathematics teachers who will be able to teach the new competency-based curriculum in their potential future teaching career.

Learning competencies in the syllabi of mathematics in Grades 6 and 10 in Kosovo
        As per the Guide for New Curriculum Implementation 2016-2021 (MEST, n.d.), the new competency-based curricula started to be implemented nation-wide from 2017 only in Grades 0, 1, 6, and 10 – corresponding to the first grades for primary (0, 1), lower-secondary (6), and upper secondary (10) education respectively. Also, the Guide stipulates that subject syllabi was and will be developed progressively starting with Grades 0, 1, 6 and 10 first in 2016, Grades 2, 7, and 11 in 2017 and so on until the subject syllabi are completed for all grades in 2019 for grades 4, 5, and 9. This means that the Grade 6 and Grade 10 syllabi of mathematics are already developed and available for review here. Grade 6 syllabus is the same across all schools, while Grade 10 syllabus reviewed here is from general gymnasium tracks - not vocational tracks.
        The new Grade 6 mathematics syllabus covers the purpose, topics and learning outcomes, methodological guidelines, guidelines for implementation of cross-curricular issues, guidelines for student assessment, and guidelines for teaching and learning resources (MEST, 2018a). The syllabus defines the aim of mathematics for grade six to enable students to acquire necessary knowledge and to understand quantitative and spatial relationships in the nature, society and everyday life and for them to develop logical, critical, and abstract thinking. While the syllabus does not specifically mention the learning competencies, it makes reference to lifelong learning competency, as follows "The goals of mathematics for grade six serve students in developing key competencies for lifelong learning as well as competencies associated with the mathematics curriculum area in order that students are successful citizens in the future [note: author's translation]" (MEST, 2018a, p. 80). As such, mathematics for grade six is fully in line with the new competency-based approach promoted in 2011 KCF in Kosovo. However, the syllabus follows an affirmative approach in the sense that it defines specific learning outcomes associated with each of the topic area to be covered over grade 6. Grade 10 mathematics syllabus follows the same structure as the one of grade 6, meaning it defines topics, and learning outcomes, as well as methodological and assessment guidelines to be followed by teachers (MEST, 2018b). Also, similarly to grade 6 syllabus, in grade 10 mathematics syllabus, learning competencies are not specifically addressed, however references are made to lifelong learning as a crucial competency for being successful in the future.

Discussion and conclusions
        The description and analyses of the recent national education curriculum context in Kosovo show that curriculum policy has been heavily influenced by international trends, primarily through 2006 European Commission Reference Framework, as well as through international technical expertise involved in the curriculum reform in Kosovo. In this regard, and prior to addressing the three specific research questions of the article, it is worth discussing first how did the transnational policy flow occur in the Kosovo context with regard to 2011 KCF development. First, the political situation was ripe for a new curriculum reform – Kosovo had declared independence in 2008, and a new minister of education was in charge – hence the new 2011 KCF is primarily a political statement, signalling to international community supervising Kosovo's independence as well as to the local public that the party in charge is determined to bring Kosovo education closer to Western Europe standards while at the same time aiming to show that the party is pro-reform and pro-European. From the global education policy perspective, the analysis of curriculum policy in Kosovo shows that convergence is at play since the new competency-based curriculum approach is fully in line with the key competencies promoted in the EC Reference Framework of 2006. In turn, from the discursive institutionalism perspective, strong coordinative and communicative discourses have been operational. In the latest curriculum reform, same policy actors have been involved in both coordinative and communicative discourses, which included international policy actors present in Kosovo education

system in form of development or aid agencies, such as UNICEF, UNESCO, EC and the World Bank, as well as local policy actors, primarily political leaders within the Ministry of Education, and local policy-makers and technical expertise. To validate this, for example, the minister of education wrote remarks that were put upfront in the KCF document, and addressed to students, teachers, representatives of the educational community, parents and citizens of the Republic of Kosovo (MEST, 2011). In his remarks, the minister of education in charge, amongst else, wrote "The Kosovo Curriculum Framework reflects issues and concerns raised during public discussions organized with you: students, teachers, school directors, representatives of municipal authorities, local and international experts in education, as well as representatives of civil society" (MEST, 2011, p. 5). The quote reiterates the coordinative and communicative discourses that the Ministry of Education has primarily been involved in parallel during the KCF development process, coordinating the process on one hand with local and international policy actors, and communicating the new reform to the general public to gain legitimation and diffuse resistance that might come up, primarily among teachers, for the radical shift from the traditional content-based curriculum to the competency-based approach. The shift in itself shows an interesting interaction between national and supra-national policy flow, where Kosovo – a non-EU state – is much more in line with the EU and EC curriculum guidelines than many EU countries (Tahirsylaj & Wahlström, under review). Still, the alignment of Kosovo curriculum with the EC key competencies is somewhat externally influenced as competency-based curriculum framework of 2011 was supported with technical expertise of international donors and actors such as UNICEF, UNESCO IBE, and EU, which in addition, reflects an early-stage and emerging curriculum development expertise and tradition within Kosovo context.

Next, turning to the findings in relation to the three specific questions raised in the article, including first, to what extent does 2011 curriculum framework in Kosovo offer opportunities to students to develop learning competencies?; second, how do Kosovo teacher education programmes preparing mathematics teachers cover learning competencies?; and third, what are opportunities for Kosovo students to master learning competencies in Grades 6 and 10 Kosovo mathematics school curriculum? a nuanced story reveals itself. Regarding the first question, learning competencies take centre stage as it is one of the six key competencies that serve as a foundation for curriculum development for entire pre-university education (Grades 1 to 12) in Kosovo. The analysis also showed that definition of the learning competencies in Kosovo borrowed from and closely followed the definition of Learning to learn competency as defined in the 2006 EC Reference Framework. There was less information and evidence that learning competencies are sufficiently or properly addressed and incorporated in the mathematics teachers education programmes within the public University of Prishtina, where the bachelor programme was primarily content- and disciplinary knowledge-based, while the masters' programme also lacked specific references to learning outcomes, but still implicitly recognizing that student teachers in the MA programme need to be trained to teach the new competency-based curricula. Lastly, grade 6 and grade 10 mathematics syllabus have been developed by MEST and therefore strictly follow the KCF curriculum development guidelines, however specific references are only made to lifelong learning as a sub-component of learning competency as defined in 2011 KCF. This situation poses an interesting scenario, where students taking grade 6 and grade 10 mathematics, and by extension all students taking any of the new competency-based curricula in all curriculum areas, are expected and scheduled to have opportunities to master learning competencies, however student teachers in training to become future mathematics teachers have less opportunities to do so. This raises another question about the readiness and competence of teachers already in schools to teach the new curriculum; teachers who have not had any teacher education course on competency-based approach and potentially minimal professional development training in the field. This question could be explored in a future study that might be focused on challenges in implementing competency-based curricula in Kosovo schools.

Considering the new competency-based curriculum reform in Kosovo in general, and learning competencies in particular, from the non-affirmative education theory also poses a complex scenario. On one hand, the clear and specific definition of six key competencies in 2011 KCF confirm an affirmative approach to education, however learning competency in itself is broadly defined and open enough to allow for non-affirmative position. At the end, it will depend on the professional capacities

of individual teachers how they work with the new curriculum and how it is unfolded to students exposed to the competency-based curricula. Further, considering the concepts of recognition, summoning to self-activity, and Bildsamkeit, it is hard to identify how recognition is addressed in KCF if at all, while it can be argued that competency-based approach and key competencies defined in KCF could serve as opportunities for students to experience summoning to self-activity and Bildsamkeit, especially within learning competencies context, in the sense that students are invited to consider schooling as an open-ended project where learning has to continue beyond completion of formal education, which at the same time is an invitation to engage in a self-transcending process. Critically and paradoxically, Kosovo teachers seem to be limited to engage in a similar process, which in turn has the potential to hinder students' opportunities for developing awareness for recognizing the others as free, and being summoned to self-activity and Bildsamkeit.

In sum, the Kosovo national curriculum makes explicit references to *learning competences* and the entire new curriculum framework is centred on six key competencies that students need to master as they go through their pre-university education from primary to upper secondary education. With regard to teacher education programmes, the findings from Kosovo show that BA degree for mathematics still relies in strong disciplinary knowledge of the academic discipline, while the MA degree has been updated to reflect the latest curriculum reform requirements. Grades 6 and Grade 10 mathematics syllabi are fully in line with KCF and make direct references to lifelong learning and learning to learn as sub-components of learning competencies. Strong coordinative and communicative discourses have been at play to create the conditions for the shift from content- to competency-based curricula, while competency-based approach in itself is both an affirmative process, since curricula and learning outcomes are clearly defined from a top-down approach, and non-affirmative enough to allow for opportunities for students to obtain an open and critical outlook for themselves and democratic society – now and in the future.

Notes

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