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The Geography Education System in Secondary Schools - Opportunities for Efficient Management and Functioning

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Abstract: *The new educational model defines educational goals and policies that require changes in the functioning of the system of Geography education. Special areas of interest are the issues concerning the extent of the impact of the changes on the system, particularly its content and procedures, the question about the quality of its key features - resources, functioning, results. The efficiency of the system requires reconsideration of its management and the interaction patterns in the Geography and Economics teaching process.*

Keywords: *management and operation, system of Geography education, Geography and Economics teaching process*

Introduction

Geography education is part of the system of general education with its inherent characteristics of a social system - purposeful organisation with precisely defined functions, institutionalized, and at the same time complex and dynamic. The dynamics in its development follow the changes in public attitudes and needs.

The statutory foundations of Geography education in the general secondary education system in Bulgaria is determined by the Law on Pre-school and School Education, enacted in 2015. In terms of Geography education, there have also been adopted regulations defining the state educational standards for the number of classes of the framework and model syllabuses, the types of training (general, extended, specialized, additional), the organization of the teaching process, evaluation, etc. The state educational policy aims at a change and is in response to the demands of society for a better quality of the educational product.

Results and discussion

The new statutory regulation leads to a gradual change in the system of Geography education in the following “parameters:

- Composition - Elements, Components, Subsystems;
- Structure - a function of dependence, coherence (coordination) and subordination;
- Organization - order, composition, configuration;
- Environment - factors that influence the system” [2].

The system of Geography education in secondary schools can be considered in terms of:

- Content - including statutory regulations translated into curricula, syllabuses, textbooks and study kits, teacher's thematic plan, etc.
- Procedure - reflecting the process of teaching Geography with the adherent teaching and learning activities.
- Environment - including the achievements of the science of Geography, information and technical resources, relationships with institutions, organisations of civil society and business.

It should be noted that the Geography education system has a specific manifestation at the level of an educational institution. It functions under the influence of external but obligatory constructs. They are the product of creative demand, strategic planning and management of the education system, the action of state educational standards. The teacher should be aware of the areas of competence in the new teaching documentation, and how he/she will purposefully translate them in the lesson. We know that updating the content of a lesson in Geography and Economics with new ideas and achievements of the science of Geography is one of its goals in the learning process. Study kits indicate the current trends and ideas for the teaching process. We accept as external constructs those that are subject to standardization in the modern educational paradigm.

The system's internal constructs are more flexible and versatile in term of place and time. The figure below represents the Geography education model that distinguishes them (Figure 1).

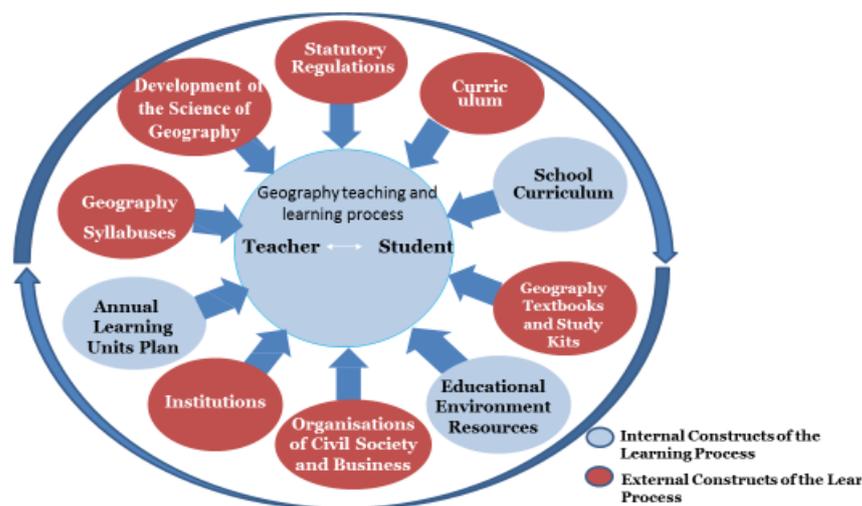


Figure 1. Model of the Geography Education System in Secondary School

The system of Geography education contains the process of teaching Geography that we place at the centre of this system, and it, in itself, is also a system – „the goals, the syllabus, the means, the methods and the forms of organization of the learning process are closely interrelated and form a comprehensive system and provide education for the adolescents, and in particular Geography education” [4].

The methods and forms of adaptation of the science of Geography to various levels: to scientific discipline, academic discipline and school subject, is the foundation for shaping the perceptions of quality

in the system of Geography education and the process of teaching Geography. The level of scientific achievement is reflected in the curricula, in the developed and approved textbooks and study kits.

The purposeful activity to coordinate the system's internal and external constructs “is in essence the quality management process”, and its immediate object is not the quality itself but “the process of its occurrence” [8].

We perceive the achievement of quality in Geography education as purposeful, consistent and logically interrelated actions and justified measures applied at all levels and to all constructs in the system in order to achieve the main objective - the formation of Geography culture.

The study of the school subject “Geography and Economics” in secondary school is organized in the different stages of the two educational levels, and they can be differentiated and considered as its subsystems. The positioning of the school subject “Geography and Economics” by grades and types of training gives an outline of the structure and organization of the Geography education system, and is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Structure and organization of Geography education in the secondary education system

Level	Stage	Class	Type of education			
			General	Specialized	Extended	Additional
Basic education	Primary	1			*	*
		2			*	*
		3			*	*
		4			*	*
	Pre-secondary	5	*		*	*
		6	*		*	*
		7	*		*	*
Secondary education	First Stage of Secondary Education (Lower)	8	*		*	*
		9	*		*	*
		10	*		*	*
	Second Stage of Secondary Education (Upper)	11	*	*	*	*
		12	*	*	*	*

It should be made clear that, unlike general and specialized training, which is constant in the levels and stages of secondary education, the implementation of the extended and additional training in Geography and Economics is only an option and such implementation depends on many factors:

- the stated desire of pupils and parents for such kind of training during the respective school year;
- inclusion in the school curriculum;
- its coordination with the Public Board;
- availability of qualified teachers;
- the professionalism of teachers, their motivation to develop programs on subject which is not studied during the relevant stage, or is innovative and integrative;
- the willingness of the school's management to offer something new as an educational product, etc.

The inclusion of extended and additional education in Geography and Economics in the school curriculum gives a specific profile of the educational institutions and is their distinguishing mark.

The availability of such opportunities in the regulatory framework implies flexibility of Geography education as a system and allows it to extend the realization of its goals to a wider range.

Following our experience in this field, and taking into consideration the processes in Varna administrative region, it should be noted that such initiatives are rarely undertaken, and when they are, it is without confidence. The fact is that there is no experience in any school in Varna region at an early stage

of application of these types of training based on Geography and Economics programs. At the pre-secondary education stage advanced Geography and Economics teaching is present through elective classes, but is often replaced by subjects for which national external assessment is held. The situation with the optional classes that provide additional training is similar, which allows such classes not to be allocated due to lack of financing.

Factors that contribute to this situation are: the inflexibility of the system; the ongoing introduction of the new curricula and programs (in school year 2018-2019 for the 7th and 9th grades); underestimation of the importance of Geography culture in a world of crises and change; the lack of motivation among some teachers, interpersonal relationships, etc.

The dynamics of introducing a new regulatory framework runs in parallel with the functioning of educational models introduced with the already repealed acts. A framework for the implementation of the Geography education system and the period of effect of these laws is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Effect of the legal framework at the beginning of school year 2018-2019

Legal framework of Geography education	Educational levels/ stages of study	Effect of the school curricula and syllabuses
1. Law on National Education 2. Law on Educational Degrees, Mandatory General Educational and School Curriculum 3. Ordinance No. 2/2000 on the State General Educational Requirements for the Syllabus	Secondary school stage: from 10th to 12th grade	Till the end of school year 2020-2021
1. Law on Preschool and School Education 2. Ordinance No. 5/2015 on General Education 3. Ordinance No. №7/2016 on Specialized (Profiled) Education	Basic stage Second stage of basic education First stage of secondary education (Lower secondary education) Second stage of secondary education (Upper secondary education): 11th and 12th grade	For the stage For the stage For the 8th and 9th grade As of the beginning of school year 2020-2021

The procedural side of the Geography education system reflects the interaction between teacher and student within the learning process and encompasses teaching as teacher activity, and learning as student activity. We perceive this interaction as a determining factor for the results from the learning process under the conditions of acting standardized external constructs.

In a functional aspect, the learning process is a specific cognitive process, complying to basic didactic principles and based on logical sequence. The realization of this process is through targeted and systematically organized school education. It depends to a great extent on the motivation of the parties in it and on the pedagogical skills of the teachers.

The learning of the structure of this process formulate the different teaching models and show the dynamics of understanding of the process and the roles of the parties in it. The dynamics of the models are presented after Uman, A., Fedorova, M. [9] (Figure 2).

The reference sources distinguish between two- and three-component models of the training process, and define traditional and modern models.

The scholastic school applied a dogmatic model of learning formulations without their understanding and comprehension.

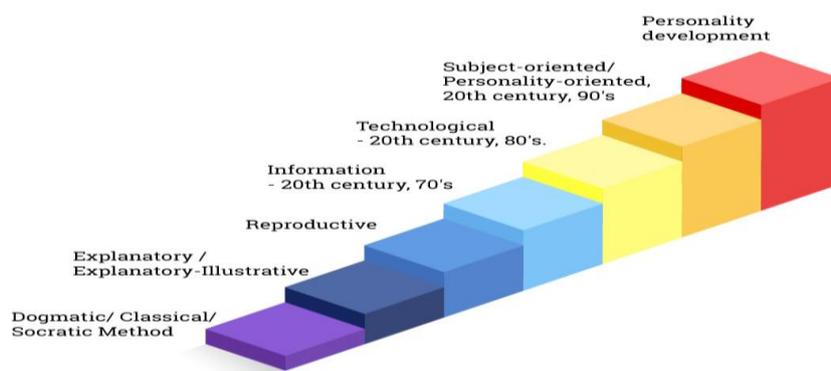


Figure 2. Learning models

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The scholastic school applied a dogmatic model of learning formulations without their understanding and comprehension.

The explanatory model or explanatory-illustrative model preserves the dogmas in the teaching process, but there is an attempt to enable learners to understand through explanation what they are taught, and then to learn it. The emphasis is on the teacher's work and improving teacher's skills to analyse, illustrate, comment, present evidence, and so on. Over time, teachers become aware of their role not only to present and explain the learning content, but also to help in the process of understanding and application of what has been learned. This provokes observation and reasoning, develops analytic and synthetic activity in students' memory, and is the basis for the emergence of the reproductive learning process.

The development of technology and the huge flow of information is a factor contributing for the learning process to become a three-component one, defined as an information model. As elements of the learning process in this model are defined „the teaching activity, the learning activity and the syllabus, without which there is no education process. The interaction between them represents the learning process“ [6].

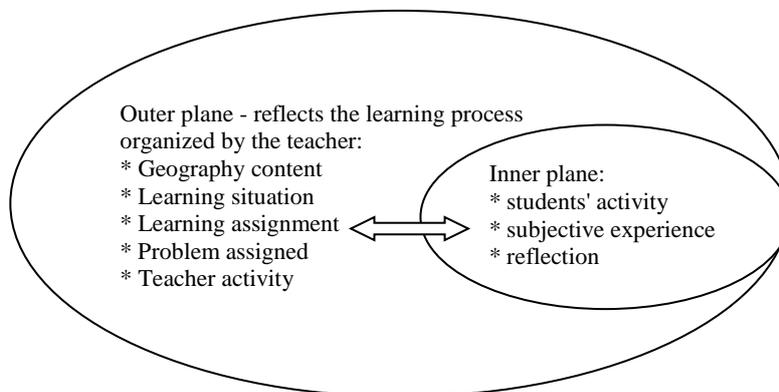


Figure 3. Structure of the educational space in the process of implementation of the personality-development model in Geography and Economics education

By adopting the concept of methods as a “way”, “approach“, “pathway” to teaching and learning, we believe that the determining factor for the outcomes of the process of teaching Geography is the competence and expertise of the teachers. “The efficiency of teaching and learning relates to the teacher's ability to select and apply the methods.” [2]. These competences should be in the focus of both the teachers and the institutions in terms of their improvement and updating.

When selecting a learning model, Geography teachers benefit from the subject of Geography as a science - the ability to form knowledge and skills not only about nature or society, but also about the

relationships and interaction between them. Geography builds values and specific competencies - to discover dependencies and influences, explain and predict phenomena, apply patterns from one field to another, recognize the manifestations of physical laws in nature, form civic and cultural competences, etc. [5] This expresses the “absolute value” of Geography education, and it is a lever in the hands of an adept teacher to apply a personality-development strategic model of an educational process.

The Geography teaching process has the potential to replace the problem situation with a “problem-situational space” that contains a set of problematic situations. Students should choose the target, determine the direction and strategy of the solution. In this situation the teacher can control and manage the motivation of the students, which is a key factor for their active inclusion in the teaching process.

We accept the application of such a model as a condition and, to a certain extent, a guarantee of building values as a model level of competence. The maximum approaching of the educational process to real life creates conditions for the learners to “reasonably act in space, to see the territorial aspects of the problems, to supplement their knowledge of the environment” [7].

Conclusions

Quality education is an investment in the future and a definite prerequisite for public prosperity. Teachers have a tool for managing it by embracing it in its dynamic nature - as a continuous process of organizational development based on analysing achievement, planning the next stage, implementing the planned activities, evaluating the results and introducing improvements to their work.

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