

PROCEDURAL ASPECTS FOR THE EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT OF FREE CURRICULUM IN PRIMARY EDUCATION

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Abstract.

In the frame of the profound changes the Albanian society has been passing through, the school-as an educational institution, ought to respond to the social development. Education brings forth experiences and, at the same time, prepares the contingents of the new generations and makes them available to the future. Education is the main instrument by means of which society makes social changes possible. The social dynamics of the world we live in, amid the intensive resources of informations, brings changes in the curricula, aiming to make the subject curricula offer not only cognition but also possibility to individuals to participate in the development of the society. Social changes bring alterations both in the aims and the content of the education system. Changes in education should be closely considered as linked with the values they create. Education should not remain behind the social developments; otherwise, it will miss its values. In every field and domain where qualitative changes are intended, there is, firstly, need for cognition and as much objective estimation of the state and the level of the existing situation and the determinative factors, so that within existing possibilities, potentially not properly exploited or newly created, to intend, later on, reaching to higher quality levels. In reaching the educational quality, a great role is played by the curricula, school textbooks, and the teacher's pedagogical mastery. Regarding this, has been used of the methods which foster the students' creative and critical thinking relevant to the contemporary level of teaching. This study intends the genuine understanding of the free curricula management via the teaching models, and basing on this approach it propounds concrete, achievable and effective objectives for qualitative improvements in the ambit of the content.

Key words: *free curricula, management, teaching models, curricular projects, teaching modules.*

Introduction

Education constitutes an important factor determining the quality of an individual's life as well as the future of the society as a whole¹. In these terms, every educational and school system should be accountable to and vindicate a two-fold function:

- To secure the preservation, continuity and the transmission of the essential social values.
- To prepare capable individuals coping with and resolve the future challenges.

Since the curricula and the instructing process make up the base of the educational system and ensure the quality of the process thereof, the system improvements should commence precisely with the revisal of the curricula and the modernization of the educational process. A special importance takes the identification of the problems in education and the diagnostication of the educational situation to be followed by drafting policies for the measures to be taken².

The pre-university education curricula and the teaching and learning process have been and continue to remain objects of constant improvements. Curricula's functions extend both in width and depth and are displayed in many directions. They determine the fundamental goals of the educational levels and the content of the subjects as well as recommend ways, forms and new directions, estimate experiences, etc.

Teachers are agents of changes in education and contributors to the betterment of the society. They should consider curricula connected with the teaching and learning process, the students' experiences and interests and the content of the didactic materials and they should link curricula with teaching methodologies. This is associated with the teachers' academic freedom into designing the curricula, since they have a determinant role in the curricula planning, application and estimation, by evolving, estimating and applying it according to the class needs. Everything that teachers plan and develop with their students should be part of the curricula. It is solely by this way that education creates values, since it is an activity based on values.

The free curricula have a two-fold character: they are mandatory to be applied until the end of the school-year but even *flexible* in terms of planning, the ways the instructing classes have been organized as well as the methodical processes. The didactic materials selected by the teacher should serve to the accomplishment of the subject and sub-subject curriculum.

Every curriculum includes free instruction classes as a compound element, taking 10-15% of the total classes. The "free classes" have been termed as "the time allocation made available to the curricula to optimally complement the students' needs and interests, conform to the objectives of the official curricula"³. Designing the school curricula relevant to the evolvement of the free classes has been arranged by the directions of MASH⁴. These directions determine the division of the free classes as the following: 1/3 of the free classes are used to reinforce the acquired knowledge provided by the subject and 2/3 of them are used for curricular projects, teaching modules, subjects by selection, and various school activities as well as for the

¹ Fullan, M. (2002). *Forca e ndryshimit: depërtin në thellësitë e reformës arsimore*. Tiranë: cde.

² MASH. (2009, korrik). *mash.gov.al*. Retrieved shtator 20, 2012, from Strategjia Kombëtare për arsimin Parauniversitar. The acronym MASH stands for Ministry of Education and Science, in Albania.

³ IKS. (2009). *Drejtimi i shkollës*. Tiranë: cde.

⁴ MASH. (2007). *Udhëzim për zhvillimin e orëve të lira*. Tiranë: MASH.

assessment of the students' achievements in school level. This contributes directly into meeting one of the objectives of the "National Strategy of pre-University Education 2009-2013" regarding the evolvement of the teaching profession⁵ by attaining:

- A sufficient scale of the teachers' individual freedom in outlining the school curricula.
- Institutionalized accountability supporting the students' achievements, mainly via drafting and meeting objectives for those achievements for each chapter or subject line as well as for standardized external assessments.

Methodology

In order to attain the objective of this study and in addition to the bibliography, 402 questionnaires have been filled in and 12 interviews have been realized via focus groups with the rural and urban school teachers of the Tiranë, Durrës, Lushnje, Elbasan, and Pogradec districts. The questionnaires and the interviews consisted of both open-ended and closed-ended questions, so optimizing the content of the needed information obtained for the study. The data were statistically processed by means of the SPSS programme which provides effective alternatives for comparing measured parameters as well as into drawing results for qualitative improvements in the field of content.

Goal

The identification of the methods and techniques used by teachers into managing free curricula and increasing the effectiveness of teaching process by enhancing the students' creative and critical thinking to the relevant level of temporary education. Based on the analyses of the quantitative and qualitative indicators it is aimed at increasing awareness about the identification of the most useful models as well as about the arrangement of the rapports for the free curricula management.

Study Results.

The following is a graphical presentation of the statistical data obtained by the questionnaires:

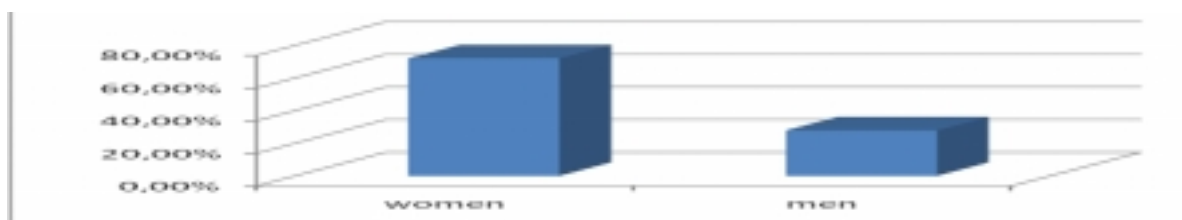


Chart 1: Percentage of the participants by gender:

The percentage of the questionnaire respondents, divided by gender, goes to the females favor, with 72% or approximately 2.5 times more than males.

⁵ MASH. (2009, korrik). *mash.gov.al*. Retrieved shtator 20, 2012, from Strategjia Kombëtare për arsimin Parauniversitar

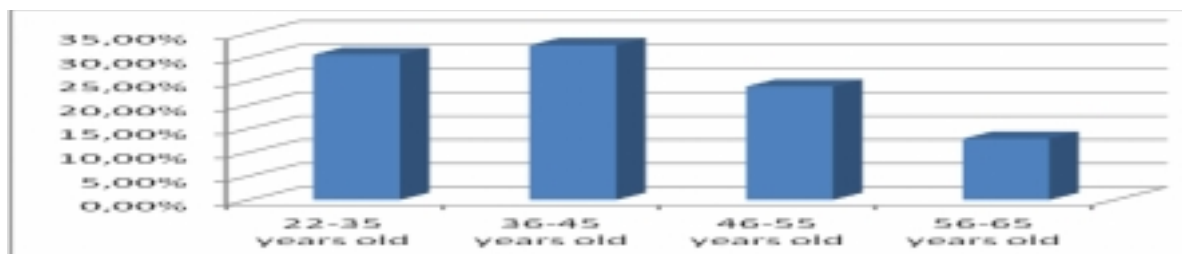


Chart 2: Sampling of the participants by age-group.

The study involved 22 – 65 year-old teachers, respectively the ages when they are entitled the right to exercise their profession, right after their graduation, and when they end their career and are retired, conform to the laws in force. For comparison reasons, the participants were divided into four age-groups. As seen in the chart, 36-45 age-group teachers take the greatest percentage, with 32.6%, whereas those of group-age 56-65 years old, take the least percentage, with 12.9 % of the participants.

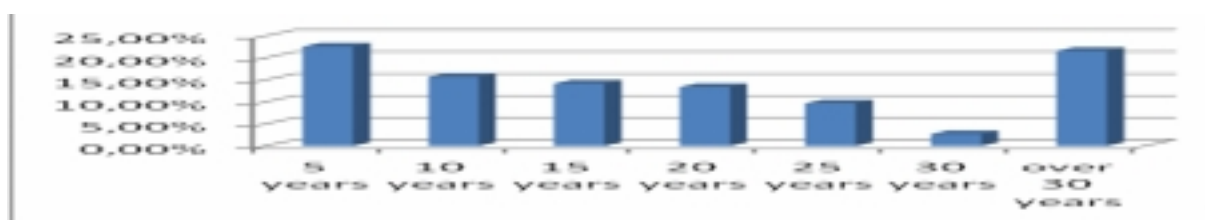


Chart 3: Participants' length of service in education.

Sampling according to the length of service in education is connected with the scale of teachers' qualifications obtained during their employment in education. It results that there is a domination of the young teachers in education since those with up to 5 years experience, take 22.6%, to be followed by teachers with over 30 years length of service, taking 21.5%. The least percentage is for teachers with up to 30 years of service length, taking 2.7% of the participants.

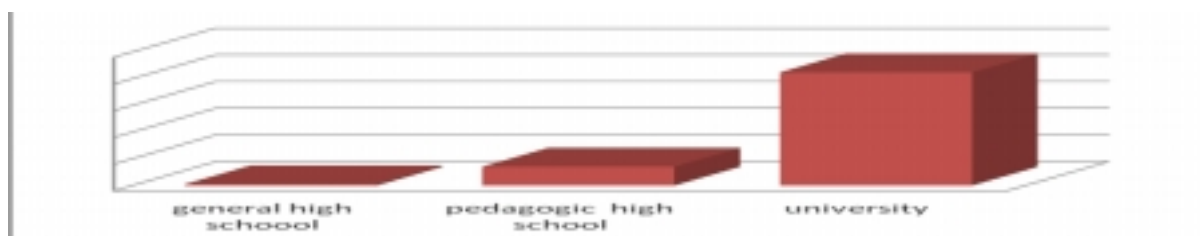


Chart 4: Participants' education according to the cycle of education system they perform.

As the chart reveals, the educational level of the participants in both education cycles is obviously dominated by those with higher education. For the elementary school teachers the percentage of teachers with university education amounts to 69.7%, whereas for those who teach in the 9-year school system it goes up to 95.3%. The rest of the teachers in the elementary schools have secondary pedagogical education, and take 30.3%. There are no teachers with secondary education teaching in the elementary school system. The teachers in the 9-year school

system having secondary pedagogical education take 3% whereas 1.7% of them have comprehensive secondary education.

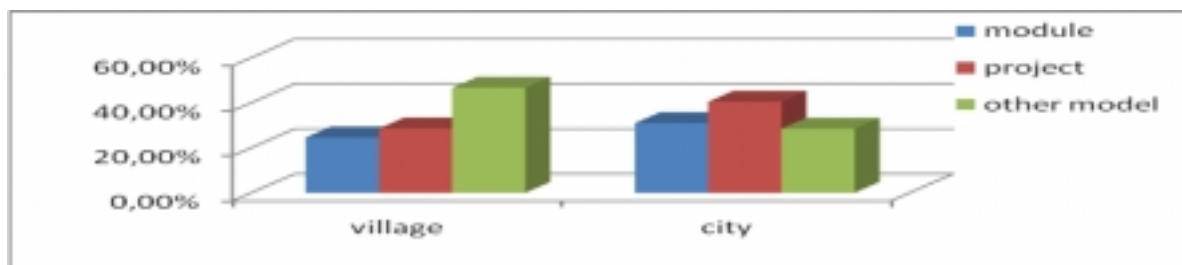


Chart 5: Teaching models used by teachers in their respective workplaces.

There is an obvious division regarding the teaching models the teachers use during the accomplishment of the 2/3 of the free classes in their respective workplaces. Rural area teachers use different teaching models, including: subjects by selection, various school activities, assessment of the students' achievements at school level, etc. Urban area teachers include working with curricular projects during the accomplishment of the free classes.



Chart 6: The teaching models used in the course of the teaching process.

In terms of the teaching models used by the teachers of both school cycles during the accomplishment of the 2/3 of the free classes, still the other teaching models are dominating going to 36% in the elementary education and 39% in the 9-year educational cycle. The class work with curricular projects is used by the 31% of the teachers of the elementary education and 37% of the teachers in the 9-year school cycle. In addition, the work with teaching models is used by 33% of the elementary school teachers and 24.3% of the 9-year school cycle teachers.

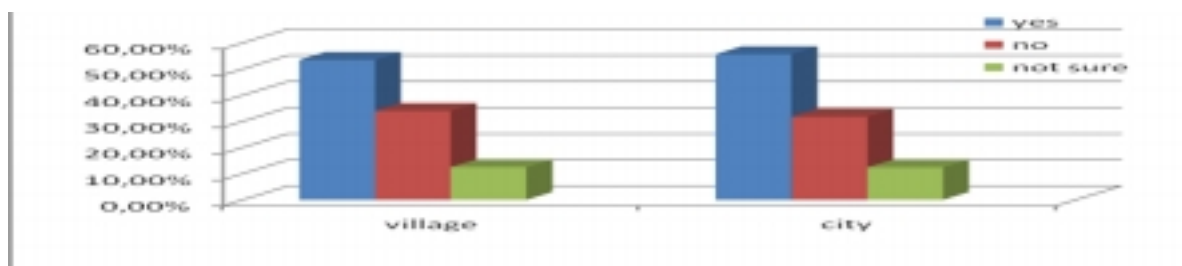


Chart 7 : Changes in the rapport of the free classes by workplace.

The changes in the rapport of the free classes are preferably seen by the teachers as connected with their workplace, with a percentage which goes up to 53.5% for the teachers of the rural areas and to 55.7% for the urban area teachers. In addition, 34% of the rural areas teachers and 31% of the urban areas teachers do not prefer to change the rapport. The rest are uncertain.

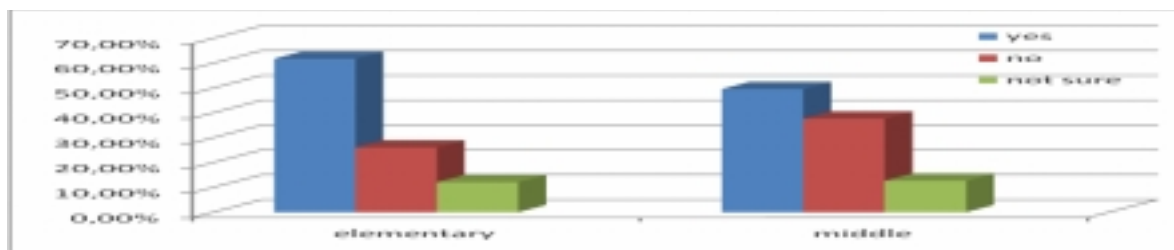


Chart 8: Changes in the rapport of the free classes according to the educational system the teachers perform.

Teachers of both educational cycles provide unified responses regarding their requests to change the rapport of the free classes' accomplishments. Obvious interest for these changes show the elementary school teachers with 61.8% whereas the 9-year education cycle teachers take about 50%. Against these changes are 26% of the elementary school teachers and 37.7% of the 9-year cycle teachers. The rest show to be uncertain.

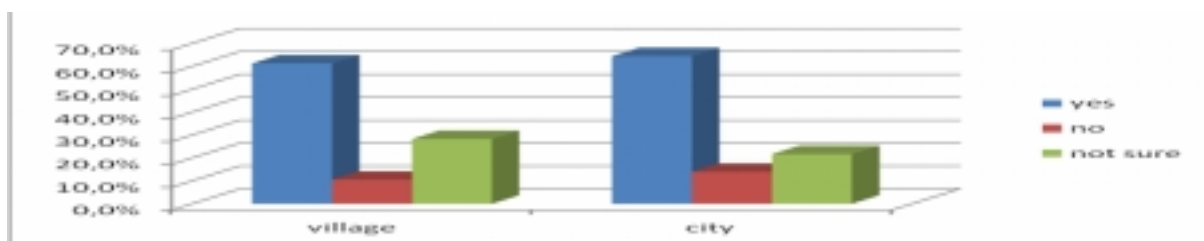


Chart 9: Ratio of awareness about the module procedure steps by workplace.

When asked about their awareness about subject modules procedure steps it resulted that 61.3% of the teachers in the rural area schools and 64.4% of the urban area school teachers are aware of procedure steps. In addition, 28% of the rural area school teachers and 22% of the urban area school teachers are uncertain. The rest are not aware of the subject module procedure steps.

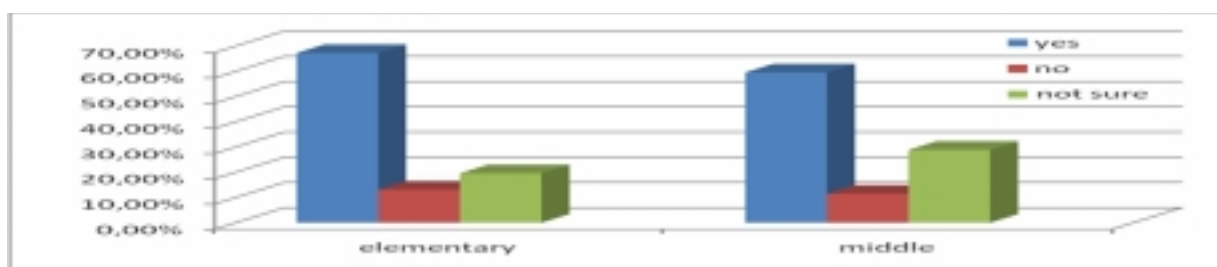


Chart 10: Ratio of awareness about the module procedure steps by the cycle of education the teachers perform.

The chart reveals that 67.3% of the teachers in the elementary education cycle and 59.6% of the teachers teaching in the 9-year educational cycle are aware of module procedure steps by type of education in which they perform whereas for both cycles 11% and 13% are not aware of them. The rest of the teachers are uncertain.

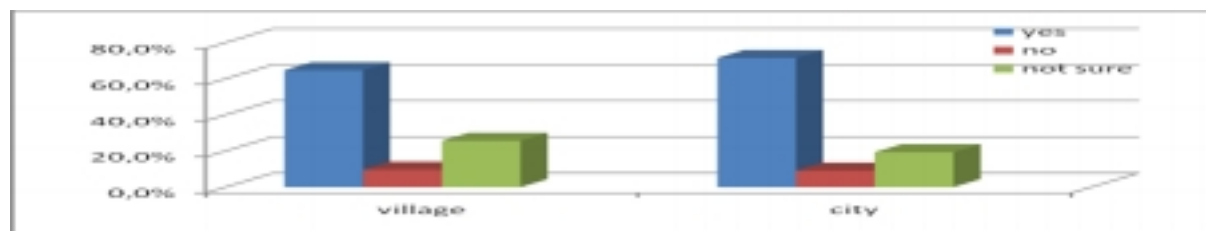


Chart 11: Ratio of awareness about the procedure steps with projects by workplace.

The chart shows that 64.7% of the teachers in the rural area schools 71.5% of the teachers in the urban area schools state that they are aware of the procedure steps with projects. Part of those who are not certain goes to 25.7% of the teachers in rural area schools and 19.4% of the teachers in the urban area schools. The rest of the teachers state they are not aware of the procedure steps with curricular projects.

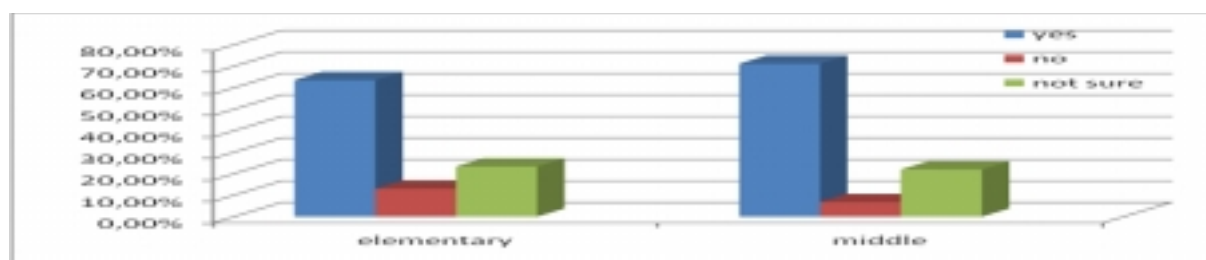


Chart 12: Ratio of awareness about the procedure steps with projects by the cycle of education the teachers perform.

It results that 63.6% of the teachers in the elementary education and 71.2% of those in the 9-year education cycle, are aware of the procedure steps with curricular projects. The awareness percentage for modules and projects is almost the same regarding the type of the education in which they perform: both in the rural and the urban areas. The rest of the teachers who are not certain the percentage amounts to 23.4% for the teachers of the elementary education cycle and 22% of the teachers in the 9-year educational cycle. The rest of the respondents are not aware of the procedure steps with curricular projects.

Discourse

Teachers' education and their continuous qualification have rightly been considered as a fundamental requirement serving to increase the quality of the teaching process.

In order to avoid biased data, a special attention was paid to maintaining proper rapport in the selection of the respondents in two aspects: rapport *between the education cycles*, the elementary cycle and the 9-year cycle and *the workplace* in which the participants perform, in the respective rural and urban areas where the study took place. The domination of the females towards males derives from the fact that in these education levels the male-teachers are less than females, especially in the elementary education cycle.

During the interviews with the focus groups there were discussions about the decreases in the number of teachers belonging to the 55-65 age-group. The decrease derives from the replacement of the senior teachers with younger ones with higher education. This determines the domination of the young ages with 5 length-in-service years in the field of teaching. In addition, the

domination of the age-group with 30 years teaching experience is linked with the age-groups employed right after the completion of the secondary pedagogical or general education and later on have got higher school graduation by the part-time system, while not interrupting their work as teachers.

The measurement parameters of the study were linked with the teaching process while focusing onto the techniques and methods teachers use in the accomplishment of the free curricula. The processing of the measured parameters and variables revealed that teachers require a change into the rapport of the division of the free classes on the argument that:

- The quantity of the free classes for reinforcing the subject, as determined by the “Guidelines for the evolvement of the free classes at school”, and seizing 1/3 of them, is insufficient.
- There are instructing topics which need a greater number of classes to complement them than the ones planned in the curriculum for the respective chapter and line.
- The level of students’ acquisition and achievements for the same teaching topic is not the same for all the parallel classes which impacts the time available for complementing and accomplishing the subject objectives.

The preference to use other teaching models in the process of accomplishing free classes, conform the MASH guidelines, suchlike: subjects by selection, different school activities and assessment of the students’ achievements at school level, is based on the following arguments:

- ❖ Teachers of the elementary education state: “It is difficult to work with projects with the children of this age”, especially for the I-III classes.
- ❖ The difficulty to raise sufficient funds for the realization of the broad-topic curricular projects.
- ❖ Teachers in the 9-year education system encounter difficulties into involving many subjects at the same time with the curricular projects, because of the number of the free classes available and the topics consecution.
- ❖ Planning classes for the assessment of students’ achievements at school level, by using the free classes available, is very necessary.

The processing of the data revealed that teachers fail to rightly specify steps for the accomplishment of the class work with curricular and subject projects. This derives from the lack of the necessary methodical information for the teaching models and procedures.

Conclusions:

During the analysis of this study results it is seen that:

- ❖ It is asked to be changed the rapport of free classes’ hours realization.
- ❖ The class work with curricular projects is used by teachers in the 9-year school cycle.
- ❖ The work with teaching modules is used by elementary school teachers.
- ❖ Most of the teachers fail to rightly specify the steps for the accomplishment of the class work with curricular projects and subject modules.

Recommendations:

- 📌 Changing the free classes accomplishment rapport in order to fulfill the students’ needs and interests and accomplish the teaching objectives relevant to the contemporary teaching level.
- 📌 Including more subjects in the topics and procedures of the curricular projects.

- ✚ Effective functioning of the curricula and subject teams and departments on school scale and among schools.
- ✚ Continuous and comprehensive training for teachers with curricula relevant to the new teaching and learning methodologies.
- ✚ Drafting and publishing packets of the methodical materials for the evolvement of the curricular projects and teaching modules for different levels of schooling prepared by IZHA and institutions of higher education.

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