

REFORMATION OF THE PRESENT CURRICULUM OF THE PRE-UNIVERSITY EDUCATION ACCORDING TO THE COMPETENCE – BASED APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

Up to the present the efforts to raise the quality of the Albanian educational system have been focused mostly in the direction of the content of the school curriculum, delivery of knowledge through the standards, as well as in the direction of instructional plans and programs. These achievements have been insufficient for raising the quality of the contemporary education, a fact that was also noticed by the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA). 60% of students in Albania did not complete the second level of PISA.

The curriculum compilers 2014 using the best international research and practice data in educational field raised the problem of the preceding curriculum, which they characterized as a curriculum traditional in essence. The aim of this work is to argue the proposals of the curriculum compilers for "a curriculum which creates conditions and supports the competence development" through competence mastering, focusing on the students, needs and demands for education, learning in situations and knowledge building from the students, against a curriculum centered in instructional objectives and focused on the subject content acquirement.

Considering the fast rhythm of knowledge explosion in the society of technology and knowledge, the new developments in the work market, changes in conceptions in the learning process, the necessity of reformation of a curriculum "after the competence-based approach" will be argued.

UDC & KEYWORDS

■ UDC: 3-37 ■ CURRICULUM ■ REFORMATION ■ COMPETENCE
■ PRE-UNIVERSITY EDUCATION ■ LEARNING STANDARDS
■ LEARNING FIELDS ■ LEARNING IN SITUATIONS

INTRODUCTION

Educational policies in the curriculum field have triggered debates among the scholars and for this reason CEDEFOP organized two international symposiums, in 2009 and 2011, in which participated scientists from more than 20 European countries. The participants discussed about how the new programs should contribute in learning and serve the teachers. A tendency of the new subject curricula, different from the traditional ones in which the mission was mainly didactic, is that having the student as a reference point, they are projected based on learning results. They are based on the conviction that every student can be successful. The teacher specifies the objectives of the students' achievements on the basis of aims and standards, which are ranked as a logical chain in the curriculum. Effective teaching provides the conditions of learning for all the students and it is planned for the objectives of learning. Such curricula focused on learning results were implemented since two decades ago in countries such as Germany, France,

Finland and England. This tendency is also observed in the European Union.

The curricula focused on the learning results change from the traditional curricula because:

Learning connects knowledge and skills with individual and social-cultural skills; they focus on learning, unlike the traditional curricula which focus on the educational panel and knowledge that should be delivered; they focus on the needs of work market and the needs of employment; the learning process takes place in different environments, contexts and with different methods.

The learning results mean the wholeness of knowledge and skills for the execution, fulfillment and solution of the task-works and problems, as well as the wholeness of sufficient abilities in the use of knowledge, skills and individual abilities in situations of work, study or profession. The observance of learning assessment -oriented curricula, led to the implementation and use of new assessment methods and techniques in such a way that there may exist an intrinsic coherence between the learning results and assessment methods. The incorporation of the learning results in the curriculum makes learning become more and more involved in the assessment. The main role of the assessment is the improvement of learning. The way of the learning assessment may be determinative for the further process of learning. The information provided for the assessment helps the teachers to understand the students' weak and strong sides in the fulfillment of learning objectives of learning program according to the expected results. The objectives of the program are for all the students and they are obligatory for the program users. This means that all the students should be given the opportunity to learn what is described in the objectives. One objective is met with different levels of different students.

The curriculum of basic education levels 1- 9 in Albania (educational plan 2004-2007)

Curriculum integration

The curriculum of basic education levels 1-9 in Albania is not integrated based on the fields, but based on the subjects, whereas the curriculum of middle higher education is organized into learning fields. In the elementary education the curriculum is organized based on the subject. It contains altogether 11 subjects: Native language, Foreign language, Math, Natural sciences, History, Geography, Social education, Music education, Figurative education, Physic education and sports, Work education. In the middle lower education the curriculum is organized based on the subject. It contains altogether 14 subjects: Native language, Foreign language, Math, Physics, Science, Chemistry, Biology, History, Social education, Music education, Figurative education, Physic education and sports, Computer science, Technological training.

European curricula are inclined towards the development of lifelong learning and provide the skill – based integration.

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They aim at making the students able to learn independently and adapt themselves to the world of work, which is becoming more dynamic and more complex. The inter-curriculum skills are an important part of the aims and objectives of the education levels, subject programs, learning expectations, methodologies and learning assessment. The inter-curriculum skills are a very important factor of the curriculum integration. The present curriculum of basic education in Albania does not clearly determine the inter-curriculum skills that all the subjects should aim, because the curriculum is not led by the document of the curriculum frame. At a part of present subject programs of the 1st classes and 9th classes is aimed at the development of critical and creative thinking skills, but there are other skills such as that of communication, use of Math, solution of problem situations, working in groups, use of Information and Communication Technology (TIC) or social skills. There are some present skills in every subject or learning field, which have a special importance of training the students with the modern curricula. In the existing curriculum, especially in some subject programs and guides for the teachers, is written about these skills, but in fact they have not become the leitmotifs of the written curriculum and the curriculum implemented in school. We mention especially the skill of the use of TIC in all the subjects which already rely on computers, digital laptop and projector, and the internet. These skills will be an important part in the improved curriculum of the basic education.

Inter-curriculum subjects are part of all the national curricula. The curricula put greater or smaller stress on the inter-curriculum subjects according to the national priorities; in Albania inter-curriculum subjects comprise the environment, health, the human rights and globalism. These subjects, which are important in student training, cannot be incorporated into one single subject because of the broad nature and dimensions they have, therefore their treatment is enabled with the participation of many subject curricula. The present curriculum of the basic education has not clearly determined and does not determine the expected learning results for these permeating subjects. One of the improvements, which will be made to the new curriculum, is the identification of such subjects and their involvement in all the learning and subject fields.

Curriculum documents

The educational plan and subject programs are the two important national curriculum documents on the basis of which the present curriculum for classes from 1st to 9th functions. One of the important documents should have been the Curriculum Frame which has remained unapproved and, as a result, it has not become a part of the national basic education curriculum. Presently the curriculum of 1st to 9th classes functions without the basic regulatory and conceptual document which would provide the coherence along the whole system. The other important document should have been the learning standards. The learning standards for the structure 1-9 are not drawn. The subject standards approved for the 1-8 structure were not updated for the new structure. The present instructional plan for the basic education for the 1-9 classes has been approved by the Ministry of Education and Science in June 2004. In this plan are determined the subjects and their weekly classes for each class. This is the first educational plan which responds to the 5+4 structure of basic education on the basis of which was developed the whole curriculum of the structure 1-9. The present instructional plan has a great number of subjects. The instructional plan does not conform to the aim of the integration of subjects described

in the Education Strategy 2004-2015. The vision which the educational plan conducts is traditional because it is organized into subjects and not in learning fields, a thing which hampers the subject integration. The curve of integration is evidently interrupted from the 6th class increasing the number of subjects in the educational plan (the subject programs which are presently implemented in our schools, are officially drawn and approved by the Ministry of Education and Science in the period 2003-2007). A small part has undergone partial revises during the years. The format of the structures of the programs was reframed with rubrics such as: lines and objectives, methodology of implementation, development of critic and creative thinking, relation with other subjects and assessment.

The content of the programs is presented for the first time not with subjects but with lines and objectives which put the stress on learning results. The programs are flexible in the sense that from a program can be drawn different basic texts as well as other auxiliary texts and materials with executive character. The programs contain elements of curriculum development in the school level, through "Free classes." In every program about 15% of total classes are left at the teacher's disposal. The free classes can be used for the reinforcement of the subject, curriculum projects on the subject or between a few subjects, optional subjects, teaching modules, assessments of the achievements in school level. Elements of the involvement of TIC are found in some programs. The programs based on the present educational plan are overloaded and this comes mainly as a result of: they concentrate mostly on knowledge than on the processes and skills of learning; they have superposition within the same subject as well as with different subjects; the objectives and the content of programs do not always conform duly with the students' age and real skills. In programs, there are almost no elements of differentiated learning.

School Texts. The present condition

A part of the reform 2004-2007 is also the Alternative text; teachers choose the school textbook with which they will work in school. In this way, in the Albanian school use different textbooks in different schools. The first steps of the reform for alternative textbooks are taken in the year 2004 by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Albania, which had as one of the aims and objectives of the work at that time the improvement and change of the school textbooks. In the national strategy drawn by MASH for the period 2009-2013 is clearly and evidently determined one of the important issues of the educational process, school textbooks, where is emphasized: "The development of the school textbooks and the liberalization of their publication constitutes one of the most important projects undertaken by the Ministry of Education and Science during the year 2006 and onwards considered as a process of uninterrupted development."

The need for reviewing the present curriculum

The development and reformation of the curriculum of the post-university education in Albania are based on a number of documents which represent the educational practices and strategies for the future. Among these, the curriculum frame determines all the required parameters for guaranteeing the development and application of a qualitative and comprehensive curriculum reform. The curriculum reform sums up the arguments of need for curriculum changes, the principles on which the curriculum and its preparation rely, the general aims of the curriculum, curriculum fields and general objectives, inter-curriculum

directions, principles of effective teaching and learning as well as principles of assessment. The curriculum frame constitutes the fundamental document of the middle and basic education and the guide for drawing the sequential curriculum documents such as educational plan, learning and achievement standards, subject programs, students' texts and other supporting publications for the teacher and their application, for the development of the curriculum in school, determines the general learning results.

The assessments of the present basic education curriculum pointed out the need for reviewing the curriculum of the instructional plan as well as its application in school. It was also necessary to provide a coherent relation to the reformed high school curriculum. The purpose of reviewing has been that the curriculum of basic education should be in accord with students' physical, mental, social-emotional development and the individual learning characteristics. The Albanian educational system continues the process of consolidation of a structural reform, which has in its own essence the transition of basic education from 8 to 9 years, an extension of the elementary cycle to 5 years and a reduction of the middle education to 3 years. The subject programs: Albanian language, Math, and Natural sciences are built based on the philosophy of the Program of OECD for the International Learning Assessment (PISA), which in its essence has the education of students with life skills.

Changes in the educational system structuring are also accompanied by the need for the determination of learning standards, according to the new study cycles and for a curriculum reform after these standards. In a long-term strategic level, the reviewed learning standards create the opportunity of the assurance of educational system quality, of monitoring and assessment of its content, they also create the reference system for gradual changes in education. The standards are organized according to the content lines which are also reflected in subject programs. Organized in this way, the standards help the educational institutions to gauge the objectives in learning fields, providing the right direction of the organization of teaching and learning process.

In the curriculum of 2012 the subject programs have a more comfortable conceptual weight and they put the stress more on the development of skills compared with present programs. The weight is facilitated in order to chime with children's cognitive skills in different developmental stages. The content of all subjects is extended in a balanced, coherent way in every class. In order to help the learning process, all the subject programs have given more weight to the teaching classes for the elaboration of knowledge. In all the programs, the proportion is anticipated to be 60-70% of the new knowledge with 30-40% for the elaboration of knowledge. The subject programs are coherent in content along the classes and subjects, providing the support of new concepts upon those taught before and avoiding the unnecessary repetitions. The subject programs are organized according to the lines and underlines, the content of which is given by means of objectives. Every subject program is set on a common structure, with new rubrics, in function of the whole subject along all the classes that it is extended. The common program rubrics are: The Introduction, General subject goals, Demands for the application of the program, Teaching methodologies and Methods of the assessment of the achievements.

The instructional plan is conceived based on curriculum fields by initially drawing the learning standards

for the curriculum fields and later the learning standards for the subjects. The whole content of the instructional plan is a result of the conception from the field to the subject instead of the conception of the special subject in the field. The instructional plan provides continuity with the curriculum of middle school.

Curriculum models

The organization of the curriculum content in Albania is conceived by combining the needs for change of the Albanian curriculum system with those of the EU curriculum systems. There are three known curriculum models: Subject-concentrated models, characterizes the traditional curriculum. The stress is put on the content, learning is passive; The student-concentrated model. It demands great skills and competencies from the teacher in the individual work with the student as well as suitable instructional materials as far as concerning the content and educational didactics; The model concentrated on life problems. We often seek for a teacher with deep acknowledgement of the content and skills in the solution of the problems. Most of the contemporary experiences are related to the fused model, by means of which, in order to provide the best, is made the fusion of all the models, at the extent that it is almost impossible to determine what kind of curriculum model is specifically used. The selected model of the organization of the basic education curriculum in Albania is the fused model within which will be found spaces that will take in consideration the demands of knowledge contents, the students' demands, their skills and interests, the social problems and the preparation of the students for their solution. The model of the organization of the curriculum, unlike the previous one, gives a new conception of organization which involves:

- The broad curriculum fields. The broad curriculum fields are a variant of the subject-concentrated model, which will avoid the fragmentation of curriculum contents caused by the up to now conception of the separated subjects as it allows the creation and involvement in the curriculum of the hybrid kinds of contents and it gives the opportunity to be fused with the student-concentrated models. This model enables the students to distinguish the relations between the different aspects of the curriculum content as well as it allows the understanding of the whole. Although the boundaries of the subjects will be preserved, the inter-subject material will increase, knowledge will no more be fragmented, but multidisciplinary and multidimensional, and the overweight of learning will attempt normalization.
- Inter-curriculum topics. On the basis of the inter-curriculum topics stands the problem-concentrated model. The identification of inter-curriculum topics as, for example, environmental issues, human rights issues, etc., and their objectification in all the learning fields and subjects is one of the important improvements which will be made to the curriculum of basic education.
- Elective subjects. They belong to the student – concentrated model. In the instructional plan is anticipated a small number of classes especially for the students' choices, which are mainly used in a second foreign language. Furthermore, through the so called "free classes" about 10% of the instructional classes are used by the teacher for curriculum projects which are also inter-subject and that, in the best cases, their topics will be selected in cooperation with the students according to their interests.

A broad conception of the competence – based curriculum

Following the previous educational experience, the Curriculum Frame of the Pre-University Education 2014 puts forward the demands for the reformatting of a system which aims at mastering competences versus mastering content; aims at creating conditions and opportunities that the students might build and develop knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that are in demand in a democratic society; to be developed in independently and comprehensively; to contribute in the construction and welfare of the individual and that of the Albanian society and to face the challenges of life constructively. The process of education will enable every student mastering of the key competencies necessary for life and work. These changes put forward the necessity of mastering the competencies which enable the individuals to manage the new changes and situations. In accordance with the aims of the pre-university education, these competencies are: Communication and expression competence; Thinking competence; Learning for learning competence; Life, undertaking and environment competence; Personal competence; Civil competence; Digital competence;

The curriculum, in a broad sense, is a dynamic harmonization of the planned curriculum which is being treated in the official written documents, the applied curriculum and the acquired curriculum. The conceptualized curriculum involves the instructional contents, learning environment, teaching methods, learning sources, assessment practices and the multiple ways of interaction between students, teachers and community. This curriculum provides the necessary conditions for the students to build new knowledge and competencies, attitudes and values, applicable in different, educational or vital situations and contexts. The determination of key competences, expressed through the learning results which should be achieved by all students in different periods of education, as well as the determination of the criteria for the assessment of the achievements of the results provide the conditions for equal opportunities for education for all the students, for precise assessment of the education quality which is offered in local or national level, for right assessment of the level of the students' achievements etc.

The educational plan is conceptualized based on curriculum fields, but initially drawing the learning standards for the curriculum fields and later the learning standards for the subjects. The whole content of the educational plan is a result of the conception from the field to the subject instead of the conception of a special subject in the field. The educational plan provides continuity with the college curricula by being organized in curriculum fields: the learning fields constitute the basis of the organization of the instructional-educative process in school, for every educational level and the relevant steps of the curriculum. Learning fields: Languages and communications, Mathematics, Natural Sciences, Society and the Environment, Art, Physical Education, Sports and Health, Technology, and TIC. Every single field has its own learning results which belong to the development of key competences. The learning fields involve one or more subjects or modules. Subjects and modules are based on the learning results determined for every field.

Conclusion

The pre-university educational system relies on the education's positive tradition, it functions in accordance with the Constitution of the Republic of

Albania and the respective legislation in power, as well as it is applied in respect of the common values of the contemporary educational systems, which have in their essence competence-based learning which prepares the young people to face the challenges of knowledge society, which is a result of the educational policies, which culminated with the International Symposium of (CEDEFOP, 2011).

The Albanian educational system has come under a whole contemporary reform after the year 2000, the educational curriculum reform 2004-2007 constitutes a positive educational experience on which the further educational reformation relied. Some of the positive elements of this reform, despite the weaknesses and the critics that it was exposed to, can be mentioned: curriculum integration, conception of learning plan in learning fields, lifelong learning, critical thinking, structuring of basic education 1 – 9, Alternative text, etc., but in essence the curriculum of this period could not overcome the emphasis on giving knowledge than the building knowledge and competences.

In strategic and long-term level, the reviewed learning standards create the opportunity of the provision of educational system quality, of monitoring and evaluating its content, and they also create the reference system for gradual changes in education. Organized in this way, the standards help the institutions of education to gauge the objectives in learning fields, providing the right direction of organization of teaching and learning process.

According to Karameta, 2013 the initiative of the Ministry of Education and Science was that the new curriculum would be directed from the Anglo-Saxon model. In fact, after the publication of the curriculum package it does not agree with this model, because in essence it is a recycling of the present curriculum, the traditional way of conception impedes also the skills that apply it. The curriculum in Albania is also distinguished for centralized decision making in central level and for the fact that the teachers are offered ready educational services such as the instructional program, tests, method and educational tools.

Below I will list some of the deficiencies of the curriculum package 2012 in Albania, according to Karameta, who, through his article in the "Shqip" newspaper, offers his points of view and meanwhile raises an educational debate before the beginning of the application of the new curriculum package for the year 2014-2015.

- The challenges offered by the curriculum are related with two main aspects: Firstly, the curriculum should be conceived of a system which treats the societal needs for education and training, fulfilling the needs of the students. Secondly, the regulatory cadre of the educational institutions, which create the due conditions for learning, is oriented by the curriculum. Facing these challenges depends not less on the way as how the proportions are treated such as: socio-constructivism against behaviorism; the competence – based approach against pedagogy with objectives; action in situations against the knowledge delivery. The full package of the curriculum does not offer any innovation as far as concerning these aspects; on the contrary it recycles the traditional meanings and practices. Distinctions between the existing package and the proposed one are superficial and circumferential. Both of them refer the old fashioned objectivist theories: behaviorism and cognitivism. The subject programs stress again the subject knowledge; they offer students' experiences and activities simply as contexts for knowledge

concretization, at a time when the modern pedagogy considers them as a starting – point for the process of knowledge and competence building and at a time when the new law of education demands strictly that the curriculum should be drawn and applied based on the essential competencies of students.

- The same way, the package does not reflect the new meanings, which provide a new rapport among educational contents, not only pertaining to school subjects, and learning results. This rapport is presented in the new National Curriculum of England, which will be applied in 2014. In these contexts, the ministerial declaration that the curriculum package supports an educational system which has the students in its center is simply rhetoric.
- On the other hand, for the package of Ministry of Education and Science (MASH) to be called simply “the planned curriculum in central level” should be reciprocated and completed, at least with two other key documents: the manual for the application of new programs and orientations, which materialize the learning and evaluation policies and modalities. These documents help the teachers and the program or text compilers to understand: The epistemological reference which orientates the learning process such as: the student or the teacher in the center; knowledge building or delivery; the student’s action in situations or passive acquirement of information; Modalities of the educational program structuring: organization with objectives; with competences; with projects etcetera; Techniques of the didactic package respective redaction: printed or digitized student texts and teacher manuals.

Conceived this way, the planned curriculum is transformed into:

- the “instrument” which provides the coherence of the educational system components, such as: educational programs, texts and instructional tools, linguistic regime and the work weight; the school curriculum and normative provisions; the administrative action plan which enables the application of the curriculum instructions etc.;
- including more than what concerns the package compilers: knowledge codification in educational programs, writings of objectives and learning activities. Placed in systemic context, the curriculum determines also the curriculum instructions which did not belong only to an educational program but which cover all the programs. Such is, for instance, the essential instruction in the strategies and techniques of building of key competencies in basic education. Furthermore, also the lifelong learning competence, determined in the educational law (article 13/d), is not mentioned either, in the frame, or in the educational programs; also the third key component of the curriculum, inter-curriculum topic it is not also elaborated in the subject programs nor on the learning standards.

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