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SOCIETAL TRENDS AND CHALLENGES FOR THE TRANSFORMATION OF EDUCATION IN A LEARNING SOCIETY

Global trends in education and their impact on the development of the education in the Republic of Moldova

The analysis of the education system development, the tracking of the global trends of development of theoretical and applied methods of learning, and the identification of the prospects for streamlining the learning process represent the current topics of great interest to researchers in the domain of education sciences, including those from the Republic of Moldova. Also, it is well known that the economic globalization and social dynamics of the last two decades have brought to the contemporary world a series of challenges, to which the field of education cannot remain indifferent.

This new economic and social context has produced profound changes on school-related learning acquisitions and goals, so, respectively, the projection of the education has changed. The functional type of culture transitioned from the academic culture. Hence, exists the great debate on the basic competences needed by the individual in today's society and the orientation of education systems towards the development of key competences, starting with the basic education itself, which is meant to ensure an efficient life and a functioning society.

In this sense, the four pillars of the development of education systems, focused on a reconceptualization of the concept of learning: *learning to know/be aware, learning to do, learning to work with others* and *learning to be*, (highlighted

by J. Delors in 2000), to which Schaeffer and his collaborators added another - *learning to transform yourself and change society*, were understood and accepted as such by the members of the pedagogical scientific community. The year 2000 marked not only the beginning of a new millennium, but also the beginning of the great changes of profound reform of the education systems in order to connect them to the requirements of the information society based on knowledge.

Pedagogical research in Moldova was fully committed towards the adoption of these new strategic directions of development of local education and the timing with reform measures undertaken at a European level. The research focused on the structure of running the educational process, the main subsystem of it, by analysing the state of affairs and the conditions for carrying out the reforms anticipated until 2000, highlighting the problems and crises in the system, identifying ways and areas of continuous education reform (curriculum, teacher training, evaluation of school results, etc.).

During the transition to *the knowledge society*, it was found that education was perceived as a mechanism for changing society, and lifelong learning - an effective way of knowing and solving the problems the society is facing. Meanwhile, the so-called *new education* - education for change and development, education related to the environment, education for the mass-media, intercultural education, etc., which emerged and developed during this period, was considered a response of the education systems to the *challenges of the contemporary world*.

All these reorientations, strategies of change and problems of the contemporary world overlapped, during the transition to the information society, with the actions of reform of education systems. In the opinion of researcher L. Ciolan these configured "the emergence of a new way of producing knowledge" [1, p. 34], generally, and of educational knowledge, in particular, which needs a *reconfiguration* of the learning process from a more functional-pragmatic perspective, more socially engaged and more focused on the student's instructional needs and problem-solving skills.

In this new social, economic and cultural context, education systems must respond to changes and new challenges related to these changes, emphasizes L. Ciolan, due to that the very concept of *learning* has acquired new meanings [1, p. 70]. The natural tendency of education systems, including that of the Republic of Moldova, is to resort to an even more technical approach to the teaching process, in which the concept of *competence* has become a basic pedagogical tool that can serve in the process of better rationalization of the teaching, learning and evaluation process.

European Parliament recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning (2006) has pointed out the following idea: while globalization continues to confront the European Union with new challenges, each citizen will need a record of key competences, which will ensure the citizen's flexible adaptation to a rapidly changing and deeply interconnected world. This document presented a first list of key competencies from which the general trend of different countries to build a curriculum centred on developing key competences originated.

In the same year, education in Moldova took this pragmatic training approach—training on the basis of competences, including the eight key competences established in the Education Code at a European level as the purpose of general education (Moldova has 9 key competences) as being indispensable for any individual who lives in the 21st century. Thus, emphasizing the new educational goals and the need to rethink the educational process from the same perspective, in other words, giving priority to meaningful and functional learning to the detriment of learning for the sake of learning.

Worth noting is that the change of education's purposes did not lead to a rethinking of the whole process of education from the perspective of key-competences. Starting with the reform of the educational plan, the development of the school curriculum and the programmes aimed at the initial and continuous training of the teachers, all these components further remain to be focused on the mono-disciplinary teaching–learning–assessment. This created a contradictory situation that continues to this day, representing the biggest problem in the planning and implementing the general education. However, the development of key competences may require the removal of the school teaching-learning from mono-disciplinary and placing it in an inter- and transdisciplinary context.

For the technical vocational education in the Republic of Moldova, the biggest challenges to face today are: underdeveloped infrastructure of educational institutions for a proper educational approach, limited diversity of specialties, directly proportional to the qualifications of education workers and limited opportunities for retraining them, poor student's academic performance, insufficient training of teachers and their digital illiteracy, lack of attractiveness of this level of training - ISCED 4, etc. All this happens in the time when the European Centre for the Development of Technical Vocational Education's review shows that the proportion of EU jobs requiring tertiary skills will increase from 29% in 2010 to 34% in 2020, while the proportion of jobs requiring a low level of skills will decrease from 23% to 18% in the same time frame.

From global trends to local challenges in achieving key-competences

Although created inconsistent and incoherent, Republic of Moldova continued developing the national curriculum in terms of key-competences (cross-cutting). Today those purposes are found in the Reference framework of the National Curriculum (2018), and in the introductions to the curricula developed on its basis for every subject. Worth mentioning is that the implementation of key-competences in educational practice is still not achieved, since the operationalization of these competences through examples of learning tasks in textbooks and methodological guides is missing completely. Moreover, the curricula and the textbooks applied to the class concern only the achievement of the competencies specific to the school subjects.

At the same time, under the spur of the new approach, education systems in the EU have established an infrastructure of pedagogical centres for obtaining key-competences (in reading and writing, in mathematics and science, etc.). The education systems also intensified their efforts towards improving digital literacy in the field of mass-media. Also, they introduced national standardized tests and made other reform measures. Despite this, the level of acquisition of key-competences is still low: approximatively 20% of adolescents aged 15 years in Europe did not acquire basic competences, and this ratio remained stable since 2009.

For comparison, due to the inconsistencies in the education reform, the Republic of Moldova records approximately double the percentage of students (45.8%) who do not achieve the basic competences to read in PISA 2015 (Program for International Student Assessment) [5], and in PISA 2018, 57% of pupils did not achieve at least level 2 in reading (OECD average: 77%), which means that 43% do not reach at least the core 2 competences to read (Moldova-Country Note-PISA 2018 Results). About 1% of Moldovan students were the best in reading, which means that they reached level 5 or 6 in the PISA 2018 reading test (OECD average: 9%). Similarly, approximately 50% of Moldovan students reached level 2 or higher in mathematics (OECD average: 76%). In Moldova, 2% of the students have reached level 5 or higher in mathematics (OECD average: 11%).

European framework for cooperation in education and training of the European Union Commission (the ET 2020) established four common objectives in education and training for implementation in Europe by 2020. Among these four objectives is the improvement of learning; one of the reference objectives

is the proportion of 15-year-olds who do not have sufficient reading, math and science skills should be below 15%.

In these conditions, pedagogical research from the Republic of Moldova, permanently engaged in the development and reform process of the national curriculum, analyses the effects of the implemented reforms, interprets and reports them to the new trends of change and transformation in education. In order to grasp some new perspectives of approaching learning so that it corresponds to the requirements of modern society, the research is also in the finding and identification process of reconfiguration methods of the learning process, already considered a mechanism for development of individual entities, organizational and social.

Therefore, at the end of 2012, the European Commission adopted the latest strategy in the field of education: Rethinking education supposes investing in competences for better socio-economic outcomes, drawing attention to the need to support teachers with unprecedented challenges. Probably, nowadays, the education is required to tend to precede the level of economic development. It seems, therefore, that the school has entered the entrepreneurial era with everything that comes out from here.

Based on the weak performances, the Republic of Moldova established as an indicator the gradually increasing student's achievements in PISA from 78% to 93% of the OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) average in 2020. Curriculum policies of the education system in the Republic of Moldova are oriented towards key-competences development defined through the Strategy "Education -2020". Thus, reaching the basic level of competences in reading, mathematics and science becomes an indicator of progress in education and of the achievement of its goals.

It should be mentioned, reaching a higher level of key competences is a strategic objective also for other educational systems in Europe such as Romania or Bulgaria. National Strategy for Lifelong Learning for the period 2014-2020 of Bulgaria also established, as an indicator of progress, the reduction of the number of 15-year-old students with poor results at reading- from 39.4% in 2012 to 30% in 2020, mathematics – from 43.8% in 2012 to 35% in 2019, science - from 36.9% in 2012 to 30% in 2020.

Therefore, in another European document – Commission's Notice to the European Parliament, Council, European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions – are mentioned the directions which EU members must develop to meet the challenges of the knowledge society, i.e. to introduce

new systemic reforms to strengthen early detection and intervention in case of learning difficulties and to replace repetition or grouping according to the skills while providing more support for learning.

So, the main challenge of the existing systems of education lies in rethinking learning, reorganizing education and training and aligning them for achieving key competences by all the students. In order to achieve this goal, learning should go beyond school subjects and integrated knowledge must turn into a foundation of the educational process, so that all the students acquire basic competences needed today, such as: communication in the mother tongue, communication in 1-2 foreign languages, basic competences in the field of mathematics and natural sciences, technological and digital literacy, etc.

At the same time, a higher quality of teaching must be ensured, a crucial precondition, which required an effective basic qualification and a continuous qualification, of teachers and educators. Another important condition is the transformation of the profession of a pedagogue and educator into an attractive career choice by all convenient means and tools. The governance of educational institutions and lifelong learning need to be improved in order to develop efficient and flexible quality assurance systems. It is essential to modernize the funding system as a tool to ensure the efficiency of primary and continuing education and vocational training through shared and balanced accountability between government, employers and pupils/students.

Premises for reconfiguring the learning process

Research made on the efficiency of the learning process, in particular, those made by OECD through international tests (PISA, PIRLS, etc.), have shown that the traditional way in which pupils/students are taught today in schools and universities how to learn proved to be inefficient and counterproductive. Therefore, a new change was needed - the transition from the logic of completeness (of objectives) to a logic of relevance and pertinence (of competences). Skills formed everywhere today in schools must be reviewed, as well as and the ways in which students are expected to learn. And where the content of the curriculum changes, the way it is taught must change accordingly. Learning should be rethought, refocused on problems, including their historical and epistemological context.

Also, the perception of learning changes, the very concept of learning has grown and expanded during all the lifetime. Lifelong learning becomes the

new strategy of education, respectively, experiences of formal and informal learning began to be recognized. Learning centred on the development of competencies has emerged as one of the most significant movements in the educational theory and practice of their last 20 years, and the competence learning how to learn is considered today the most important indicator of the efficiency of education.

At end of the year 2019, the EU Commission published an analysis of EPSC (European Political Strategy Centre) on 10 trends transforming education as we know it, according to which the education is further changing and developing fast, being dependent more than ever on social and economic contexts of the contemporary society. The trends are orienting towards personalization and a continuity of learning, learning how to learn becomes the most important ability to form nowadays. Here are 7 of the 10 global trends in education identified in this analysis and which refer specifically to the possibilities of development and transformation of the field until its expansion into a learning society:

1. *The sooner, the better* – the education received in early childhood often shapes the perspectives of life.
2. *Graduating from school is not the end of learning* – learning how to learn is the most important skill of them all.
3. *Digitalization is the new literacy* – digital skills are becoming basic education and young people are at an advantage.
4. *People are not the only learning ones* – people will compete more and more with machines in developing new ideas.
5. *From standardization to customization* – from mass education in the industrial age to individualized, digitally activated learning pathways.
6. *From silos to a mixture* - to interdisciplinary learning, based on technology.
7. *Many new fish in the lake of education* – the provision of formal education is complemented by new entrepreneurial projects.

We believe that any national strategy for developing education or reconfiguring the educational system and process, whether at school or university level, must take into account these directions and trends if it is really wanted to reform the system and ensure quality education. At the same time, the transformation of the current society into a learning society could be considered the basic strategic direction in the projection and implementation of the educational action of training-development of the human personality in the information society based on knowledge.

Meanwhile, in the context of the information society, based on knowledge, a number of new concepts of education have been shaping, which require development and interpretation - the globalization of learning, learning focused on the learner, learning organizations, learning offers, learning communities, learning facilitators and even a learning society. This concept designates an educated society, committed to active and responsible citizenship, liberal democracy and equal opportunities. According to [1, p. 78] a learning society is everything the education could dream of, which sustains the idea that when learning occurs, it is integrated into all aspects of life and integrates, in return, all sides of the human being.

Therefore, the new educational paradigm - the approach to competence - based on training has established itself not only in the European countries, but also in the Republic of Moldova as the strongest trend in the development of education and aimed at truly focusing on the teaching-learning - assessment process, on the development of key competencies, which are believed to be needed by all people in order to develop successfully in today's society. Respectively, lifelong learning has become the basic principle of the development of contemporary societies, and the key competence system established at European level today represents the learning target or the basic acquisitions with which all students must be endowed until the end of compulsory schooling.

In this new curricular paradigm, at the level of an educational system and process in the Republic of Moldova the new educational model for personality formation in the knowledge society was outlined, the so-called new educations were exploited as innovative elements in the activity of integral personality formation-development [3]. Also, the competence of learning how to learn is in the list of objectives/key competences of the national curriculum.

However, for the general education in the Republic of Moldova (probably for other countries as well) the big problem today is not so much the acquisition of key competencies, but, especially, the disagreement between the tradition of mono-disciplinary teaching-learning in the classroom and the education's tendency to innovate, due to which training based on key competences requires a transdisciplinary approach to learning. This requires rethinking or even reversing patterns in disciplinary training and establishing, through an integrated curriculum, inter- and transdisciplinary learning capable of truly leading to the development of key competencies.

Conclusion

In this article we have tried to capture, in broad lines, the directions in which the phenomenon of globalization influences education, as well as the main challenges to which educational systems must respond in this context. We consider that any national strategy for the development of education or for the reconfiguration of the educational system and process, whether at school or university level, must take into account these directions and trends, if we really want to reform the system and ensure quality education. At a strategic level, acquisition of key competences through basic education should be considered the main direction towards developing new documents of educational policy in terms of projecting and implementing the educational action of forming-training of the human personality in the information society, based on knowledge.

In the knowledge society, learning not only as a principle guiding, but rather as a process and product, acquired new meanings, the very perception of the concept of learning has changed a lot, so that traditional teaching and learning stops responding to contemporary society's demands. Learning organization on the basis of classical subjects is considered insufficient in such a dynamic and complex world in which learning increasingly becomes, a social process centred on the development of competences able to assure the young with premises as solid as possible for personal, social and professional success.

In terms of the trends outlined above, what is required today from education's planners, including from the pedagogical research in the Republic of Moldova, is a new vision of learning, theoretically and methodologically based, on which they should start a new process of development of the national curriculum. This time at its very core, i.e. the reformation of the Educational Curriculum Framework Timetable, with emphasis on the integration of content areas and innovation learning process so that it becomes more relevant and provides new solutions to challenges of the contemporary world.

Abstract: The objective of this article is to highlight the trends and the challenges as regards the development of education and training in the context of an information-based society, grounded on knowledge; trends which the authors believe are highly topical for pedagogical theory and practice in the Republic of Moldova. These trends may serve as a basis for reconfiguring the current educational process with a view to enhance its alignment to the individual and social requirements of development in the context of a learning society.

Keywords: education system and process, curriculum, trends, transformation, knowledge-based society, learning society

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