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COMPETENCY-BASED APPROACH TO EDUCATION IN INTERNATIONAL DOCUMENTS AND THEORETICAL RESEARCHES OF EDUCATORS IN GREAT BRITAIN

Abstract

Modern educators consider that the acquiring of important for life competencies can give an individual the opportunities to orient in a modern society, informational space, changing development of labour and post-graduation education. Competency-based approach became a new conceptual orientation of schools in foreign countries and causes a number of discussions in international and national levels of different countries.

Introduction

Significant developments in this direction have been made since 80's by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development which experts collect and analyze data on education in different countries from the standpoint of efficiency and effectiveness, and systematically seek to implement competency in the essence of education. The OECD developments are based on several provisions that are now fundamental to most relevant studies being performed by other institutions, organizations and professionals working in this sphere. Below are represented the main ones:

- Formation of competencies is a result of interaction of many different factors;
- Modern life demands from an individual acquiring a set of skills called key competencies;
- Choice of the most important (key) competencies should be made at a fundamental level taking into account current perception of society, an individual and interaction between them;
- An impact of cultural and other contexts of a society and a nation should be taken into account;
- Selection and identification of key competencies is influenced by subjective factors related to an individual such as age, sex, social status, etc.;
- Selection and identification of key competencies requires a broad discussion among different specialists and representatives of various social groups.

The selection, identification and further development of key competencies and identification of the development indicators is possible only under compliance with the above conditions [2, p. 10].

Discussion

According to the OECD definition, the concept of key competencies is useful to apply only to those competencies that enable an individual to participate effectively in many social spheres and contribute to improving the quality of society and personal success. Therefore, they are interpreted as a main set of very general

concepts being detailed in knowledge, abilities, skills, values and attitudes by training sectors and spheres of students` life.

Within the category 'autonomous action', the key ideas are the development of an individual and his/her autonomy in terms of making choice and acting in a given context. Therefore, the key competencies are as follows:

- the ability to protect and take care of the responsibilities, rights, interests and needs of other individuals, that presumes the ability to make a choice from the standpoint of a citizen, family member, worker, consumer, etc.;
- the ability to make and implement plans and individual projects allows you to define and substantiate the objectives considered the reason for being and correlate them with your own values;
- the ability to act in a large/broad context means that an individual is quite aware of how the different systems work, of his/her own position within them, of the possible consequences of their actions, and takes into account many factors in his/her while making a choice of actions [1].

Let's follow the evolution of approaches to key competencies in the emerging common European educational space having analyzed the milestone documents and acts: White Paper on Education and Training (European Commission, 1996), A Memorandum on Lifelong Learning (European Commission, 2000), e-Europe 2005: An information society for all, Commission's Action Plan for Skills and Mobility (European Commission, 2002), Key Competencies: A Developing concept in General Compulsory Education (European Network of Information and Documentation, 2002), etc.

The important document which outlined European approaches to the definition of basic skills in the context of the new strategic goals of social development was the Materials of the Lisbon Summit of the European Council (2000). By providing the substantiation to the ability to learn throughout life, the Lisbon summit identified the following groups of basic skills:

- IT skills;
- Foreign languages;
- Technological culture;
- Entrepreneurship;
- Interpersonal and social competencies;
- Learning skills;
- General culture [3].

At the beginning of the XXI century the European Educational Information And Documentation Network (EURIDICE) made public a base document of the European Commission - Key Competencies: A Developing Concept in General Compulsory Education [7]. Outlining the new goals of education for the period up to 2010, this document 'aggregates' or integrates approaches to key competencies of the European Union. Let us provide details of the materials used in Great Britain (England, Wales and Northern Ireland) [4].

The emphasis was made on the ability of each individual to use his/her skills in the broad context of different activities, constantly making decisions about when and what skills should apply. Therefore, during the update of the National Curriculum of School Education - 1995 in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, the binding (normative) component was significantly reduced and schools were given

rights to allocate more curriculum time for developing students in three basic skills of three areas:

- Communications,
- Calculation,
- Information and communications (IT) technologies [3].

Simultaneously, the qualification requirements for 16-19 year-old citizens of the country were reviewed in the same manner and in September 2000 the basic skills have started being widely implemented in the English context. However, the study found that the process did not involve the Curriculum of Northern Ireland - the following mandatory components (basic skills) were designated for 14-16 year-old students (fourth stage) only at the beginning of the XXI century:

- The ability to operate under changing conditions showing flexibility in behavior;
- Personal-oriented, social education and basics of healthcare;
- Citizenship;
- Work efficiency.

It should be mentioned that the term 'basic skills' in the UK is also widely used in the field of adult education in regards to language and numerical literacy. In this context, the Basic Skills Agency defines them as 'the ability to read, write and speak English (Welsh), use mathematics at the level of necessary production functions and in a society as a whole' [5].

Concerning the compulsory school education, the selection and justification of key competencies in the UK took place much later, mostly in recent years. From 2000-2001 the Modern National Curriculum for compulsory school education in England has been inclusive of the requirements to six areas of skills identified as basic skills because they help students improve their learning and self-presentation in education, work, and life. The key areas have been identified the following ones:

- Communication;
- Calculation skills;
- Informational technologies (IT);
- Cooperation with other individual/team work;
- Improvement of personal learning and its representation;
- Amelioration and settlement of problems [4].

The first three key areas were provided top priority status and public support (the nation-wide support strategies in compulsory education league launched), namely:

- The National Literacy Strategy (NLS) aimed at the development of communicative skills in elementary school pupils.
- The National Numeracy Strategy (NNS) aimed at the development of computational skills in elementary school pupils.
- The National Information and Communications Technologies Strategy which should be actualized in learning the English literature, mathematics, and natural sciences in line with other national strategies (verbal and numerical literacy) [8].

The 'concept of numerical literacy' is defined as "key vital skill without which children will feel themselves inferior throughout their lifetime".

The ‘competency in information and communication technologies’ is far beyond gaining basic skills and technologies by students. It presumes development of the aptitude for imaginative and flexible use of technology, as well as for the identification and application of appropriate knowledge, skills and comprehensions [7].

In addition to the above mentioned basic skills, the National Curriculum also involves the development of wide range of skills in elementary school pupils, such as the ability to think (information processing skills, the ability to argue/debate, research skills, ability to think creatively, the ability to evaluate, etc.), as well as financial ability, entrepreneurial skills, and professional training.

All this key areas of skills are given in details in the National Curriculum for compulsory education in Great Britain. In addition, the English National Curriculum contains a note specifying the manner in which basic skills should be included in school curricula and programs. Let’s analyze the identification of key areas of skills of the National Curriculum.

The ‘communication’ is defined in the document as a key skill that involves the ability to speak, listen, read and write. The ability to speak and listen requires the ability to communicate effectively in various situations, including effective participation in group discussions. The ability to read and write is the ability to read fluently literary and other texts, critically interpret the reads, write quickly, and do critical analysis of various texts including own and outsider ones [6].

The ability to develop this crucial skill is greatly attributable to the school subject ‘English language’ and in the use of language in the study of other subjects.

‘Numerical skill’ means key skill of using numbers inclusive of the development of ability for mental calculation and the ability to apply it in different contexts, understanding and use of mathematical language related to numbers and verbal score for resolving complex problems and explaining their reasons, the ability to use calculation skills, understanding of arithmetic operations and the use of mathematics for learning of other subjects of the National Curriculum, as well as in real-life situations.

The opportunities for developing this key skill are concentrated mainly in the school subject ‘mathematics’.

The ‘Information Technologies’ is the key skill inclusive of the ability to use a set of information sources and tools to find, analyze, interpret, evaluate and use a variety of information, the ability to critical judgments and making choice of IT technologies in order to obtain maximum results in evaluation of information, solving problems, or in the professional activities.

The ability to use information resources involves research skills, ability to make decisions, the ability of creative thinking, and the ability to do a review, modify and evaluate work with IT technologies [9].

The opportunities for developing this key skill are concentrated mostly in the subject "information technology", and in the use of IT technologies "throughout the complete curriculum".

The ‘Cooperation with other individuals’: the key skill of cooperation with other individuals/team work is the ability to cooperate during the discussion in a small group and in the class as a whole. Cooperating with other individuals the students

develop social skills, their awareness and comprehension of the needs of other people.

All school subjects are inclusive of the opportunities for cooperation and efficient collaboration of students in formal and informal settings, as well as for high appreciating the experience of others and considering what they think, say, and do.

“Improving own learning and behavior”: the key ability to attract students to reflecting and critical assessment of their work (the studied material), the ways to improve training and presentation of the results. Students should be able to identify learning objectives, to reflect on the process and move forward in learning, to analyze failures and problems in learning, and to plan ways to improve learning [6].

Conclusion

The analysis shows that the social competency holds the prominent position among the list of key/core competencies of elementary school pupils in Great Britain. In the English context it has been defined as "cooperation with other individuals/team work" and "communication". The fact that the communication skill is defined in the UK as a first step (stage) in implementation of key competencies in the learning process of elementary school, clearly shows the hierarchy of priorities in this area.

At the end of XX - beginning of XXI century the ‘problem of literacy’ acquired a new meaning, a new interpretation, and new global resolution strategies. In modern conditions, the international educational society views public literacy ‘in close connection to proliferation of civil rights, democracy and mutual understanding, as well as cultural development of an individual and community as a whole’ [5, p. 5-7].

Thus, the ideas, concepts and specific scientific statements regarding the competency-based approach to education, including the elementary school, is a powerful source of influence on teaching practice and pedagogic thought in the UK. They are an organic part of the theoretical basis for new approaches to pedagogic education, where social-cultural training of future educators gains momentum and becomes a top priority issue.

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