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RESTRUCTURING INITIAL TRAINING FOR SPEECH-LANGUAGE PATHOLOGY IN BULGARIA

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Katya Dionissieva

Department of Logopedics, SWU "Neofit Rilski"

Blagoevgrad

dionissieva@abv.bg

What is this presentation about?

Speech and Language Pathology (SLP) in Bulgaria is undergoing significant changes in structure, content and practical preferences for initial training at several universities. Why and how is this process developing? This presentation is focused on some of these challenges.

- Department of Logopedics: Who we are?
- Logopedics and Special Education
- Moving towards independent specialty
- Curricula development
- New academic activities
- Hearing disorders: a special case

Department of Logopedics: Who we are?

The Department of Logopedics (Speech and Language Pathology) ¹ is the only independent department of Logopedics in Bulgaria, founded in 2002. After a long discussion with the educational authorities the need for separating Logopedics from Special Education was recognized due to hard work done by professionals at South-West University.

Even before the separation the department staff, successors of scholars working for decades in cooperation with worldwide known scientists in the field of Speech and Language Pathology, were trying to meet high expectations of both students and practitioners in theory and practice of this scientific area. Professionals at the department are implementing modern technology in speech and language therapy along with broadening investigations in a variety of SL disorders. The staff of the department is stable in numbers:

- Professors (PhD) – 1
- Associate Professors (PhD) – 4
- Assistant Professors (PhD) – 2
- Associate Assistants – 2 (incl. 1 doctoral student).

During last decade about 25-30 students per academic year are enrolled in initial training in Logopedics, and the most recent numbers are:

- Bachelors – 97 (4 years course of studies):
 - Bulgarians – 65
 - Foreign students - 32
- Masters – 10 (1 year course of studies).

Logopedics and Special Education

Training of undergraduates for SLP in Bulgaria was first started in 1956 at Sofia University, Faculty of Philosophy under curricula of Special Education (SE) ². As a part

¹ Traditionally in Bulgaria the term "logopedics" is used for SLP.

² Defectology was the term for SE in use for more than 30 years.

of initial training for SE the curriculum of Logopedics was strongly influenced by Pedagogy.

- Most of the basic courses were in the field of education;
- Few courses in medical studies were present.

Along with the first initiatives for separating Logopedics from SE the lecturers at the Department of Logopedics at SWU started rethinking the content of initial training in order to meet the main international standards. In fact, far before the act of separation the curriculum was restructured and many important courses in medical studies were successfully introduced. Regarding to the traditional necessity of training speech and language pathologists in delivering of services to children with special educational needs, some courses in SE were still present in the curriculum.

Moving towards independent specialty

At SWU the initial training in Logopedics was started within the specialty of Special Education in year 1986, at the establishment of the university (former Higher Pedagogical Institute).

In year 2002 officially an independent specialty of Logopedics was opened at SWU after its separation from Special Education. This act was due to a successful project, funded by the World Bank (see below).

Still in year 2002, after the legal recognition of the independent specialty the first Department of Logopedics in the country was opened at SWU, and a modern curriculum according to international requirements was introduced.

In year 2009 Logopedics was successfully accredited as an independent specialty in Health Sciences Direction and now is considered as a paramedical specialty. The Department of Logopedics was relocated at the newly established Faculty of Public Health and Sports (2009).

Keeping in mind the undergoing process of reconstruction of higher education in Bulgaria, we must say that professionals in the field of Speech and Language Pathology countrywide are experiencing great difficulties promoting new standards for the development of both academic specialty and field practice.

Curricula development

The most recent curriculum for undergraduates in Logopedics meets the requirements of Regulation No. 21/ 30.09.2004, concerning the application of the system for gaining credits at high schools (ECTS).

The curriculum was initially developed in 2003/2004 due to a successful project of Prof. D. Georgieva (Department of Logopedics at SWU) that was funded by the World Bank - "*New educational technologies for student training in Logopedics*"-12069. One of the main goals of the project was the development of a new curriculum under the credit system and restructuring of course programs according to the requirements of the credit system. Official consultants of the project, respectively of the new curriculum, were well-known European scholars - Prof. Dr. John Van Borsel Gent University, Gent, Belgium, and Prof. Dr. Hans-Georg Bosshardt, Ruhr University, Bochum, Germany. Also the curriculum was consulted by Prof. Arnold Spee from Holland – chief coordinator of MATRA Project for the introduction of the credit system at Bulgarian higher education institutions.

The new curriculum was introduced in academic year 2004/5 and meets most of the worldwide standards for training students in SLP:

- Standards of the International Association of Logopedics and Phoniatics (IALP) (Published in Journal of Pholia Phoniatica et Logopaedica, 1998; revision published in 2010.) The requirements for students' training are under the heading: IALP Guidelines for Initial Education in Logopedics.
- Standards of the Permanent Committee for Contact with Logopedists in EU (CPLOL), published in 1998, revised in 2007.

According to the standards mentioned above SWU offers only fulltime initial training in SLP. The curriculum main content meets the following requirements:

- Qualification profile of Bachelor in Logopedics,
- Course titles (compulsory, elective and optional) and their range during the entire eight semesters of training,
- Type of students assessment,
- Technological types of training, coded as lectures, seminars and practice,
- All kinds of diagnostic and therapeutic practice, and state practice with the relevant number of hours for contact classes,
- Credits for each subject (summarized by semesters and for the entire period of training)
- Graduation

The goals of the initial training in SLP were derived from the philosophy of traditional higher education in Bulgaria and the modern trends following good practices from abroad. It was strongly recommended to provide sufficient theoretical knowledge in the field of medicine, psychology, linguistics and other studies important for training in SLP.

The curriculum was developed to offer to undergraduates knowledge and skills in theory and practice in all areas of SLP – disorders of articulation, language, voice, and fluency, audiology, emotional and behavioural disorders, and communication disorders in mental diseases.

Parameter	Course/ Semester	Horarium
Thematic modules: (compulsory courses only)		
• Medical studies	10 courses	435
• Linguistic studies	3	225
• Psychological studies	6	270
• Logopedical studies	15	780
Practice:		
✓ observations (logopedical only)	I-VII semesters	210
✓ clinical practice in SLP (diagnostics and treatment)	IV- VII	270
✓ probationer's practice (internship)	VIII	435
• Other knowledge	3 courses	90
• Sports	I-VIII semester	240
Diploma thesis	VIII	300

Table 1. Characteristics of recent curriculum

As seen in Table 1, courses in Logopedics occupy approximately 1/3 of the total horarium of the curriculum, and most of them are offered during years 3 and 4. Bolded numbers include hours for extra curriculum activities. The total horarium of Bachelor's curriculum for initial training is 2400 hours according to the new requirements of SWU Academic Council.

Evaluation and Graduation - According to the requirements of the Bulgarian Higher Education Law, the basic form of students' evaluation is the written exam. Parallel types of current evaluation of student skills and knowledge are present too. Test, essay, paper observation, paper summary, internet exploring, keeping practice diary, etc., are the most popular types listed in the curriculum.

For graduation at Bachelor's degree are eligible state field practice exam and theoretical state exam or diploma thesis defence.

New academic activities

Starting in 2002 till now the Department hosted more than 15 visiting lecturers from US, EU and Australia. Some of them revisited SWU for both lecturing and research collaboration.

In addition 26 visits initiated by Socrates-Erasmus Program, Fulbright Program, and many other projects were carried out successfully. (Table 2)

Recently the Department of Logopedics is the only one at the university that holds so many mobility activities.

University, destination	Mobility in academic years	Students	Lecturers (number of visits)
Gent University, Belgium	2003/4, 2004/5, 2005/6, 2006/7, 2007/8, 2009/10	4	6
Ruhr University, Bochum, Germany	2004/5, 2005/6, 2006/7, 2007/8	3	4
Lublin University, Poland	2009/2010	-	1
KATHO College, Belgium	2006/7	1	-
Total:		8	11

Table 2. Mobility of students and lecturers via Socrates-Erasmus Program in EU.

Hearing disorders: a special case

Traditional approach

As observed from the middle of XX c., for decades in Bulgaria only teachers of the deaf were offering speech and language therapy to children with prelingual hearing disorders at special and mainstream settings. Speech and language pathologists were partially involved in these activities. The main goal of the treatment was to develop in children skills for oral communication, applying bi- or multi sensory techniques – lip reading, tactile and kinetic sensation, and residual hearing.

For years Bulgarian universities were offering to undergraduates 4 to 5 years courses of studies (later Bachelor and Master degree) for teachers of the deaf at departments of Special Education or similar. Many other professionals were qualified by attending courses for continuing education.

At the same time training of speech and language pathologists lacked of courses in hearing disorders that were present in the curricula of almost every speech and language department at European and US universities.

Broadening competencies

At South West University some changes in the training of undergraduates in SLP for treatment of patients with hearing disorders occurred in late 90s of the 20th century, when a parallel specialization in Deaf Studies was introduced. Courses as: Development of oral communication by deaf children, Language acquisition by deaf children, School integration of hearing impaired children, etc., were successfully introduced to the curriculum.

The horarium of some of the existing courses was increased. The idea for training undergraduates in SLP for treatment of children with hearing disorders along with patients with other types of communication disorders was developed later and introduced to the new curriculum in academic year 2004/5 .

Nowadays, comparing to the curriculum in the past undergraduates in SLP have more compulsory courses related to Hearing Disorders and are offered a range of elective ones in affiliated studies as: special education, alternative and augmentative communication, communicative strategies, inclusive education for children with communicative disorders, etc.

Conclusions

- At South West University the duration of training in Logopedics for students at Bachelor degree is 4 years (8 semesters), full-time enrolment, according to the most recent curriculum.
- The aim of the training is the graduates to be fluent in the specifics of speech and language development in normal and disordered communication – voice, language, fluency, articulation, hearing and multiple disorders, etc..
- The new curriculum was developed according to the standards of IALP and CPLOL, and was successfully introduced in academic year 2004/5.
- The continuing increase in numbers of children with hearing disorders and cochlear implant recipients (fine modern hearing technology) at inclusive education settings in Bulgaria is determining the need of new knowledge and skills to be offered to undergraduates and practitioners in the field of Speech and Language Pathology.

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