

COMPETENCY-BASED APPROACH as a NEW PARADIGM in the INTERNATIONAL and National EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

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Annotation

The article dwells on the current problems in the sphere of education from the point of view of its ability to 'produce' specialists that correspond to the demands of the modern informational society. The article presents the views of the leading educationalists, their theoretical and practical contribution into the process of modernization of the outdated educational system. The article also defines modernization of the educational system as the only logical development step of any viable system. The international educational community has been concerned about the problem, which reveals itself in numerous international conventions. Modernization of the knowledge-centered educational system must be carried out in the direction of competency-centered one, which is now the main priority of the world educational community.

Keywords: modernization, competency-based approach, educational system.

Introduction

The development of the educational system and especially its improvement is the direction of the national educational policy. The beginning of the third millennium is a very difficult transitional period for Ukraine, as old ideological and psychological stereotypes are being changed for a new system of ideas and beliefs [1, p.9]. Economic and social development of Ukraine is seen in the context of integration into the European Community. This Strategy of Integration, accepted on the national level, calls for reformation of many spheres. Among them education is a priority, as it influences not only the current situation, but also the short- and long-distant future. Integration in education means implementation of European norms and standards, which is aimed at 'development of European cultural identity and its integration into the general European intellectual-educational and scientific-technical environment' [3, p.4]. Thus, the revision of the education and technology content must be a priority direction in the development of the national educational system. It must be based on the experience of the leading educational systems of the European Community. To achieve this thorough analysis of the international educational experience is to be carried out.

1. The analysis of relevant research and publications

The conceptual basis of global changes in the society and education as its constituent part is analysed in the works of F.Fukuyama, Z.Brzeziński, G.Kissinger, I.Wallerstein, J.Bell, A.Toffler, V.Inozemtsev, Y.Masuda.

Various reformation aspects, topical problems of modernization of higher education in the context of integration of Ukraine into the European educational environment are examined in the works of V.Ashrushenko, V.Astakhova, V.Bekh, V.Viktorov, P.Gnatenko, D.Dzvinchuk, S.Klepka, K.Korsak, M.Lukashevich, O.Navrotsky, N.Nichkalo, N.Ognevyuk, I.Utyuzh, V.Shinkaruk and other national scientists.

Significant sources of information as for the tendencies of the international and national educational communities are documents of the Ministry of Education of Ukraine and authorized groups of ministries of other countries, as well as bills and laws concerning new content and technology of education [3], [8].

The aims of the article are to analyse the situation on the international and national level in the sphere of education, as well as to emphasize the importance to modernize the national educational system on the basis of international educational experience.

2. Results

A famous modern American philosopher Alvin Toffler, while analyzing the phenomenon of transformation of modern societies, underlines that ‘the world that is fast emerging from the clash of new values and technologies, new geopolitical relationships, new life-styles and modes of communication, demands wholly new ideas and analogies, classifications and concepts’ [5, p.14]. These changes and a general world tendency of the culture development, which lies in the transition from post-industrial to information society, demand new professionals – not just educated and active people, but also independent, confident, responsible, able to work in new technological and social conditions. That is why the role of education in providing the society with such specialists becomes of paramount importance. Another urgent question is the correspondence of the modern educational aims and needs of the society.

However, educators, psychologists, analysts and specialists in many other spheres underline the inadequacy of the educational results and the needs of the society. It is not surprising. It is difficult to imagine in what conditions of the national or international labour market the graduates will work tomorrow or in five years. Even more unstable is the situation with schoolchildren, who will have to work in the middle of the XXI century, when, according to O.Y. Lebedyev, even futurologists cannot describe the future, to say nothing of a school [7, p.3].

This situation needs a new level of understanding of the concept ‘education’ and its aims, because it is the main agent in formation of individuals’ mindsets. ‘A contemporary teacher must teach their students to be open, ready to overcome difficulties, feel confident in the new information society, always develop themselves and realize their potential’ [1, p.10]. ‘A well-developed individual must be the aim and content of the whole educational system. Instead of the priority of a state, in the educational environment a personality must be a priority... Orientation at a person, fundamental values, cardinal democratization of education are the basis for the third millennium education’, – underlines V.G. Kremen [6, p.240].

Thus, the necessity to modernize the current educational system is a must. However, the modernization is not only the necessity; it is also the only logical step, conditioned by the evolutionary essence of any viable system. According to O.Y. Lebedyev [7, p.4], the modernization of education, i.e. ‘the correspondence to demands and possibilities of a society’ has always been carried out in a varying degree. It has depended on the ability of an educational system to change. In its turn, this ability depends on the approach to formulate aims, choose the content and organization of the educational process as well as evaluate its results. At present, the formation of educational aims is of global and integrational character. They are formed not at the national but at the international level, with underlying concepts being declared at international meetings and taken for strategic guidelines of the international community. For example, at the Millennium Summit of the United Nations in 2000, one of the main components of the Millennium Development Goals was equal quality education, particularly primary [8].

In Europe 1999 became the beginning of the greatest educational project – the Bologna process. Its aim is to create a common educational environment for the countries of the European continent in order to develop mobility of the citizens. When Ukraine joined this process, it undertook the commitment to reform its educational system within the framework of Bologna process. This, along with the creating universal standards, has to solve several urgent problems: to eliminate the discrepancy between the education and the needs of the country, transform it into a resource of development at various levels (personal, social and state) and create the correspondence to the principles of the market economy.

In the analysis of the Russian educational system O.Y.Lebedyev [7, p.2] gives as an example the report of the International bank specialists. Alongside with the advantages of the Soviet educational system, it has to form a professional universalism – the ability to change spheres and methods of activity. The formula to achieve this is defined by the scientist in the following way: what is needed is the shift from a good specialist to a good employee. Of course, the notion of an employee covers the notion of a good specialist. However, what is also necessary is an employee who is able to make independent decisions, be self-motivated and open to innovations.

As for the situation in Ukraine, according to the Fund “Democratic Initiatives” named after I.Kucheriva, 70.5% of the respondents evaluate the quality of the higher education as low and medium. The results of the survey carried out by the Institute for Economics and Forecasting of the National Academy of Science of Ukraine show that more than 70% of future specialists acquire at universities a definite amount of knowledge. They can use it in standard situations, but they cannot solve some irregular tasks; 20% of the graduates at Ukrainian HEI are not confident within their scope of knowledge due to the absence of the desire to study, and only 10% of the graduates have acquired the skills of self-study and self-improvement [4].

In this connection, the conclusion of Lebedyev as for the reasons of the discrepancy between the education and present needs is of paramount importance. A traditional reaction of a school to the changes in the society has always been the so-called extensive development of school, i.e. the bigger amount of the educational material: the change of curricula or new subjects (Basics of military studies, Constitution of the USSR, IT etc.). However, the time resource has always been limited. The scientist sees another way out of this situation – the change of the interconnections and interrelations between the subjects. And at this point it is topical to define the new aims of education, which must reflect the desired outcome. The traditional approach presupposes that the more a student knows, the higher his education level is. But today the education is defined neither by the amount of knowledge nor by its polymathy. It is determined by the ability to solve the problems of various complexity levels on the basis of this knowledge. This means that a new approach is needed, the one that will not answer the question ‘what new material a student has learnt’, but ‘what a student has learnt to do’ [7, p.4].

It should be emphasized that 70% of graduates who are qualified but unable to perform in substandard situations is the result of the educational system that in this way proves its incompetence. It makes the educationalists to search the ways of reformation of the educational system and its standards. The old, knowledge-centered approach is insufficient. New standards presuppose the development of the so-called competences. According to many scientists, they reflect the readiness of a graduate to operate successfully in the labour environment. Information society suggests new roles. To manage them successfully the youth need the ability to operate new technologies and skills.

During the last decade the developed countries in Europe and around the world, such as Austria, Great Britain, Canada, New Zealand, Germany, France, Hungary, Lithuania, Moldova and several others have stated a comprehensive discussion at the international level,

concerning the ways of providing an individual with the necessary knowledge, skills and competences to ensure their harmonic interaction with the technological society, which is rapidly developing [2, p.6].

Analysing the experience of educational systems around the world, one of the ways to correlate the educational content and modern problems is to create the educational programmes based on the competence approach and mechanisms of its implementation. These issues are studied by such international organizations as UNESCO, United Nations Children's Fund, UNDP, Council of Europe, OECD, the International Department of Standards, etc.

According to specialists, only competences can ensure the possibility to feel confident in the modern world, constantly changing labour market and further self-development. The competence approach in the sphere of reformation of education and its aims has become a priority direction of the world educational environment, causing many discussions on every level.

Alongside with the traditional approaches (knowledge-centered, systemic, complex, individual-oriented, etc.), the modern pedagogic has new ones that have attracted attention of the pedagogical society comparatively recently. Among them are situational, contextual, polyparadigmatic, informational, ergonomic, etc. The competency-based approach belongs to the latter. While traditional approaches have had a profound theoretic development from the point of view of pedagogy, philosophy, psychology, new strategies had not had enough attention until quite recently. So, one can notice that they are still quite indefinite and undeveloped.

Ukrainian pedagogic community has not had enough experience of working with this approach, compared to the foreign colleagues: there are not enough books and articles on the theoretical and/or practical examination of this problem. A detailed and comprehensive examination of the notion of the competency-based education is necessary for the implementation of this approach into the practices of the national schooling.

Conclusion

The incorporation of our country into the international community demands the realization of the elements of the integral educational environment, where the content is characterized by the development on the basis of competences. This is conditioned by many reasons that are the subject of further research.

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