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Challenges, contradictions and continuity in creating a five-year teacher education programme in Iceland

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Abstract

In 2008, new legislation was passed in Iceland on teacher education, requiring a master's degree as a prerequisite for teaching certification for all school levels from preschools to upper secondary schools. In the same year the Iceland University of Education merged with the University of Iceland. This article maps the revision of the teacher education (TE) programme for compulsory school teaching at the University of Iceland from these extensive changes, 2008 until 2017. During this period, the University also dealt with the consequences of the economical downfall of 2008 and serious decline in attendance in the TE programme. The study is based on an analysis of various documents, including reports, memoranda, minutes, legislative documents, course catalogues, and a survey among graduated students. We discuss the challenges that arose in creating a high-quality TE programme for a too small group of students, contradictions that were encountered when trying to bring together different and often contradicting interests of stakeholders, and the continuity of previous practices and trends.

Keywords: initial teacher education; policy of teacher education; contradictions in teacher education; teacher license; content analyses.

Introduction

In 2008, new legislation was passed in Iceland on preschools, compulsory schools, and upper secondary schools, as well as on teacher education (no. 87/2008). The legislation called for a Master's degree as a prerequisite for teaching certification for all new pre-, compulsory, and upper secondary school teachers. This legislation made Iceland one of the first countries to require a Master's degree for teachers at all school levels, from pre-school to upper secondary school, which makes the country an interesting case to study.

The University of Iceland is one of two universities in Iceland providing a five years teacher education programme but largest as measured by the number of students. Icelandic teacher education for the compulsory school level (10 years of schooling for 6- to 15-year-old students) was first established as a university discipline with legislation in 1971 (Lög um Kennaraháskóla Íslands No 38/1971 [Act on Iceland University of Education]). Shortly after the turn of the millennium, concurrently with other developments, initial steps were taken towards a merger of the Iceland University of Education and the University of Iceland. The main aims of the merger were to improve the quality of teacher education, that is, to increase diversity and flexibility in undergraduate and postgraduate studies offered in pre-, compulsory, and upper secondary school teaching and other education-linked professions and to improve opportunities for students in different faculties of the unified university to link their studies with teacher education. Furthermore, this measure was supposed to support teaching and research in education studies and create opportunities for integrating research with other studies within a unified university (Parliamentary Document No. 519/2005–2006).

The subsequent years of 2008–2018 constituted a period of flux in the history of teacher education due to new education legislation, the merger of the Iceland University of Education with the University of Iceland, and the severe financial cutbacks in the education sector, as well as in most other sectors, that took place after the collapse of the banking system in October 2008 (Johnsen, 2014; Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2015; Ragnarsdóttir and Jóhannesson, 2014).

This article maps the revision of the teacher education programme for compulsory school teaching at the University of Iceland's School of Education from 2008, when the new legislation was passed and the Iceland University of Education was merged with the University of Iceland, to 2015, when the programme underwent a government-stipulated regular self-evaluation followed by still another structural change in 2018. The purpose of the article is to analyse the intentions and priorities at the beginning of the process of lengthening the teacher education programme and see how it came through. The research question concerns what challenges arose during this process, what contradictions were encountered, and how the continuity of previous practices appeared.

Background: Teacher education policies

Teacher education around the world is organised in different ways. Even in such a relatively homogeneous part of the world as the Nordic Countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden), teacher education has quite different histories and organisation (Nordic Council of Ministers, 2008). After the turn of the millennium in 2000, several trends seemed to be at work that may make teacher education programmes more alike than before. Ongoing processes tend to normalise teacher education from country to country (Zgaga, 2008), with a tendency toward the globalisation of a neo-liberal policy paradigm (Beach and Bagley, 2013). Importantly, teacher education is also affected by the so-called Bologna Process in which 46 European countries are converging their higher education systems (European Ministers of Education, 1999; see also Caena 2014; Rasmussen and Dorf, 2010).

The specific trends of integrating teacher education into higher education are supplemented by more general internationalisation and Europeanisation trends and the fact that this is not just a European affair but a global one (Zeichner, 2018; Zgaga, 2008). Integral to the Bologna Process is the request for presenting all information about study programmes in a similar manner, as well as implementing quality control measures. Importantly for our study, Iceland participated in the Bologna Process (Jóhannsdóttir and Jónasson, 2014; Jónasson and Óskarsdóttir, 2016).

One of the changes in teacher education that have been under consideration is if a Master's degree should be required of teachers, grounded in the current belief in more research-based teacher education (Trippestad, 2017). Finland has required a Master's degree for all compulsory school teachers since 1979. Finland has also been the only country without trouble in recruiting students for teacher education programmes (Rasmussen and Dorf, 2010). Iceland, as noted before, requires a Master's degree, graduating the first cohort from a five-year programme in 2013. In Norway, Master's level teacher education was implemented in 2017, and all teacher education institutions must fulfil requirements for research in order to be allowed to provide the programme (Trippestad, 2017). Other nations, such as Scotland, are considering moving teacher education to a Master's level (Kennedy and Doherty, 2012) with an emphasis on the research training component as well (Donaldson, 2014). In the USA, the government response is to establish a competitive market for the preparation of teachers often by deregulating what type of programme could be offered (Zeichner, 2018).

According to the Bologna Process, participating countries have been developing 3+2+3-year cycles, that is, three years for Bachelor degrees, two for Master's, and three or more for doctoral studies. Thus, countries that want to expand teacher education from the three-year bachelor level must now develop two additional years, as Iceland decided in 2008 and which took effect in 2011. The main arguments for lengthening teacher studies are familiar and frequently used by policy makers and educationalist around the world (Ellis and McNicholl,

2015). They rest on the desire to improve the quality of the education system, thus making the country more internationally competitive. This line of arguments worries many scholars. Howe (2012) argues that the quests for a Master's degree are due to external forces that should be seen in the "light of global neoliberal and neoconservative agendas fulfilling international comparisons ... at least partially due to external market forces, with little to do with more effective teaching" (p. 62). Similarly, Kennedy (2015) claims that there is "a need for more empirical evidence regarding the purpose, nature, and impact of Masters level teacher education" as well as an "interrogation of the intentions of Master-level learning (understood as enhanced intellectual capacity) as opposed to Masters qualifications (credentialism)" (p. 190).

Although teacher education in many countries had important headquarters in separate universities, such as the Iceland University of Education until 2008, the field has always been plagued with pressures relating to opposing perspectives and issues of debate about the ideological foundations of teacher education, which affected the development of teacher education (Jónasson 2012). These issues centre on study elements and content, professionalism of teacher educators, responsibility, the role of practical training, and coordination of teacher education as a whole field. Jónasson (2012) also points out how the frequently-heard simplification of teacher education, which is seen merely as comprising two elements, subject knowledge and pedagogy, affects debates in Iceland as well as elsewhere (see also Proppé, Mýrdal and Daníelsson, 1993). Caena (2014, 117) refers to this tension as between teachers as "all-round" professionals and subject specialists. In line with that, Green, Reid and Brennan (2017) stress the importance of learning how to deal with the challenge of contemporary struggle and conflict over the nature and purpose of teacher education that takes place worldwide.

Taken together, teacher education deals with various kinds of pressures and demands from international trends in higher education as well as from society. This situation creates challenges and carries with it a variety of contradictions in how teacher education in Iceland, or any other country evolves.

Method

The study is based on content analysis of various documents (Krippendorff, 2013), most of which are officially available. Four types of documents and data were studied.

Four *reports* were analysed: a) One that describes the main priorities for new teacher education programme (Sigurðardóttir, Geirsdóttir and Sigurgeirsson, 2009), b) a report that summarises experiences and main issues that occurred during the process, written from the point of view of the faculty dean (Sigurðardóttir, 2014), c) an external evaluation report of the merger of the two universities (University of Iceland, 2014), and d) a self-evaluation report of

the Faculty of Teacher Education (University of Iceland, 2015). These four reports provide important information about the challenges and contradictions that the School of Education, and especially the teacher education programmes, faced since 2008.

Four *legislative documents* were analysed. These are two parliamentary documents (No. 87/2008, No. 872/2009) from the time when the decisions were made about the merger of the university and lengthening the teacher education programme; one act, i.e. the Act on the Education and Recruitment of Teachers and Administrators (No. 87/2008), and one regulation, i.e. the Regulation on the content of teacher education (No. 872/2009).

Course catalogues from three different school years were analysed in order to observe the changes in the structure of the programme over time. The reason for that is that we soon found that the changes occurring around and after 2008 involved a complicated picture of contradictions between a variety of ideas and practices and that some of the changes that took place involved a continuity of previous ideas and practices. It was, therefore, necessary to analyse the content of the teacher education curriculum, and for that purpose, we used course catalogues from both recent and prior times to identify the continuity. We chose the catalogue from 2012–2013 because it was the ideal curriculum in line with the School of Education policy and the 2015–2016 catalogue because of adjustments to allow for declining attendance. We chose the 1998–1999 catalogue because some changes had been made after an earlier merger with the preschool and sports teacher education colleges in the beginning of 1998.

Statistical data from the University of Iceland Student Registry were analysed to see changes in number of students.

The analysis of the documents was performed in close cooperation between the authors who first read the documents. At first we had aimed at telling this as the story of the challenges of lengthening the teacher education programme in the context of the merger of the two universities. But after our first deliberations about the content of the documents, we created the framework of challenges, contradictions, and continuity and reread and re-analysed the data in relation to that framework.

Although this study is limited in scope as it only covers one out of the two universities providing a five years programme and only the compulsory school level, the authors believe it provides a fair picture of the challenges. In addition to the documents that were scrutinised, the authors' experience as active participants in the process at various stages of it should be noted. One of the authors wrote two of the reports that are analysed and all participated in constructing the self-evaluation report. Thus, the experience and opinions of authors with

different backgrounds provided invaluable insights; however, although the authors present the picture as accurately as they can, it is not possible to claim total impartiality.

Challenges, contradictions and continuity

Our overall finding, after tracing the changes in the content of the compulsory school teacher education, is that the process was riddled with challenges and contradictions.

When we delved further into earlier course catalogues, we were also able to see an ongoing continuity as well, in many respects – a continuity that may not always have been a consequence of deliberate decisions. Hereafter, we present our findings in three sections titled challenges, contradictions, and continuity.

Challenges

In this section, three challenges out of the many that came up in the process of reforming the teacher education programme, are discussed. They concern the challenges of preparing teachers for the future, how to implement the Bologna Process, and finally, the unforeseen challenge of decreasing enrolment in compulsory teacher education, which impacted both the structure and the content of the curriculum.

The challenge of educating teachers for the future

An ongoing challenge in teacher education is how to prepare students for a lifelong career. For that reason, the University believed that many groups and individuals should participate in the process of defining future requirements. Based on that, collaboration or consultation with interested parties outside the School of Education, such as the Icelandic Teachers' Union and the Icelandic Association of Local Authorities, was utilised. A symposium with these and other main stakeholders, held early in the process communicated the following main messages. Teachers must be educated for the future to deal every day with a diversity of school tasks and situations in a professional and successful manner. Their studies must also prepare them for leading the development of school practices. This should be done in close connection with the anticipated workplace, not only the classroom but the school as whole. The focus should be on developing the ability for cooperation with a range of people inside and outside the school.

The first group that worked on preparing the five-year programme agreed upon four key aspects as read threads in the new programme. These threads were drawn from on the messages from a stakeholders' symposium, recent literature, and European recommendations as they appeared in different policy documents (Sigurðardóttir et al., 2009). These key aspects are as follows:

Diversity of teacher tasks: The need for teachers to perform a greater diversity of tasks than previously has created a need for a deeper and broader foundation of knowledge. These are,

e.g., to take part in curriculum design, cultivate a sense of moral responsibility and civic duty among their students, increase their understanding of democracy, support equality, provide practice in critical discussion, place particular emphasis on developing the arts and creative work, and to focus on sustainability in the broadest sense of the word in all school practices.

Collaboration and cooperation: In complex instructional and educational institutions, there is a greater need than before for teachers to possess solid collaborative skills that enable them to work with different people within and outside the school and have analytical and communicative skills that equip them to work with their students.

Inclusive education: This has been central to discussions on school practices in Iceland at least since the Salamanca Statement in 1994 (UNESCO, 1994) as in our neighbouring countries. Based on this premise, inclusive education needs to be a central feature of teacher education as this policy makes great demands on teachers' professional skills.

Professionalism: There is a call for redefining the concept of teacher professionalism due to the diverse needs of students, increased requirements of collaboration, and need to deal with both general and specialised tasks. Teamwork, cooperation, and shared responsibility have replaced independence as central features of teachers' self-identity. Teachers should be professionals who are able to confront changes and take part in developing school practices, for example, by being active researchers into their own work (e.g., Ellis, Edwards and Smagorinsky, 2010; Caena, 2014).

In spite of a relatively good consensus among faculty members and stakeholders about the main trends in teachers' tasks and professionalism, as well as the need to implement new ideas, many challenges arose when an attempt was made to implement these into the programme. There were two main reasons for this; firstly, it turned out that there was no agreement on which of older and traditional subjects and topics should go out of the programme to make space for something new; secondly, stakeholders outside the faculty of teacher education had no voice at the table where decisions about structure and content were taken.

The challenge of implementing the Bologna Process

The Bologna Process emphasises defining the competence of students at all levels, including teacher education students. The taskforce that presented its report in 2009 made suggestions about learning outcomes which were further discussed by the faculty members. Their conclusions were that teachers at all school levels should possess the knowledge and competence to organise learning and a learning environment appropriate for different individuals in a varied society. Furthermore, they should be able to communicate with different people and take part communicatively in school practices, cultivate positive attitudes

and important values, and to be leaders in the fields of education and study (Sigurðardóttir et al., 2009).

These outcomes later formed the basis of work on learning outcomes of individual degree programmes that appeared in the course catalogue in 2012–2013. They were developed in conformity with the National Qualification Framework for Higher Education (2011).

Attendance and graduation

The number of registered students in the programme for compulsory education teachers at B.Ed. level decreased over the eight-year period. Consequently, the number of graduated students has also fallen dramatically (see Figure 1). A total of 269 students graduated with a B.Ed. degree in 2005, as compared to 82 in 2016. The most significant decline was from 2011 to 2012. One hundred and eleven students graduated from the University in 2012, the last year they had the possibility of obtaining a teaching licence based on a B.Ed. degree.

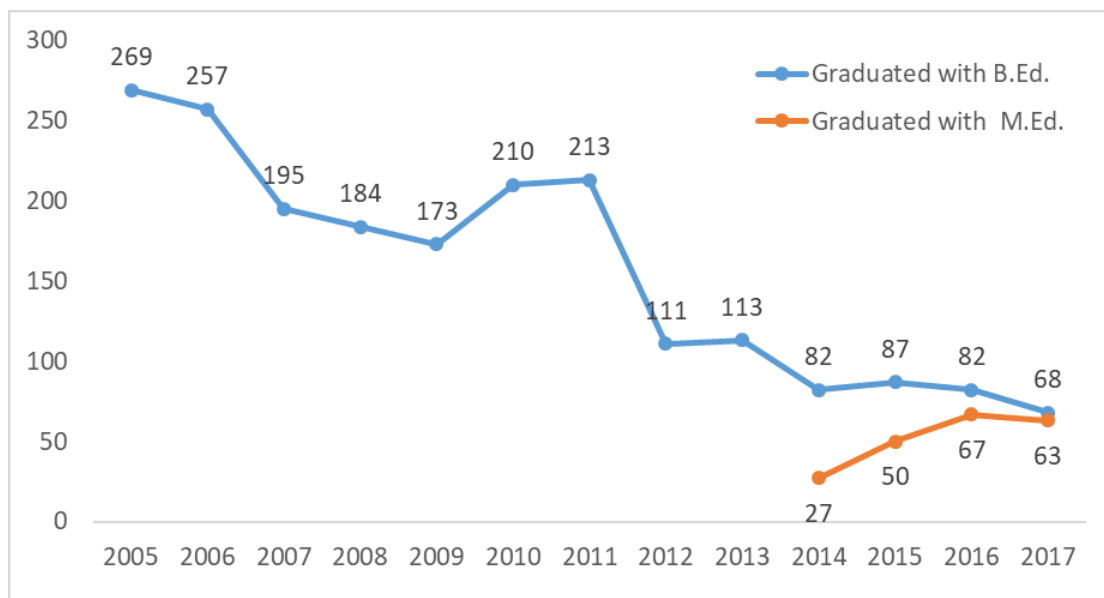


Figure 1. Number of students graduating with a B.Ed. in compulsory school teacher education, 2005–2017 with a B.Ed. degree and 2014–2017 with a M.Ed. degree (Source: University of Iceland Student Registry)

In 2014, the first teachers who completed a five-year programme with a Master's degree graduated (after a period of two years when very few graduated as compulsory school teachers). Only 27 teachers graduated with an M.Ed. degree. This number slowly rose over the next few years, with 63 teachers graduating in 2017, but is still far from being as it was before. Obviously, this situation is worrying for the schools facing a serious shortage of teachers in near future and for the University, which had to reorganise the programme for much fewer students than intended. It is worth mentioning that 95% of teachers who graduated with a M.Ed. are working in schools two years after graduation (Sigurðardóttir and

Sigurjónsdóttir, 2017), as compared to around 50% before the legislative change (Jónsson and Eyjólfsson, 2017).

Little is known about the reasons for this decrease in student numbers, which was evident from 2005. It is likely that the lengthening the programme had an effect, although this trend was seen before the decision to lengthen studies.

Contradictions

This section specifically addresses several of the matters that helped to explicate contradicting opinions and interests during the shaping of teacher education after the 2008 legislation was passed and the merger of the two universities.

Power and responsibilities for the teacher education programme

The question of who is responsible for teacher education has been pressing at all stages (Sigurðardóttir, 2014), that is, to what extent is the curriculum stipulated on a national basis and to what extent can individual institutions decide. This was also a pressing matter within the University of Iceland with regard to the responsibility of the School of Education versus other schools within the university and even within the School of Education. This was most crucial regarding upper secondary teacher education but concerned the compulsory level to some extent as well. These issues were also relevant between the School of Education and various interested parties outside the university. The origin of this issue may well be the recognition of the social importance of teacher education as the ballast of the education system and as a convenient target to be easily blamed for conceived failures or mistakes in the educational system (Trippestad, 2017). Conflicts about responsibility and power are, in reality, the manifestation of a much larger issue of what perspective forms the foundation of decisions about content and focus (Jónasson, 2012).

An example of contradicting ideas concerning responsibility and power within the University surfaced when the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture was preparing regulations about the content of teacher education that the authors participated in. The problem centred on who would be called upon for consultation and who had the authority to write an opinion on behalf of the University. The conclusion of this matter can be interpreted as meaning that the School of Education did not have decision-making authority over and above the other four schools of the university on issues concerning teacher education. This difference of opinion resulted in an arrangement that delegated responsibility for the education of upper secondary teachers at the University of Iceland to all faculties of the university through participation in a central studies board (University of Iceland, 2012).

The question of responsibility and decision-making within the School of Education was also pressing. After the merger in 2008, three faculties were established within the newly formed

School of Education and each decided on faculty matters at faculty meetings, including which study programmes to offer (Regulation for the University of Iceland No. 569/2009). This meant that decision-making on matters concerning teacher education was largely in the hands of the faculty members of the Faculty of Teacher Education and that instructors in other faculties had no say, even though many instructors (mostly in foundational courses) in other faculties also taught in the Faculty of Teacher Education (University of Iceland, 2015). Before the merger, this was not the case. On the other hand, the composition of the instructor group in the Faculty of Teacher Education was diverse and represented many disciplines. This meant that there were spokespeople for many perspectives, while other perspectives were less noticeable as there was no one to advocate for them.

The social significance of teacher education has often been noted. For this reason, many groups should be able to influence the shaping of the programme. Jóhannsdóttir (2010) stresses the importance of understanding schools and teacher education as interacting systems for the benefit of mutual future development. This was, in fact, a point of some importance within the School of Education. Work began with extensive participation of stakeholders and collection of ideas. Thus, there was a considerable and effective consultation process in place, perhaps stronger than ever before (Sigurðardóttir et al., 2009). When it came to final decisions, however, the outcome of a vote of the faculty members of Teacher Education at a faculty meeting counted. It could, therefore, be said that it is not easy for important, interested stakeholders outside the University to exert their influence.

Focus on specialisation versus focus on breadth of knowledge

Today, teachers are expected to be knowledgeable and have skills in many areas of school practice (Jónasson, 2012). In the revision process, it was decided to attempt to strengthen specialist knowledge in certain areas of school practice, especially since, in recent years, there has been an increasing tendency for teachers to work in teams to share their knowledge. Contradicting ideas appeared, particularly with regard to compulsory teacher education, which deals with a broad range of age levels and subjects.

The new specialisations in one or two subjects appeared in the course catalogue in 2012–2013 at the cost of breadth in subject areas. The main criticism of this came from interested parties outside the university, such as school principals who pointed out that the subject specialisations were too narrow (Sigurðardóttir, 2014). The fact that teachers could seldom teach one or two subjects was pointed out. Since many Icelandic schools, both compulsory and upper secondary, are so small, teachers have to teach several subjects (Sigurðardóttir et al., 2009). On the other hand, criticism was also voiced that teachers, especially at the lower secondary level, did not know their subjects well enough. It is hard to meet all these wishes since teachers cannot always choose their place of employment according to the

specialisation they chose during their teaching studies. This argumentation, along with a heavy cutting of resources, led to yet other changes in the implementation process.

School practice develops and teachers' tasks change over time, a fact that supports the call for constant professional development of teachers. This can be seen in the debate about the content of so-called core school subjects in teacher education. Core school subjects are courses that all students take. The most traditional ones are Icelandic and mathematics, but the importance of the arts, languages, natural sciences, and social studies was also argued. Yet others claimed that all students needed a better foundation in the academic fields of teacher studies, such as sociology, psychology and philosophy. The need to include the six fundamental pillars of education (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, 2011) in curricula was noted when the pillars were introduced in the curriculum guides for all school levels. Particular attention was drawn to literacy, equality, and sustainability. Attention was also drawn to the fields of study, such as inclusive education and school development and assessment. The focus on increasing the importance of practical training for all student teachers, favoured by the Icelandic Teachers' Union (2008), must also be kept in mind. The proponents of most of these ideas had seen the lengthening of teacher studies as an opportunity to put more weight on the issues they supported. The Faculty of Teacher Education was faced with the need to reconcile these points of view and strike a balance. It hardly needs to be mentioned that faculty meetings at this time were characterised by a lively exchange of opinions.

Continuity

When change is planned and implemented, not everything is changed nor does everything change as planned (Jónasson and Óskarsdóttir, 2016). The changes in Icelandic teacher education for the compulsory school level are no exception to that. In this section, we explain the changes in the curriculum in the context of what followed and discuss what turned out to be a greater emphasis on certain things. In order to better analyse trends and continuity over time, we used the course catalogue from 1998–1999 for comparison.

After the legislation changed in 2008 and a new regulation about the education of teachers came into force in 2009 (Reglugerð um inntak menntunar leik-, grunn, og framhaldsskólakennara, No. 872/2009 [Regulation on the Content of Education for Teachers in Pre-, Compulsory, and Upper Secondary Schools]), the Faculty of Teacher Education developed its course catalogue. This work actually began in autumn 2007, and step-by-step changes were made to the course catalogue until a final version appeared at the beginning of 2012. A new change process then began that culminated with the 2015 catalogue (Table 1).

Table 1. Overview of compulsory school teacher education 1998–1999, 2012–2013 and 2015–2016. Number of ECTS in each category.

Course Syllabus	1998–99	2012 – 2013		2015 – 2016		
Study	B.Ed. 180 ECTS	B.Ed. 180 ECTS	M.Ed 120 ECTS	B.Ed. 180 ECTS	M.Ed 120 ECTS	Comments
Foundations courses	18	20	5	20	5	Sociology, philosophy, psychology; from 2012 also sustainability
General pedagogy, curriculum, teaching methods	36	35	30	30	35	Various aspects of teaching and learning for the appropriate school level. 2012–2013: 22e field practice are included in courses 2015–2016: 23e field practice are included in courses
Core school subjects	34	10		40		1998–1999: Icelandic (12); Mathematic (6), art (8) and environmental studies (4), elective (4). 2012–2013: Icelandic (5) and Mathematic (5). 2015–2016: Icelandic and Mathematics (20) and four other core subjects (total 20) (1 in field practice)
Specialization in school subjects or the teaching of young children	50	80	40	40	25	1998–1999: Two academic subjects (25 + 25) Or one in art and craft (50). 2012–2013: Students elect one (120) or two subjects (80+40), field practice is a part of courses (20). 2015-2016: Students elect one subject (80e) including field practice (15–18)
Field practice	28					2012–2013: 42e included in courses 2015–2016 40e-43e included in courses, depending on their choice
Research methods, study skills	8	25	5	20	5	1998–1999: IT (4) language (4) 2012–2013: IT (5), academic writing (10) research methodology (15). 2015–2016: academic writing (10), research methodology (15 thereof 1 in field practice)
Electives			10	20	20	Open choice
Final projects	6	10	30	10	30	Final project is mixed of pedagogy (15) and subject (15)
Total ECTS	180	180	120	180	120	

In Table 1, we explain the division of courses in the course catalogues for prospective compulsory education teachers. The courses are grouped into eight categories (described in the last column) to make it easier to compare the three catalogues from different years. In the first line, we have listed some of the so-called foundational courses, followed by courses in general pedagogy, subjects, field practice, research methods, electives and final projects. The change from the 2012–2013 catalogue to 2015–2016 catalogue was primarily to adjust for declining attendance with some other changes regarding what people wanted to do. There were too few students to make it possible to keep up 120 ECTS of subject teaching in all the subjects taught at compulsory schools with required depth. So, from autumn 2015, the course catalogue was reorganised with just one programme for compulsory school teachers instead of three, separate programmes. In the revised programme, all the students take a 40 ECTS subject core and then choose one, 80 ECTS subject area in which to specialise. From 2012, field practice was included in courses in general pedagogy, whereas it had been organised as a separate block during the 1998–1999 academic year.

Table 2. *Overview of the compulsory school teacher education, 1998–1999, 2012–2013 and 2015–2016. Percentage of ECTS for each category*

Study	1998- 1999 B.Ed. 180 ECTS	2012-2013 B.Ed. + M.Ed. 300 ECTS	2015-2016 B.Ed. + M.Ed. 300 ECTS
Foundations courses	10	8	8
General pedagogy, curriculum, teaching methods	20	14,5	14
Core school subjects	19	3,5	13
Specialization in school subjects or the teaching of young children	28	33,5	16
Field practice	16	14	14
Research methods, study skills	4	10	8
Electives		3	13,5
Final projects	3	13,5	13,5

Table 2 further demonstrates what has changed and what has not changed between the chosen points as a percentage of the total extent of the programme, which was 180 ECTS in the first period but 300 in the other two. For ease of comparison, the field practice units are reported in a separate category instead of comprising part of the courses in which they were involved. Although sustainability has been added to the foundational courses, these subjects decreased in their share of credits from 1998. The same is true for general courses on pedagogy, curriculum, and teaching methods. They went from 20% to 14% in both of the later catalogues, although the number of credits rose.

Then we see how emphasis has shifted between core school subjects – mainly Icelandic and mathematics – and a greater, in-depth specialisation as appeared in the 2012–2013 course catalogue. In the 1998–1999 catalogue, 28% of the programme involved specialisation, which increased to 33.5% in 2012–2013 (without credits in field studies) and then dropped in 2015–2016 with a greater emphasis on core school subjects again. Core subjects that are obligatory for all students were 19% of the programme in 1998–1999, then dropped due to the emphasis on specialisation and then went up again to 13% in the most recent programme.

Field practice was a separate part worth 28 credits in the 1998–1999 course catalogue. In later catalogues, field practice became integrated into general pedagogy, teaching methods, and school subject courses. The argument for doing so was to strengthen the link between theory and practice. Field practice was increased to 41–42 credits, which is only slightly less as a proportion of the whole study programme than in 1998–1999. It is coordinated with courses in subjects and in pedagogy. As expected, the final projects (B.Ed. and M.Ed. theses) began absorbing a larger share of the programme as the Master's level was introduced. These are treated as a separate category in the table but are inevitably linked with all the other categories.

The importance of strong links with the prospective place of work was stressed in the work from the very beginning and appeared in the 2012–2013 course catalogue. Changes were made in 2007 regarding how practical training was organised. A contract was made with several schools to become placement schools for a small group of students (Sigurðardóttir et al., 2009) over the five years of the study. The aim was to provide deeper and more focused training for student teachers in the workplace and to strengthen the ties between academic study and practical work. The receiving school was supposed to take greater responsibility for students' practical training as the staff there had the opportunity to follow the process of individual students. This, however, was gradually changed back and the 2015 programme is similar to what it was in 1998. The students now visit four schools to do their practical work.

Another example of innovative change that was emphasised from the beginning of the process was to increase all courses to a minimum of 10 ECTS in order to gain a more holistic and cross-disciplinary approach to the programme. To make that possible, teachers were required to collaborate more closely than before. According to the 2015–2016 course catalogue, this has more or less changed back in many courses and suggestions are constantly coming to downsize all courses, which is very similar to the 1998–99 course catalogue. There is, though, one 25 ECTS course at the Master's level that combines theory and practice, which can be considered to be a new and innovative action.

All in all, this comparison showed more continuity between previous practices than we expected. The new things in the programme are research methods and final projects, in line with international trends and the requirement for a research-based Master's degree (Trippestad, 2017), as well as, most recently, more elective courses, a small course in sustainability, and the 25 ECTS course mentioned before.

Conclusions

Teacher education at the University of Iceland has been characterised by changes in structure and content, involving challenges, contradictions, and continuity. There has been deliberation on recognised issues within the discussion on teacher education in Iceland and abroad (Trippestad, 2017; Zeichner, 2018). A turning point in teacher education was reached in 2008 when new legislation on teacher education was passed, an economic recession hit Iceland, and the Iceland University of Education and the University of Iceland merged. In the revision process, after lengthening the study, faculty members at the University of Iceland dealt with well-known challenges and contradictions, as well as what has appeared as continuity between previous and recent content and structure. Currently, the programme is undergoing yet another change that was revealed in the course catalogue for 2018–2019.

In the *Faculty of Teacher Education Self-Review* (University of Iceland, 2015), the importance of putting an effort into building a shared faculty culture and vision was emphasised in order to create a framework to guide internal discussions on what should be in the teacher education curriculum and what should be excluded. The importance of focusing on involvement of partners such as schools, teacher unions, and the Ministry of Science, Education and Culture was also stressed, as these can support the faculty and decisions that need to be made. In just few years' time, the faculty succeeded in extending the teacher education programme from a three-year to a five-year programme, raising it from the bachelor's level to the Master's level and managed to create a programme that is comparable to international standards.

The story told here also reminds us about many forces that affect how programmes change over time. Green, Reid and Brennan (2017) stress the importance of finding ways to deal with this challenging pressure for change. Teachers that a nation needs are never the teachers it currently has (Green, Reid and Brennan, 2017). They also warn that rapid changes in structure and content might cause a loss of what Zeichner (2018) calls the soul of teacher education, referring to the practice of teacher education and the practice of schools. We think that this is significant for teacher education programme in our case and throughout the world.

Footnote

The first author was dean of the Faculty of Teacher Education for most of the period under scrutiny until the third author who is the present dean took over in 2013; the second author was a member of the faculty council from 2010–2014.

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