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Model for formation of social and civic key competences in geography and economics training in the first high school stage

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Abstract: *Educational reforms in recent years have necessitated the use of a variety of methods through which the key competences described in the European reference framework are formed. Through Geography and Economics training the eight groups of key competences are formed, including social and civic competences. The present study provides a model for the formation of social and civic competences in students through geography and economics training.*

Keywords: *key competences, social and civic competences, European reference framework*

Introduction

The dynamics of our daily lives force us to have skills, which make us to be more complete and active citizens of Bulgaria, Europe and the world. In the rapidly changing world, people need to have a large amount of skills and competences to develop throughout their lives. The formation of key competences as well as their development takes place throughout a person's life. In the educational policies of Bulgaria and many other countries, reforms have been made, which focus on competency-based education. The recommendation of the Council from 22.05.2018 on key competences, calls on „Member States to ensure that everyone will develop key competences throughout their lives by using a variety of learning approaches” that make it easier for students to live in the global world [13].

The purpose of this study is to try to analyze the essence and to emphasize the importance of key competences, in particular social and civic competences, by proposing a model for their formation through geography and economics training in the first high school stage.

Materials and methods

The main research methods are analysis of documentation, comparative analysis of scientific and methodological literature, survey method.

Results and discussions

Key competences

Competences are closely related to a higher degree of development of a group of abilities or assessment of a certain degree of perfection of skills [16]. In the last few years, a number of discussions have taken place about the basic competences that every person should have. The results of these discussions outline complexes of competences that are considered particularly important and significant for person's professional and personal realization. Gradually, as a result of the search for a "conceptual basis of school-based comparisons of achievements in international and national systems", the concept of *key competences* is imposed [9].

The following can be distinguished as key competences:

- Social – ability for social interaction, civic, psychological, pedagogical culture, skills for psychosocial adaptation, etc.;
- Professional – related to design-reflective skills, readiness to solve professional tasks with a high degree of difficulty, skills for application and development of innovations in the professional field;
- Communicative – language culture, language literacy and ability for productive dialogue and cooperation;
- Informational – for searching, processing and presenting information, computer literacy and handling of information technology products;
- Educational (academic) – ability for independent cognitive activity, desire for continuous self-education and self-improvement, for professional progress and research activity.
- Adopted in line with pan – European and national trends, the Concept for Lifelong Learning stands out two main groups of competences: professional and key [12].

Based on the thesis of dividing the content of the education in different categories such as „meta-subject” (includes all subjects and disciplines), „interdisciplinary” (includes certain subjects and educational areas) and “subject based” (for each subject separately), Hutorskoy organizes the competences hierarchically on three levels [6], indicated on Figure 1.

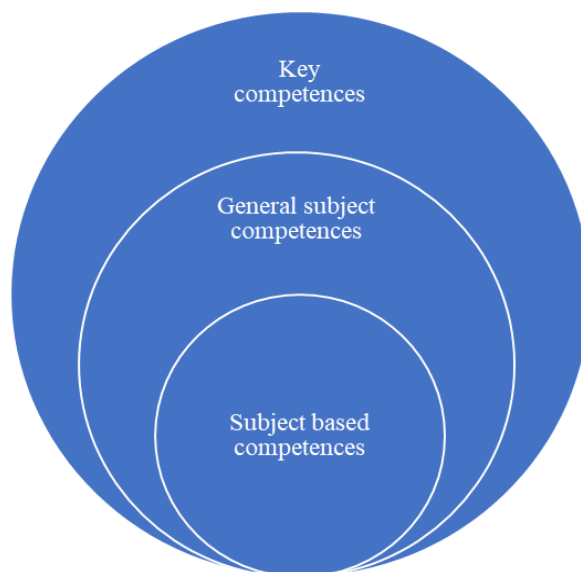


Figure1. Levels of Competences (based on Hutorskoy), 2005

In the European Reference Framework, the competences are defined as combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes. Knowledge is described as a composition of already established facts, data, concepts, ideas and theories that support the understanding of a particular area or subject. Skills are described as the ability and capacity of a person to perform processes and to use its existing knowledge in order to achieve results. Attitudes are described as a predisposition and way of thinking for taking action [9].

Leading European documents, such as the Lisbon Strategy and the European reference framework (2006), determine the following universal key competences:

- Communication in the mother tongue;
- Communication in foreign languages;

- Mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology;
- Digital competence;
- Learning to learn;
- Social and civic competences;
- Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship;
- Cultural awareness and expression [7, 10].

For each of the key competences, the most important knowledge, skills and attitudes are listed. The idea of key competences is based on results-oriented training. Collaboration and learning through projects are approaches that support the learners training, increase their interest in the process of building key competences. Key competences are interdisciplinary and can be formed and developed in each and every subject, including geography and economics.

With the development of technology and the constant increase in the flow of information in the field of education, it is necessary to focus students' attention on activities that will form competent individuals with active civic self-awareness.

For full development of the student's personality and formation of a sense of respect for parents and relatives; own cultural identity, language and values; national values of the country and other civilizations – necessary for a responsible life in a free society, through education in the spirit of understanding, peace and tolerance, gender equality and friendship between all peoples [1].

On 18 December 2006, the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union adopted Recommendations on the key competences needed for satisfaction of personal and social fulfillment in the future knowledge-based society. This document, known as the „Key Competences Reference Framework“ identifies the eight groups of skills, knowledge and abilities, in general – competences [7]. It is clear that the possession of these competences is a good basis for the realization of a full life - both socially and personally. The learning to learn skill, accompanied by mathematical and digital literacy, provides a good basis for professional mobility and easy adaptation to the rapidly changing needs of the market and production. This reduces the risk of unemployment. The addition of both communication and social competences provides the possibility for full social realization of the individual as an active and responsible citizen with rational behavior in society. The formation and development of these competences is a long process. It covers the whole of conscious life of a person, but school education has a fundamental role in it [3].

In our opinion, for the purposes of this study we accept the statement that competences are a proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and / or methodological resources in work or study situations and in professional and personal development. For key competences we accept that they are „knowledge, skills and attitudes that help students to achieve personal fulfillment and at a later stage in their lives to find work and participate in society`s daily life” [8]. In this article we analyze a model for the formation of social and civic competences in the geography and economics training in the first high school stage.

Model for formation of social and civic key competences

In the present research an attempt will be made to indicate a model for the formation of social and civic competences in students and we will pay attention to the opportunities provided by the subject geography and economics for the formation of civic and social competence in adolescents.

Civic competence is the ability to act as responsible citizens and to participate fully in civic and social life based on an understanding of social, economic, legal and political concepts and structures, as well as global developments and sustainability [13].

Civic competence is based on knowledge of the basic concepts and phenomena related to individuals, groups, labor organizations, society, economy and culture. This means understanding the European common values expressed in Article 2 of the Treaty of the foundation of the European Union and in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. [4, 5]. This competence includes awareness of current events and a critical understanding of major events in national, European and world history. It also includes awareness of the goals, values and policies of social and political movements, as well as knowledge and understanding of sustainable systems, in particular climate change and demographic change worldwide and the root causes that cause them. Knowledge of European integration and awareness of diversity and cultural identities in Europe and in the world are essential. This includes an understanding of the multicultural and socio-economic dimensions of European societies and the way in which national cultural identity contributes to European identity [7].

Civic competence skills are related to the ability to participate effectively, together with other people, in activities of general or public interest, including the sustainable development of society. This includes skills for critical thinking and integrated problem solving, as well as ability to argument decisions and to take a constructive part in community activities, also in decision-making at all levels, from local and national to European and international. It also includes the skill for consulting, for critical thinking and interacting with both traditional and new types of media, as well as to understand the role and functions of the media in democratic societies [13].

Establishing students' entry level on key competences through a survey

For the purpose of conducting a pedagogical experiment and a research on the opinion of students for the formation of key competences in students in the first high school stage, 104 students from 9th and 10th grade of PEG „Nikola Vaptsarov“ Shumen were interviewed and asked the following questions:

Indicate what the term „competence“ means to you:

A) Competence is associated with the individual's ability to function adequately in a professional environment, demonstrating behavior that meets expectations.

B) Competence is a set of knowledge (theoretical and practical), habits (intellectual and practical) and attitudes (value orientations and attitudes).

C) The competence owed by the person having the respective competence includes its personal attitudes towards the competence and its subject matter.

D) Competence is the ability to perform a job according to a predetermined standard.

E) Competence is a proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological resources in work or study situations and in professional and personal development.

F) I cannot answer.

Before the conduction of the pedagogical experiment the answers of the surveyed students are different and are shown in fig. 2.

The majority of students (39%) state that: „Competence is a proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and / or methodological resources in work or study situations and in professional and personal development“. For 34% of the surveyed students, the competence is a set of knowledge (theoretical and practical), habits (intellectual and practical) and attitudes (value orientations and attitudes).

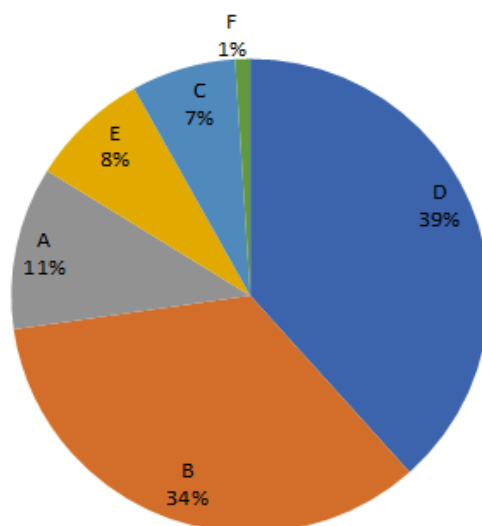


Figure 2. Relative share of the answers to the question: Indicate what the term „competence“ means to you

In addition to clarifying the concept of „competence“ the main purpose of the experiment is through this model to clarify the nature of key competences and to outline their importance for the development of adolescents.

For this reason, in the same survey, students were asked: "Why are competences important to you?" and the possible answers are:

A) Facilitate the realization on the labor market.

B) They are an important factor for the improvement of the personal development of each individual.

C) They contribute to the successful mobility within the European Community.

D) They ensure successful performance and social well-being of people by improving the quality of life.

E) I cannot determine.

F) Not important to me.

The results show that 66.8% of the students consider the competences important because they facilitate the realization on the labor market and for 21.9% of the surveyed students - because they contribute to the successful mobility within the European community. It is noteworthy that a small number of students indicated answers E (I cannot determine) and F (Not important to me), respectively 0.4% and 0.2% of the respondents. This indicates an awareness of the interest and appreciation of the important meaning of competences for the students. The presence of positive motivation to participate in the pedagogical experiment is crucial for expecting positive end results.

Another question asked to the students in the survey is related to the assessment of the significance of the individual key competences for the students themselves by their grading in the groups of competences with the greatest importance, with the least importance and without significance.

The analysis of the answers shows that of the eight key competences described in the European Framework of Reference and the ninth competency „skills to support sustainable development and a healthy lifestyle and sport” with the most importance for the surveyed students are digital competence and social and civic key competences. Students define as less important competences - Mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology and skills to support sustainable development and a healthy lifestyle and sports. To the majority of the students the learning to learn skill and the competence for cultural awareness and expression are not important.

In order to establish the students' point of view on the methods for formation and development of key competences, the last question from the survey was asked:

How we can develop key competences in your opinion?

A) By working on projects;

B) By learning through experience;

C) By using interactive methods;

D) Through communication and exchange of experience;

E) Through teamwork.

The chart in Figure № 3 shows the students' summarize responses in %.

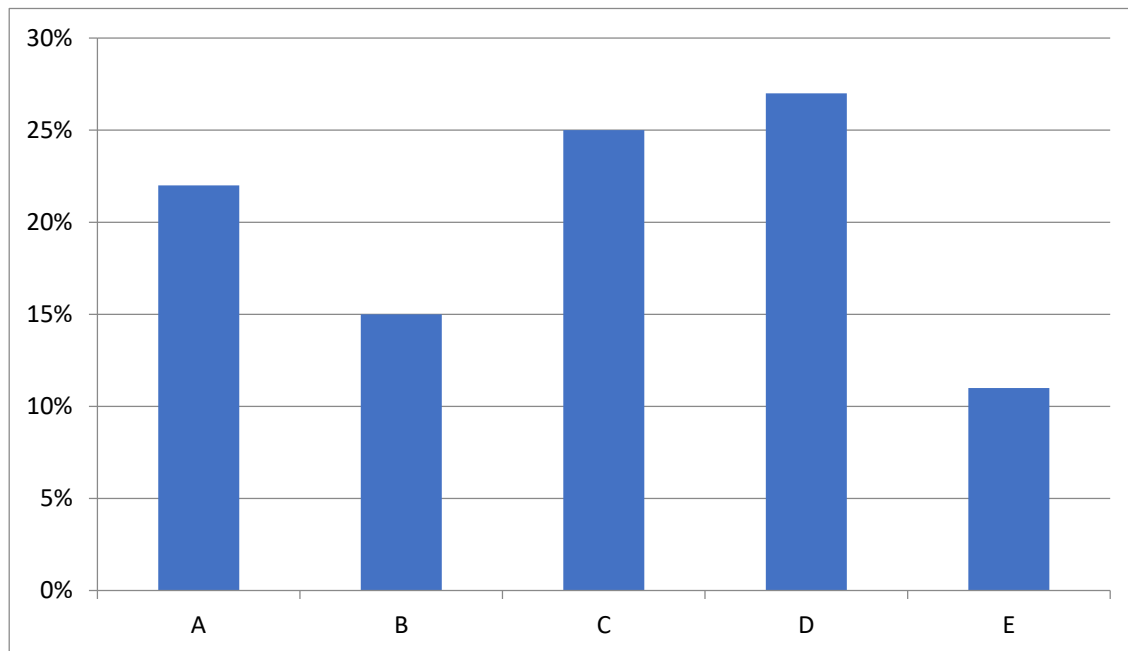


Figure 3. Relative share of the answers of the students participating to the survey to the following question: „How can we develop key competences”?

During a conversation with the students, they clarified that in their opinion, key competences can be developed through all these methods and they have indicated the most interesting for them. This explains the variety of the answers.

Good opportunities for the formation of social and civic competences can be found in the Geography and Economics training courses in 9th and 10th grade. The main reason for this is that in 9th

grade Geography of the Society of the World is studied, and in 10th grade Geography of Bulgaria [11, 14, 15].

Types of methods included in the model for the formation of social and civic key competences in geography and economics training in the first high school stage

Based on the results of the survey, we found a different entry level of the degree of mastery of the concept of „competence“, different ranking of the main types of key competences, but also a general positive assessment of their importance for the students.

We focused the pedagogical experiment on the curriculum in geography and economics in 9th and 10th grade, because it offers a good content basis for the formation and development of previously formed social and civic competences. We thought that the most suitable for this purpose were the topics:

- „World economy” – 9th grade;
- „Geographical location, borders and size of Bulgaria“ – 10th grade;
- „Settlements in Bulgaria“ – 10th grade;
- „State and administrative system of Bulgaria” – 10th grade.

An way of the formation of social and civic competences could be found in the first lesson of the geography and economics training and education in 10th grade, namely „Geographical location, borders and size of Bulgaria” [11,15].

During school year 2019 - 2020, 26 students from 10th grade in foreign language school „Nikola Vaptsarov“ Shumen participated in an experiment conducted in connection with a dissertation research. The students were given the task to analyze the borders of Bulgaria through the SWOT - analysis method. Figure 4 presents some of the students' answers about the northern border of Bulgaria.

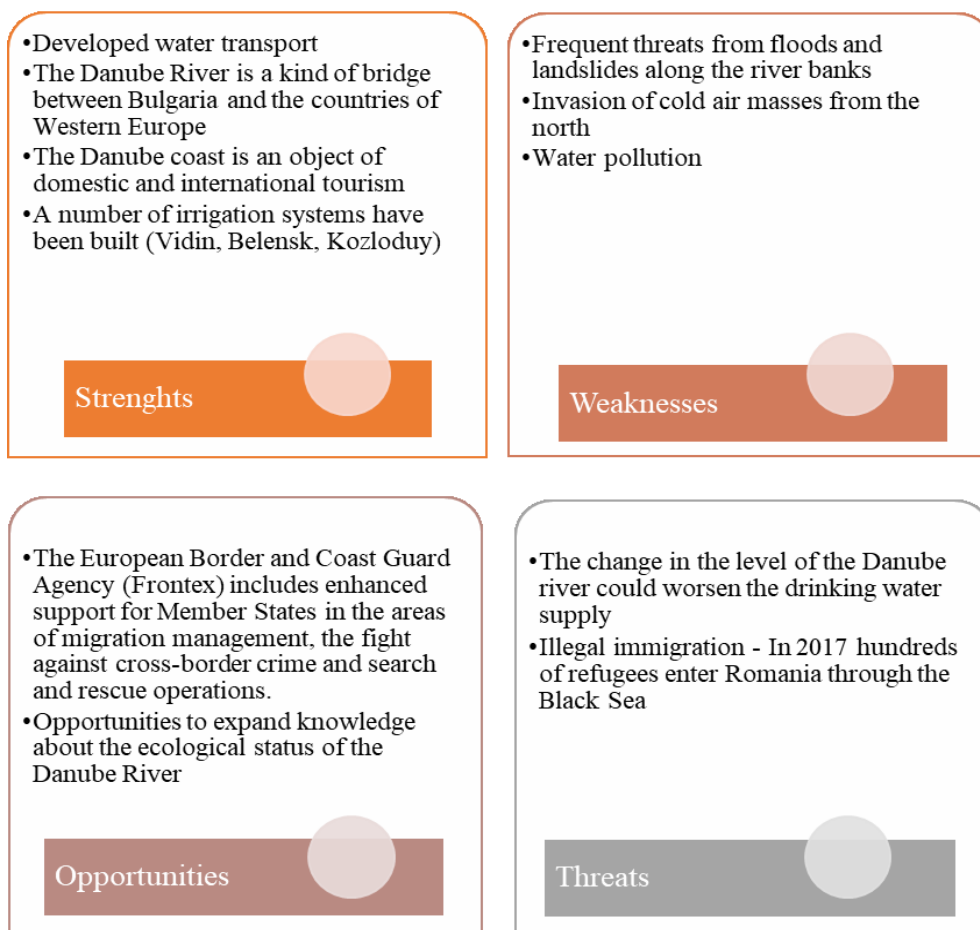


Figure 4. Results from SWOT - analysis of the northern border of Bulgaria

Another possibility for the formation of social and civic competence in students can be established in the topic „Settlements in Bulgaria“, studied in 10th grade [15]. The students were given the task to do a local history study of their homeland.

In the theoretical and methodological literature and in the practical activity local lore is a term that includes the activity of state institutions, public organizations and individuals for searching, collecting, processing and systematizing, studying and promoting publications, documents and material sources for a given administrative-territorial unit or area defined by natural, historical or economic boundaries [2].

The methodical requirements for realization of the set task are shown in Figure 5.

The first stage of completing the task is organization of the work and a preliminary preparation which includes determining the settlements and setting a deadline for the implementation of the task. When determining the settlements, the students are given the opportunity to choose their home settlement, the home settlement of their parents or grandparents. In this way a variety of settlements was researched and the interest of the students increased. The students were given fifteen days to prepare the local history study, and they had to allocate themselves for the each activity.

The second stage of the students' work is related to the research itself. Students should explore the location and nature of the settlement, when it originated, by whom and how it was founded and to follow its development. An important part of the study is the research of the population, its ethnic and racial affiliation, numbers and how they have changed over the years. In the second stage, students must also study the economic activity that is developing or that has developed in the village and the environmental consequences of human activity. Last but not least is the description of the problems of the settlement and the opportunities that exist to develop in the future. The third stage is the systematization of collected information. Students have the task to summarize the information from the study. During this stage, the data they have collected must be processed and the surveys, if any, analyzed. The last, fourth stage is the presentation of the local lore study. Students have to choose themselves how they will present their research – through a presentation, brochure, flyer or other.

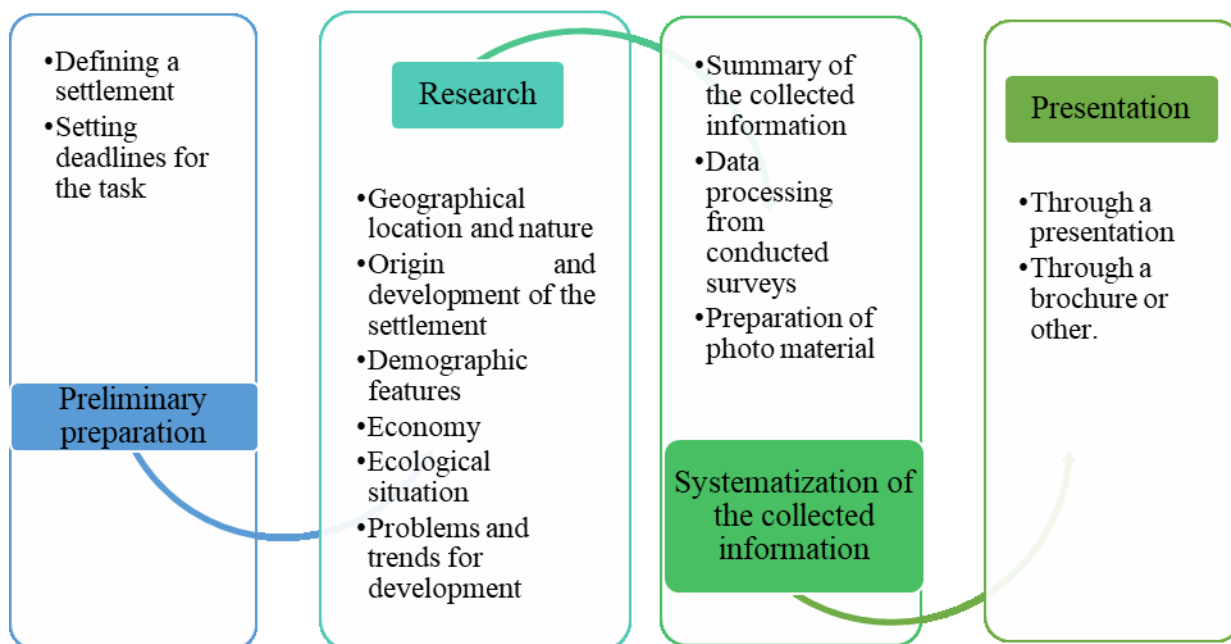


Figure 5. Requirements for preparing a local history study

During the preliminary preparation, namely the determination of the settlements, it became clear that there will be a great variety of studied settlements from northern, central and northeastern Bulgaria./Dobrich, Zlatar, Isparih, Kazanlak, Madara, Novi Pazar, Osmar, Pavlikeni, Pliska, Plovdiv , Smyadovo, Timarevo, Tutrakan, Hitrino, Shumen, Yasenkovo.

In a detailed analysis of the local lore research of the students, a thorough study of the nature, origin and development and demographic features of the settlement is observed. The students made an effort to present a rich photo material describing interesting, according to them, events and landmarks from the studied village. On figures from 6 to 12 could be seen a part of the photos gathered and used by the students in their local history study. Those photos illustrate different aspects of economical activity from historical point of view in the settlements subject to the study.



Figure 6. The fortress of Shumen



Figure 7. The center of the Pavlikeni in 1940



Figure 8. Market of Pavlikeni in the 30s of the XX century



Figure 9. The exhibition „Bee Mania“ in the city of Dobrich



Figure 10. The train station in the village of Hitрино before the explosion on 10.12.2016.



Figure 11. Development of grain production in the village of Zlatar in 1976



Figure 12. The school opening in the village of Timarevo in 1965

As already mentioned, part of the third stage is the systematization of the collected information and summarization of surveys conducted among the population.

Interesting results could be seen in the survey conducted among some residents of the Shumen in connection with the local history study of the city. After analyzing the survey, the following conclusions were made:

- Many people of the working age with professions such as medics, gastronomes and others from the tertiary sector would emigrate from Bulgaria and Shumen, but at a later stage 93% of them say that they would return to their hometown.
- Older people strongly believe that the economic situation in the city will change and will attract migrants in the future.
- People in Shumen believe that the food products in the big supermarkets are very expensive, which do not correspond to the income of the population.
- 68% of the people in Shumen participating in the survey indicated that one of the most serious problems of the population in the city is the high price of water and the frequent accidents that leave the population without water supply.
- 75% of the surveyed population of the city has indicated that the medical services in the city are of very low quality and are unsatisfactory for the population.

In the study for the town of Ispereh are described interesting stories told by locals about the history, development and life of the town.

According to the residents of Ispereh about the way of life in the town since 1955 to date:

- The city market was on a barter basis
- Eggs calibrators were used. The calibrators were used to determine the size of the eggs and therefore according to the size were determined their price in the form of other goods: a small egg = one soap, a large egg = half a kilogram of sugar.
- In the past, almost all residents of the city have raised animals / horses, goats, pigs, chickens, etc./, and today these people are units.
- Until 1970 there were no large industrial plants in Isparih
- Many of the villages around Isparih do not have schools, so the children from these villages are transported to the town of Isparih so they can study.
- According to the residents, it was possible to feed a large family with the received remuneration due to the fact that they produced food products in their households (cheese, yellow cheese, etc.).
- According to many of the town residents, life used to be calmer and "sweeter", but there were also disadvantages that there was a lack of a number of goods. "Now there are goods, but we don't have money, and in the time of socialism we had money but there was no variety of goods," Grandpa Peter said in a conversation with him

The results of the study of the native village give grounds to claim that through it a number of skills are developed in the students: to research, summarize, systematize, to make a forecast and to express an opinion on problems encountered.

Based on the results of the experiment, we come to the conclusion that in most of the students social and civic competences have been formed.

The described activities are types of methods included in the pedagogical experiment which represents only one part of it.

Conclusions

- The formation and development of the key competences is accomplished by applying a set of methods in geography and economics training process in the first high school stage.
- The formation of social and civic competences in students is increasingly important for them, as this key competence helps to ensure resilience and the ability to adapt adolescents to the changing world.
- The research of the home settlement contributes to better social inclusion in the social and economic life of the student in the country and creates an opportunity to develop critical thinking and skills for better argumentation, which are among the most important skills related to social and civic competence.
- The described methods by which it is possible to form social and civic competences and the results of the conducted experiment confirm the thesis that the school subject geography and economics creates many good opportunities for the formation of this group of competences.

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