The Status of Interpersonal, Intercultural, Social and Civic Competence in the curricula for High School and Secondary Vocational Education

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Abstract:

Background: The interpersonal, intercultural, social and civic competence belongs to the so-called "soft competences" that are not acquired in a particular subject, but rather determine the student's personality and ability to cope with challenges both in the learning process, as well as in life in general.

Materials and Methods: Within this research we will determine to what extent the curricula include (knowledge, skills and attitudes) of the interpersonal, intercultural, social and civic competence. The goal of our research is to analyze the goals, teaching methods and activities and the way of assessing the students' achievements in civic education curricula for high school education and secondary vocational education and their impact on the development of **interpersonal, intercultural, social and civic competence**. The descriptive method is dominant in the research, with all its modalities, i.e. condition analysis, comparison and generalization were performed.

Results: On the basis of the analysis, it can be concluded that the stipulated goals contain a major part of the knowledge, skills and attitudes envisaged with the interpersonal, intercultural, social and civic competence. The teaching methods and activities encourage the student to think and work independently, while the assessment of the students' achievements is focused on developing a sense of self-assessment of their own knowledge.

Conclusion: The results do not suggest that the development of this competence should enable students to engage efficiently and constructively in social and work life, especially in increasingly diverse societies, and to resolve conflicts where necessary. The development of a democratic society requires innovative and creative people who will systematically learn and acquire new knowledge, skills and abilities within the regular education and beyond it.

Key Word: curricula, interpersonal, intercultural, social and civic competence.

I.   Introduction

Interpersonal competence is a competence that encompasses all forms of behavior that need to be mastered so that the individual can participate efficiently and constructively in social life and solve problems when necessary. This competence includes: development of critical and self-critical abilities, teamwork, ability to work in an interdisciplinary team, ability to communicate with experts from other fields, respect for diversity and multiculturalism, ability to work in an international context, ethical commitment, as well as development of interpersonal skills that are necessary for effective interaction between two or several people in the public and private sphere. (Blažinić, 2010).The development of interpersonal competence among students implies an increase of their opportunities for comprehensive personal and professional development.

Howard Gardner considers that interpersonal abilities are one of the seven abilities in general, and by interpersonal abilities he refers to ten skills: giving feedback, anticipation of other people's feelings, cooperative learning, eye-to-eye communication, ability to understand, division of work, art of cooperation, application of feedback, feeling for other people's desires, group projects. (Blažinić, 2010).The essence of interpersonal learning implies engaging the child's social motives. Social support in the traditional school is more present behind the scenes of permissible behavior than formally, such as whispering while the student is answering orally or use of cheat sheets during testing. The traditional frontal work instead of social support develops dependence of weaker students on better ones and a sense of inferiority.

Intercultural competence is an integral part of this competence, whose realization under no circumstances can take place through the contents of one or several subjects, rather it is a part of the overall educational activity both within the formal education system and non-formal education. Intercultural competence can help us understand the complexity of today's world through deeper understanding of both other

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people and ourselves.The main goal of intercultural learning is to promote and develop students' capacities for mutual interaction and communication with the world around them. (Council of Europe, 2018)

Intercultural learning places the other at the very center of relationships. This encourages the re-examination of our own beliefs or things that we normally take for granted and encourages continuous opening for the unknown, new and incomprehensible to us. In that process of interaction and mutual acquaintance, each person can develop personally, socially and globally. Intercultural learning in that case has the role of promoting capacity building of those who learn about complete functioning in the society.

Social competence can be developed only if the learning takes place through cooperation and mutual exchange of knowledge between the students in the class, i.e. if so-called cooperative learning is practiced instead of independent learning. Working in pairs, in groups, teamwork, classroom discussions, etc., are just some of the methods based on the idea of cooperative and interactive learning. Students learn, however not everyone for themselves anymore. Now learning takes place through conversation, discussion, exchange of views, cooperation, etc. These forms are sometimes called interactive (where the emphasis is on dialogue and knowledge exchange), and sometimes they are called cooperative learning (where the emphasis is on collaboration and mutual contribution to learning).The easiest way to recognize the value of social interaction and mutual exchange of knowledge is on the basis of one's own experience. According to John Dewey, if we try to express our opinion to someone else, we will notice that it changes with the interaction. The thought we want to convey needs to be shaped and expressed in a way that makes it understandable and acceptable to the other person. Through that formation, the very initial thought changes, acquires new meanings and is better understood. (Lalović, 2009).

The interaction encourages independence and responsibility for one's own opinion and other people's opinions.

Civic competence covers a wide range of activities and curricula that are grouped into four basic areas: human rights education, political education, peace education and democracy education, which are realized through different forms of education: formal, non-formal and informal education. (Lalović, 2009). Civic competence rests on the principles of lifelong learning. This means expanding the goals of the subject civic education, from knowledge of democracy and human rights to education about civic competence, i.e. to develop skills and values that should represent a bridge from knowledge to behavior.According to the definition of the Council of Europe, civic education is "a set of practices and principles aimed at better preparing young people and adults for active participation in democratic life, undertaking and exercising their rights and responsibilities in the society" (Kotri, Kašćelan , Backović, Lalović, 2007)

The existing forms of civic education in schools include: president of the class, class community and school parliament. It is evident that the concept of civic education exceeds the limits of the subject. The basic principles of changes in education imply greater democratization of relations in the school and affirmation of the principles of civic education in teaching and in the overall life of the school. Therefore, it is necessary for the goals of this subject to be realized not only within the separate subject, but also through the contents and activities for all school subjects, regardless of whether it is a matter of compulsory, elective subjects or free activities during the primary, secondary, higher education, and further on.

II. Material And Methods

The descriptive method is dominant in the research, namely, analysis of the curricula, comparison and generalization have been performed.

Considering that interpersonal, intercultural, social and civic competence belong to the so-called "soft competencies", that are not acquired in a certain subject in the schools in our country, no subject was dealing with this issue more specifically. Starting from the school year of 2001/2002, the subject civic culture has been introduced as a compulsory elective subject in the first year of high school education, while in the academic year of 2002/2003 the subject civic education was introduced as a compulsory subject in the fourth year of secondary vocational education. Within the analysis of the status of this key competence, we will analyze the curricula in these two subjects.

The purpose of the analysis is to determine to what extent the curricula for these subjects include (knowledge, skills and attitudes) of interpersonal, intercultural, social and civic competence.

The analysis covers general and specific goals, teaching methods and activities as well as assessment of students' achievements and their impact on the development of interpersonal, intercultural, social and civic competence.

Hypotheses:

General hypothesis:
Civic culture and civic education curricula enable the development of interpersonal, intercultural, social and civic competence.
H1: The prescribed goals in the subjects civic culture and civic education stimulate the development of interpersonal, intercultural, social and civic competence.
H2: The prescribed teaching methods and activities of the teacher and the students stimulate the development of interpersonal, intercultural, social and civic competence.
H3: The prescribed way of assessing the students' achievements stimulates the development of interpersonal, intercultural, social and civic competence.
The dependent variable in our research is the level, i.e. the degree of development of interpersonal, intercultural, social and civic competence. The independent variables include: the type of secondary school and the secondary education curricula.

III. Results and Discussion

Interpersonal, intercultural, social and civic competence implies a process of personal development that can have a more extensive impact on the society. In addition to personal characteristics, the attitude towards other people is exceptionally important, which implies awareness of the feelings, needs and interests of others, as well as the ability to cause the desired reactions in others (influence, communication, conflict management, leadership, encouraging change, nurturing of collaboration and teamwork skills).

The general goals of the subject civic culture stipulate that the curriculum in this subject should enable students to acquire knowledge about the rights of the citizen to participate in the management and protection of his/her rights, to develop intellectual, interactive and individual abilities, as well as to form personal attitudes (responsibility, self-discipline, participation in public affairs), to make decisions, to cooperate and to deal with conflicts.

The following special goals can be distinguished: identification of the commitments towards one's country and perceiving the way of their realization, deepening the sense of belonging to the immediate community or one's own country, application of the democratic procedures in solving public policy problems (negotiation, voting, protest), development of civic characteristics: responsibility, courtesy, tolerance, activity, courage, cooperation, speaking the truth, independent and critical use of information and distinguishing opinions and assessments from facts, to exercise their rights and obligations in a specific situation, to express their own views in discussion with other people and in public forums, to develop tolerance in regard to different views and attitudes and to reveal their own predispositions.

The general goal of the civic education curriculum that is realized in secondary vocational schools is for students to learn, acquire and actualize the essential scientific and generally accepted facts about the human and his social community, especially in their most developed form of citizen in the modern society and in the country with a democratic political order. An equally important goal is for them to actualize and evaluate the realities and characteristics of the Macedonian society, the country, the wider global community, as well as to take the right attitude towards them. This curriculum should enable students: to understand the development of basic structures, phenomena and processes in the society, especially in the areas of social relations, economy, politics and culture, to behave and act as positive individuals and citizens with social responsibilities, rights, established values and ethics, to apply their professional training in social life and in interpersonal relations through critical, creative, cooperative behavior and tolerance.

The specific goals within this curricula are divided into two groups. The first one refers to the contribution to the goals of vocational training and includes the acquisition of the necessary information, knowledge and skills, for perception and behavior in the modern society and its institutions, processes and normative-value systems, to become familiar with personal and collective freedoms and rights of the human-citizen, with their application and protection in the institutions of our constitutional, legal and political system, as well as to connect the interests and the motivation for professional training with the interests and motivation for productive, creative and responsible role in the economic, public and political community life.

The second group of special goals refers to the contribution for the students' personal development, whereby it is emphasized that the content of the curriculum and the interactive approach for its realization will enable the student: to properly understand the society and the immediate community which constructively includes interests, motives, values and creative potential of the human personality, development of high ethical standards, application and use of values and standards for personal, professional family and material promotion as well as practice of tolerance, adaptability, cooperation and respect for others in interpersonal relationships.

The analysis of the goals in these two curricula suggests that they contain most of the knowledge, skills and attitudes envisaged with the interpersonal, intercultural, social and civic competence, which contributes to stimulating its development, wherewith the set hypothesis is accepted. It is particularly important that in this

case the development of civic interests and knowledge within the further formal and non-formal education, as well as the readiness for lifelong learning are emphasized as separate goals.

Another important point is the determination to train students for simple administrative tasks: writing letters with a request to receive data, filling out forms, writing a conversation report, which indicates that in this case the students are required to train for practical application of their own knowledge, and they are not expected to do so in the future.

However, the achievement of these goals is closely related to the following factors: the level of democratic atmosphere in the school, the recognition of the importance of this subject for achieving the goals in the school by the school administration and other teachers, the degree of presence of elements of civic education in other curricula, as well as the level of competence of teachers in other subjects to recognize the goals of civic education and their willingness to affirm these ideas and practice in teaching.

Something that lacks within the goals of these curricula, and matters for this key competence, is to enable students to delimit the professional and personal sphere of life and to prevent the transfer of professional conflict to the personal sphere, as well as the ability to demonstrate solidarity by expressing interest in solving problems that refer to the local and wider community.

Teaching methods and activities

The teacher's teaching methods and activities envisaged with the curriculum in the subject civic culture within high school education should motivate and emotionally engage the student and arouse the student's interest to engage in independent thinking and work, wherewith the set hypothesis is accepted. This means not only knowing how to list human rights and the documents that prescribe them, but also being able to use, respect and defend them in specific social situations.

Thereby, the teaching forms, methods and techniques that are being used should contribute to the development of critical thinking, decision making, problem solving, presentation and defense of views, encouraging cooperation, learning to disagree, but also to compromise.

The activities of the students in this regard are guided by the very learning techniques and forms of work, therefore they gather information from different sources and in different ways, which implies establishing contacts with experts from the scientific and political life, as well as visits of institutions and municipal authorities, governmental and non-governmental organizations. By making a portfolio of the collected material, students have diverse opportunities to develop their artistic, poetic, graphic and aesthetic skills.

In order to realize the goals of the curriculum for the subject civic education intended for vocational schools, the use of modern interactive forms and methods has been envisaged, which enable successful application of the acquired knowledge in identifying, describing, explaining and analyzing phenomena in everyday social life and specific social situations.

The student's activities in this case arise from the envisaged methods and techniques and refer to the analysis of texts, tables and pictures, conducting group research, drafting portfolios and panels on a specific topic or content, as well as writing essays.

In regard to the role of the teacher, in both analyzed curricula the application based on teaching methods, forms and techniques envisages a change in the teacher's role. The teacher is no longer an informant and an interrogator and becomes an organizer, a coordinator and a leader of the open exchange of students' experiences and opinions. The teachers applies interactive learning techniques such as: projects, simulations, role play, sociodramas, discussions and debates as well as fieldwork

Assessment of the student's achievements

Within the curricula for both high school education and secondary vocational education, it is envisaged to descriptively assess the students' achievements according to properly prepared criteria and standards that, in addition to the knowledge, will also cover other elements. This will allow the development of a sense of self-criticism and estimation of one's own knowledge during the assessment process. All this is in favor of stimulating the development of the interpersonal, intercultural, social and civic competence, wherewith the set hypothesis is accepted.

The progress and assessment of the students' knowledge and abilities should be planned, systematic and permanent.

The nature of these subjects and their "openness" to the ever-changing social reality implies their connection to other systems outside the school and constant support from the local community, the non-governmental sector, the parents and the general public.

If this support is not realized, despite the application of modern methods, techniques and tools for work as well as criteria and standards for monitoring the students' progress and achievements, these subjects will

remain isolated and will not have the strength to affect the desired changes both in education and in the society as a whole.

IV.   Conclusion

The key competencies are not conceived as contents of individual subjects, rather they are expected to be developed across all subjects within the school.

In order to prepare for an active role in the society, students should: acquire knowledge and information about their rights, responsibilities, opportunities and ways of action in the community, develop skills for perceiving social problems and their resolution through cooperation, as well as develop motivation to use the newly acquired knowledge and skills not only at school but also in life. (Kotri, Kašćelan, Backović, Lalović, 2007).

As a result of this research we can point out the following recommendations that should be incorporated in the curricula:

- To focus on the ability for an efficient and constructive approach to problem solving with an emphasis on controlling one's own dissatisfaction, promotion of dialogue and an increase of tolerance.
- To promote the importance of voluntary work by organizing solidarity actions which are the best way for students to become familiar with their role and importance.
- Students should be given the opportunity for greater creativity when determining the pace and dynamics of adoption of the curriculum contents, as well as
- To direct the monitoring and evaluation of the quality of education towards measurement of the level of realization of educational outputs.

Civic and democratic values are expected to become part of the value system of the students and a basis for their future action in their own surrounding.

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