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Analysis of the actual legal framework on the role of the training activities in geography and economics education in fifth grade

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Abstract: *The purpose of the study is to analyze and outline the conceptual frameworks of geography and economics as a school subject in fifth grade, broken down through lessons for activities as means of learning geography, competence formation, building skills and values, and developing cognitive abilities in connection with the formation of the foundations of geographic culture of students as a main goal of teaching of geography in school.*

Keywords: *geography and economics, knowledge, key competences, skills, relation, cognitive abilities, geographic culture, teaching of geography.*

Introduction

The complex nature of geography science and in particular the Geography and economics subject definitely contributes to the formation of knowledge for the students, skills and relationships for the world in its diversity and the place of man in it as part of the whole and at the same time as a connection between its individual components. The International Charter for Geographical Education outlines the importance of the subject as „necessary for the development of responsible and active citizens of the present and the future world“ and states that „... Geography is an informative, skill-challenging, interesting discipline at all levels of education and learners need a global understanding of the world in order to co-operate globally in the fields of economics, politics, cultural and environmental issues“.

Results

The geography education in Bulgarian schools is closely related to the educational policy of the state and is determined by the Law of Pre-school and School Education [3], Ordinance No. 4 from 30th November 2015 for the curriculum [4], Ordinance № 5 from 30th November 2015 for the general education training [5], which regulates the state educational standard for general education and curricula for the different school subjects.

It clearly states that „The State Educational Standard for General Education is a set of requirements for the learning outcomes of each general educational subject and determines the competencies - knowledge, skills and attitude that are expected as learning outcomes of the subject at the end of each stage of the respective level of education“ (Article 6) and „Training for acquiring general education in each of the subjects according to art. 3, paragraph 1 shall be carried out under curricula in which, on the basis of the relevant requirements under Article 6, paragraph 1 specifies the competencies of the students as expected results of the class training“ (Article 7) [5].

In other words, „Curriculum are an important state document that focuses on the scope and structure of the learning content of a particular subject. They actually place an institutional contract, assign the mission to fulfill the specific discipline“ [2, p. 7]. In practice, they represent the framework that specifies the requirements for the curriculum and determines the place of geography training in the general system of school education. The curricula themselves represent the public procurement and public expectations for geographic training in the Bulgarian school, but they do not impose restrictions for teachers, just the contrary. Following their professional training – scientific and pedagogical, taking into account the specific characteristics of the particular school environment and the individual and age specifics of the students, they have the opportunity to plan the methods, the teaching technologies, to define the accents and to motivate the cognitive activity of the students to achieve the goals and the tasks set out in the specific curricula.

At first we mentioned the complex nature of geography science, which also reflects on the subject of geography and economics in the Bulgarian school. It is for this reason that, in order to achieve its goals, geography uses inner-subject and inter-subject relations; it is based on the accumulated students' knowledge of the subjects of man and society, man and nature, history and civilizations, biology and health education, chemistry and environmental protection, physics and astronomy, Bulgarian language and literature, mathematics and information technologies; it is the basis for the formation of civic competences and the consolidation of a national identity in the context of the globally developing world.

The significance of the 5th grade geography and economy course is determined by its fundamental nature. „Education in Geography and Economics in the 5th grade is directed towards mastering basic knowledge, skills and acquisition of key competencies related to the formation of geographic culture backgrounds for the surrounding area on a global and regional level as part of their common culture“ [1]. In practice, this is the first self-determined geography and economics course that sets the stage for geographic education at school. On the other hand, it is a natural continuation of the knowledge acquired by the students in the Primary school on the subjects man and nature and man and society and precisely through the basic knowledge, skills and competences that it forms and the key concepts it introduces correspond with the other educational courses at the primary and high school stages. All of this gives us reason to define this course as a foundation for the geographic culture and education of students in the Bulgarian school.

In content terms, based on the curriculum, the geography and economy course for the 5th class includes the following core themes: geographic information, Earth as a part of the solar system; the natural appearance of the planet, population, settlements, political map; economy and the continents Africa and Antarctica. From the content of the course it is evident that it differs, apart from its fundamental also general and regional nature, and corresponds categorically with the modern concept of geographic education, based on the trinity nature - society – economy.

General and singular concepts are derived from the content of the course. They are legally specified in the curriculum of geography and economics for the 5th grade, approved by the Minister of Education and Science. As a consequence of the content range, the course is conceptually loaded, with general concepts prevailing. The singular concepts have more explanatory nature, they specify the common ones and predominate mainly in the educational content referring to the continents of Africa and Antarctica which, on the other hand, create a clear idea for the students about the contrasting nature of the planet, respectively geography science and consciousness of the latitude zone (Africa) as a leading geographic regularity.

In this document we also find a recommended percentage of compulsory school lessons, namely: 59% for new knowledge, 19% for exercises, 6% for revision, 6% for summary, and 10% for control, it

means that from the total number of lessons (51) 29 are for new knowledge, 10 are allocated for exercises, 3 for revision, 3 for summary and 5 for control.

Thus, the framework clearly demonstrates that learning activities in geography and economics education in the fifth grade take up a significant part of the curriculum, even more that so far the lessons for exercises that mostly form skills were not explicitly stated and took a very modest part in the geographic training of Bulgarian pupils.

The curriculum itself as a normative act over the years varies depending on the educational policy of the state, the scientific achievements of the geography science, the expectations and the requirements of society for the results of the learning process and its feasibility in real life. In terms of geography and economics training, there is a strive to increase the share of cognitive learning by students in which the teacher cooperates and assists the student in forming theoretical knowledge, skills, key competencies and attitudes to meet the expected results of training to achieve general education at the end of the class. It is interesting to note that the „Additional specifications for the particular subject of geography and economics“ of the curriculum states the following:

„A necessary condition for achieving the objectives of geography and economics education in the 5th grade is the organising of educational trips. During the excursions students should be given the opportunity to observe natural objects, processes and phenomena; to navigate by map and compass; to make measurements; to demonstrate skills for prudent behavior in nature; to protect nature“ [1].

All of this unambiguously emphasizes the importance of learning activities for geography and economics education in the 5th grade as a means of forming „competencies (knowledge, skills and attitudes) that include both specific geographic skills and learning skills, social and civic responsibility, initiative, evaluation and self-assessment“ [2, p. 36].

In the „Geography and Economics Curriculum for the 5th grade“ (general education), learning activities in education are clearly defined by the following verbs: characterizes, gives examples, explains, describes, identifies, names, knows, recognizes, orientates, reads, uses, calculates, differentiates, produces, identifies, compares, differs, compiles, tracks, groups, responds. They are extended throughout the curriculum and represent the skeleton on which the learning content is built. This inevitably shows the emphasis on students' independent scientific knowledge in order to complete the scientific and theoretical knowledge with skills, competences and attitudes and their application in a real life situation, or to solve cases and situations that have a geographic expression, explanation or motivation

It is important to note that the verb „know“ is used not only in the context of the purely scientific, factual or empirical knowledge, but also in terms of rules, algorithms and prescriptions for performing certain actions, which underlines again the importance of scientific -cognitive activities in the educational process in geography and economics in the 5th grade, even more that, as already mentioned, this is a fundamental course relevant to all other educational geography courses in Bulgarian secondary school.

The importance of science-learning activities for the geographic education in the 5th grade is also evident from the specific methods and forms for evaluating of students' achievements in the formation of a term assessment, as legally stated in the „Geography and Economics Curriculum for the 5th grade“ (General Education Preparation), namely:

- ✓ Current assessments (oral, written, practical) – 40%;
- ✓ Assessments from control work – 30%;
- ✓ Assessments from different participation (work in class, homework, group work, etc.) – 30%.

This percentage reveals in practice that not only not the knowledge and reproduction of facts have been assessed, but also the skills, competences and attitudes shown by the pupils in the application of the same, to the extent that the control works themselves are a creative solution of the teacher and could also respond to certain scientific-cognitive activities. Of course, they need to be designed in a way to meet the knowledge, skills, competences and attitudes demanded at the end of the training course as a result of geography training.

The geography and economy curriculum for the 5th grade (general education) determines the organization and conduct of lessons for activities as a particularly responsible task for geography and economics teachers, whether they are a personal decision which shows to a great extent their scientific, methodical and methodological preparation, personal qualities and experience, adjusted and compliant to

the age-specific features of pupils' psyche. Moreover, in purely psychological terms, the 5th graders are characterized by strong emotional memory, „high curiosity, high interest in the new and unknown, motivation, permanent impulse for activity in terms of the learning process, highly developed figurative thinking“ [4, p. 78].

On the other hand, they are just beginning to acquire skills for teamwork and leadership – activities that correspond to civic education and are important for shaping the learners' personality. The approach set out so far fully corresponds to the main purpose of this type of lesson, namely: „the formation and development of certain skills - practical and intellectual, competences and patterns of behavior and their improvement“ [4, p. 67]; they definitely support the achievements of competences described in the curriculum as the expected learning outcomes of the educational process. In other words, lessons for activities are a compulsory element of the system of lessons of geography not only in the fifth grade, but also in the overall geographic education in Bulgarian secondary school and combine a variety of scientific-cognitive activity - working with different geographic sources and documents, scientific and scientific popular literature, compilation of geographic texts, preparation of scientific reports, essays, references, study prognoses, reading and elaboration of graphic images, diagrams, schemes, etc. This type of lessons contribute to the development and improvement of the intellectual skills of the learners, related to thinking operations, analysis, synthesis, summary, systematization, etc.

From the stated above can be concluded that the organization of the learning activities in geography and economics education in the 5th grade is defined by the current regulatory framework and in this respect it is necessary to meet the expected learning outcomes to achieve general education at the end of the class, implemented in the „Geography and Economics Curriculum for the 5th grade (General Education Preparation)“ approved by the Ministry of Education and Science. On the other hand, the teacher has the freedom to decide exactly how to respond to these expectations, taking into account the specifics of the school and the classes that he works with, the age characteristics of the pupils on a psychological level, based particularly on his scientific and methodical preparation and based on his professional experience and creative decisions. In this connection, it is necessary to conclude about the great significance of the learning activities in geography and economics education in the 5th grade for the reflection of the educational content in its scientific context and the conceptual apparatus as a whole and in its interrelation.

On the other hand, the learning activities enable the organization of different class activities - individual, group, class-specific depending on the objectives of the particular unit of study. Through learning-cognitive activities, learners have the opportunity to develop and improve their emotional intelligence. And the emotional intelligence from its side has influence on the emotional memory that has a leading part, according to psychological studies at that age. And last but not least, it is necessary to point out that learning activities allow „the assessment of geographic knowledge in real life situations and as an element of the professional competencies of different specialists“ [2, p. 37].

Conclusions

In conclusion, it can be summarized that learning activities are the key competencies to form the foundations of the geographic culture of learners which is the main goal of geographic education in Bulgarian school.

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