

SOME DISCREPANCIES OF THE PACKAGE OF BASIC EDUCATION CURRICULUM WITH THE EDUCATION LAW

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Abstract

The paper presents some discrepancies of the basic education curriculum package with the Law no. 69/2012 "On the pre-university education in the Republic of Albania". According to the research and documents published by the Institute for the Development of Education (IDE) and reports of the Minister of Education and Science in the consultation meetings, the hypothesis is formulated with particular reference to inconsistency between the spirit and articles of the law and the definitions and guidelines of the curricular documents. This discrepancy will affect the products of the curriculum development package (guidance and clarification regarding education programs, preparation of textbooks, teachers' textbooks, etc.) and the results of the package implementation in school context. For data collection, analysis and formulation of recommendations, the study uses the meanings and definitions of the Law no. 69/2012 "On Secondary Education in the Republic of Albania", as well as data from contemporary research in the curricular field. The study is organized in three sections. **The first section** reflects the new philosophy and basic features of pre-university education curriculum stemming from educational law. **The second section** summarizes the results of comparative analysis and reveals some inconsistencies between the requirements of the law of pre-university education and the curriculum documents package. **The third section** summarizes the conclusions and recommendations of the study. The study proves that education law definitions of competence development cannot be satisfied, because this development is incompatible with the pedagogy by objectives, which is used as a technique for the development of new educational programs. This paper is accompanied by explanatory notes and literature sources.

Key words: *education law, curriculum, key competencies, pedagogy by objectives, competence-based approach.*

1. Education law and breaking the frames

Education *is a basic right of* all children, but it is not easy to decide what the children must learn, what all will learn, and what some of them can learn (depending on their interests and circumstances), as it is difficult to try to reconcile our pedagogical tradition and the needs of education system with contemporary curriculum trends: the competency-based curriculum. However, we must choose what is most important for children's development, for the future and the well-being of our society, recognizing that, in a rapidly changing world, the selection process is the challenge which lies ahead.

Many of the things that we learn are eternal. Basic skills as writing, reading and computation have always been essential to the development of humanity, and their vital importance continues to grow with the growth of economy and communication. Recognizing this, the new curriculum considers them as key competencies and emphasizes their development by the students. However, in this world, where the pace of change is accelerating, students face the need to develop educational technology, social awareness, etc., systematically.

The adaptation and the balance of these fundamental aspects have urged many educational systems in the world to find themselves at a turning point in their history and to begin reshaping the curriculum. Our pre-university education system stands in this process, which is reforming the curriculum of basic education, as defined in the Law no. 69/2012 "On pre-university education in the Republic of Albania" (hereinafter: the education law). This important document serves as a benchmark to assess achievements and to address the solutions of the many problems. Thus, through the general principles for the development and implementation of the curriculum, the educational law paves the way for the transition from the subject knowledge-based curriculum to the new curriculum that addresses the competencies as one of the key outcomes of learning and training: "*the curriculum is developed and implemented based on the core competencies of students*", (article 44/3). This article defines some of the key features of the new curriculum: "***the curriculum is developed as a whole for all levels of education***, with regard to formation of values education, skills and core concepts, principles of teaching, learning and assessment of students' attainments; the curriculum is consistent with the physical, mental, social, ethical development of the students and their individual features of learning; according to educational levels and classes, the curriculum will be designed and developed ***on the basis of pre-university curriculum framework***. Moreover, the education law defines eight key competencies: 1) *communication in the mother tongue*; 2) *communication in foreign languages*; 3) *mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology*; 4) *digital competence*; 5) *lifelong learning competence*; 6) *social and civic competences*; 7) *competence of the initiative and entrepreneurship*; 8) *cultural competence and expression* ", (article 13).^[1] [Emphasis, hereinafter the authors.]

Having designed the basic features of the new curriculum, the educational law establishes curriculum reform process in the contemporary trend. The development of competence is now the daily subject of education in many countries such as USA, Canada, UK (England), Japan, Spain, Germany, Finland, Czech Republic, Norway^[2], Kosovo^[3] and, finally, Iraq.^[4] To remove the focus from codified ***knowledge*** in educational programs to ***competences***, and to use competence as the foundation of curriculum organization,^[5] this means, of course, to undo habits and to doubt about things that seemed clear so far.

This change is taken into account by Jonnaert, UNESCO Chair holder in Curriculum Development/Canada, when he claims that *“the world of education, in the context of curriculum reform, is currently living several breakings of frames. The transition from the pedagogy by objectives to the logic of the competence is one of these. The transition from the behavioural perspective to constructivism or social constructivism; the gradual transformation of teaching practices towards more participatory approaches; the search for the meaning of learning rather than the teaching of the de-contextualized content, are the other examples of broken frames. The reforms that combine several of these ruptures are complex, entailing major changes at different levels of education systems. It is indispensable that these ruptures of frameworks are unambiguous. Indeed, only the unequivocal curricular choices allow building the consistency of education systems and their training programs, but also the consistency of the pedagogical practices of teachers and, as a corollary, the consistency of the learning process. The choices of the paradigms and concepts, which serve as foundations of the curriculum frameworks, should not allow leaving behind shadows that taint the reform”*.^[6]

The contemporary reforms of the curricula are part of the many changes that confront schools today. According to UNESCO, the four pillars of the contemporary reforms are:

- Logic of the skill (competence - authors),
- Socio-constructivist perspective,
- Focus on learners,
- Increased emphasis on training situations.^[7]

2. Data analysis

The documents published by MoES and Institute of Education Development (IED) are used as the main sources for data collection. The research concludes that:

A. There are inconsistencies in the definition of basic concepts

a) The definition of the basic concept "curriculum" is not coherent. It is defined either as *"the set of activities organized by the educational institution to provide specific training to students"*^[8], or as *"a set of documents as the curriculum framework, school plan, curriculum, text and other materials a subject or area of learning and the overall activities of organized learning environment, which serve to provide a certain amount of training to learn them"*.^[9] Likewise, the key concept "basic competence" is defined once as *"knowledge, skills and attitudes"*^[10], and later as *"the combination of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values needed by students for personal development, active citizenship, social inclusion and employment"*.^[11] We note meanwhile that the term "knowledge" expresses two different concepts according to the constructivism theory.^[12]

b) The definition of the key concept "curriculum framework" is not coherent; it is defined sometimes as *"the core document of the curriculum describing its general goals, core competencies, skills and cross-cutting themes of learning, goals of the learning areas and general principles of the process of teaching-learning and student assessment"*^[13], or as *"the core curriculum document, describing its general goals, core competencies, expected outcomes for students in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes at the end of basic education and secondary education, learning field goals and general principles of teaching and learning process and student assessment"*.^[14]

c) The elaboration of the key concept of "core competence" is replaced with the elaboration of the concept of "cross-curricular ability". Furthermore, the significant differences found in the formulations of cross-curricular ability, discussed in the curriculum framework of high school and the pre-university education curriculum framework.^[15]

B. Curriculum Package does not clearly reflect the evolution that has occurred in the last decade in learning theories and curriculum theories

Although the education law defines the notion of competence as one of the main learning outcomes, and for the minister of education and science "*the curriculum philosophy, plans and its educational programs aimed at developing of the eight key competences and the competences knowledge society based in the education law*"^[16], the curriculum packages do not support this goal.

The competencies-based approaches (CBAs) are based on the other theories of learning. CBAs harmonize four vectors that complement and feed each other: a) the reference to constructivism and socio-constructivism, b) the understandable situations where a person acts c) understanding what the person realizes on the situation d) the strategies that support the development of competencies.^[17] Harmonization of these vectors bases the learning strategies, not on the subject contents codified in educational programs, fragmented and listed one after the other, but in situations understood by students (enhanced context strategies), which have a positive impact on the students achievements. This statement is confirmed by contemporary research, such as the meta-analysis of Schroeder & colleagues.^[18] Thus, CBAs are "the opposite" of the Pedagogy by Objective (PBO).^[19] In these conditions, the challenge for the development of competencies, that the reform of basic education curriculum must face, is shaped as the shift from PBO.

Meanwhile, the behaviourism continues to strongly influence on the education. This is expressed in the concept of learning (e.g. transmission models, algorithmic model, programmed instructions), in the strategies for developing and implementing the educational projects/ programs (definition of objectives, content structuring, development of the taxonomies and the evaluation), and in the teachers preparation etc. The behaviourist theory of learning is based on ontological hypothesis, according to which the knowledge about the reality is independent from the subject who knows (ontological reality). It exists before the subject's efforts to learn; it exists before him. *Knowledge* represents a part of the reality that it depicts. In this manner, knowledge is divided into a series of scientific disciplines, located close to each other, which describe the reality. Knowledge does not depend on the subject it recognizes, as it does not depend on the value of "the objective truth".

PBO, which refers to behaviourism, has a dual role: first as *a pedagogical approach* and second as *a technique of designing educational programs*. Pedagogical approach and techniques of design are two different things that do not automatically link between them.^[20]

As a pedagogical approach, the foundations of PBO were laid by Tyler^[21] and Bloom^[22], and were developed during the 60s - 80s by a group of researchers as Mager^[23], Huberman^[24] etc. As such, the PBO means the scientific and rational organization of the education, so that the people adapt to the needs and values of society turned into targets. It emphasizes the hierarchical organization of the decontextualized disciplinary contents (e.g., operations with fractions, syntax rules, etc.).

As a pedagogical approach, PMO does not agree with the methods that take into account the mental processes of reasoning and the impact of the social environment, for which learning is much more than the association of the stimulus with the observable behaviour. Besides *observable behaviour*, PMO is linked with two others key concepts: *the general objective* and *specific objective*.

PMO is an authoritarian approach. The teacher's role is the reproduction of the content planned in the programs. The approach is based on the textbook; teaching methods are based on memory and mainly aimed at mastering the facts and skills development. Measurements of the achievements made by standard tests based on mastery of subject content. PBO sees curriculum as a written document that aims at meeting the goals, as something solid that consists of the subject content.

As a technique of designing educational programs, PBO organizes the *subject content* sequentially and *the tasks* for their acquisition rank, going from the simple tasks to the problem solving. The technique is more complex. A program designer must fully own the scientific discipline, converting its subject content, identifying the most appropriate taxonomic level for each subject. The construction of the particular methodology is complex and rigid. In many educational programs, this methodology is not respected exactly.

The logic of the development of educational programs under the PBO is based on descriptions of behaviour, relatively well -defined, developed by students when they face the defined subject content. To describe these objectives a detailed analysis of the subject content is required. For this purpose, the program makers use the mathematical analysis (Gilbert, 1962) ^[25], with the help of which the complex contents are disintegrated / analysed step by step into even more simple lessons. After this, the behaviours that fit these units teaching content are required. Most often, the operative objectives on the educational curriculum are reduced in a verb and a direct object that express certain content.

Even today, the many educational programs are based on the PMO and its development over the years, referring to the logic of R. Tyler, expressed through four questions:

1. *What educational purposes sought to be achieved?*
2. *What educational experiences can be provided to achieve these goals?*
3. *How to effectively organize these educational experiences?*
4. *How can I determine if these goals are achieved?* ^[26]

Table 1 summarizes some of the learning parameters by PBO's logic.

Tab.1. Parameters of learning according to PBO ^[27]

PARAMETERS OF LEARNING	PBO
I. Input	Decontextualized contents subject, broken down into the micro-topics and organized sequentially from the simple to the complex.
II. Process	An observable behaviour of the learner based on the transmission of the content of the discipline by the teacher; the learner is passive and reproduces the decontextualized content transmitted by the teacher.
III. Results	Disciplinary contents transmitted by the teacher, reproduced and presented by learners.

IV. Nature of contents	The decontextualized content transmitted by teachers, reproduced and presented by the students.
V. Expectations / Standard of Learning	The decontextualized contents of the disciplines, to reproduce at the end of training.
VI. Reference epistemological	Refers exclusively to the behaviourism.

Thus, the PBO is based on behaviourism and combines subject content, split into teaching topics. Therefore, the educational programs, oriented by the PMO's logic, are based on behaviourism and are also disciplinary-based. [28]

Such features distinguish the new draft-programs published by the IED, in the context of the reform of the basic education. Illustration of this finding is made by examining the draft program of the course "Geography 7-9", (2012). [29] The logic, according to which this program is built, is also used for compiling other draft-programs.

A. It can be easily to ascertain that the ways of conceiving the concept of "objective" is consistent with the behaviourist concept of R. Tyler:

- *"Through an objective, the **learning content** that the student should learn is informed. For example, the objective: 'Students describe the shape of the Earth, its size and importance' is understood as if the lesson should treat the shape of the Earth, its size and its significance.*
- *The objective also provides information on the **teaching method**. For example, with the following objective: 'Students discuss the causes of air pollution', a teacher understands that and will apply the method of discussion for the development of the learning content according to the causes of air pollution.*
- *The objective informs about the planning and **evaluation of learning**. Let us elaborate this target in the example: 'Pupils show on the map the regions with the highest density and the lowest population'. This objective requires us to appreciate the attainment not in writing, but in assigning the learner a task map, through which he shows the regions with the highest density and the lowest population". (p. 7)*

B. The analysis of the core elements of the program study's structure proves that the logic of this technique is based on the behaviourism and is also disciplinary-based. To prove this, let's refer to tab. 1, where the learning parameters according to PBO are presented, and on tab. 2, where the content of the main elements of the program structure "Geography 7-9", 2012 is presented.

Tab.2. Study programme structure "Geography 7-9", 2012

RUBRICS	CONTENT
1. General 1.1. Users of the program 1.2. The organization and the structure of the program	- The object of subject content, its mission, conceptual loads etc. - Teachers, textbook writers, etc. - The program is organized based on 5 lines.
2. The goals of the course	1. To gain insight into the spatial, temporal and structural patterns of the geographical phenomena, on the physical and human environment, and understand that these patterns change over time. ...

	9. To demonstrate the attitudes of ethical-social behaviour in individual work and team work.		
3. Demand for the program application 3.1. Objectives of the program 3.2. Number of the teaching hours 3.3. Knowledge Processing	- Learning objectives describe the content of educational programs (knowledge, skills, attitudes), which will be acquired by students in given line or in thematic groups of content.		
4. Integration and the connection between subjects 4.1. Integration and connections in the curriculum areas 4.2. Integration and links with other areas	Recommendations on the possibility of connecting geography with the subject within the learning's area as history, citizenship and out of the field as the natural sciences are offered.		
5. Teaching methodologies 5.1. Teaching materials	The program provides guidance on the types of methods and teaching materials.		
6. Methods of assessment	The program provides guidance on the types and methods of assessment.		
7. Objectives along the lines, by grades	This section of the program presents five lines: <i>Description of Line 1:</i> This line introduces students to the science of Geography. They learn to use five basic concepts of geography (location / place, environment, region, interaction, development) in their research. The line aims at developing geographical basic research skills of the student, through recognition and initial elements using scientific research methods, and geographic tools used to fulfil it. Also, this line aims to raising curiosity and interest of the student in careers related to this field of study. <i>Description of Line 2:</i> ...		
	Geographic tools and location		
	Line/ Thematic block	Objectives	Main terms / concepts
Introduction to geography (9 hours)	Students should be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to describe geography as a science and its object of study; • to show the importance of studying geography; • ... 	-Science of geography -Five themes of geography (location / place, environment, region, interaction / relationship -...	

I. Input: Decontextualizing subject contents, split into micro-topics and organized sequentially, from the simple to the complex. (tab. 1)

a) The Geography program study examines the decontextualized geographic knowledge, such as: hydrosphere, geographic coordinates, solstice, etc., by structuring them in lines and thematic blocks. *"The object of the Geography program study for 7th grade, the 8th and 9th, is structured in line and thematic blocks, coming one after the other"*, (p. 8).

b) *"Through an objective we are informed about the **content of learning** that the student should adopt. For example, the objective: "Students describe the shape of the Earth, its size and importance" we understand that in the lesson should be treated the form of the Earth, its size and significance* (p. 7). On the other hand, referring to the objectives along the lines of section 7, in tab. 2, all learning contents correspond to the geographical knowledge that are codified in the

respective program. Further, "*The Geography program for Grades 7-8-9 conducted in 70 annual hours / each class. 60 -70% of the teaching time is devoted to the new knowledge, versus 30-40% devoted to the knowledge processing*", (p. 8).

c) According to this program, "*the objectives of the program describe the learning content (knowledge, skills, attitudes), which will be acquired by pupils in a given line or a thematic group of the content*", (p. 7). This program's orientation does not respect the distinction between the **subject geographical knowledge** codified in the program (the form of earth, its size etc.), and the **knowledge, skills and attitudes** that the student builds, after this knowledge is discussed. In these conditions, the orientation of the point **b** is inconsistent with the orientation of the point **c**. The first identifies the learning content with the geographic knowledge, while the second identifies the learning content with the elements of the cognitive and affective domains (knowledge, skills, and attitudes). Hence, does not the term "learning content" express two different concepts?

II. Process: The process of learning, in the context of the PBO, means "observable student behaviour based on the transmission of the content of discipline by the teacher; the learner is passive and reproduces the decontextualized content transmitted by the teacher", (tab. 1).

On page 9, this program guides:

"*Particularly in knowledge processing the special time should be devoted to **the cultivation of:***

- *the generic skills such as the communication ability, the information's management, the problem solutions, and the critical and creative thinking;*
- *the subject-specific skills, developed through working with the map, working with statistical data, graphs etc.;*
- *the formation of attitudes, as social and ethical attitude when working in small groups of students "*, (p. 9).

III. Results: Disciplinary content transmitted by the teacher, reproduced and presented by the learner. To this end, point **b** & point **c** above give information.

IV. Nature of contents: The decontextualized content transmitted by teachers, reproduced and presented by students, (tab. 1). Here is a summary of what the program sets: "*The content of "Geography 7-9" is organized as follows: the 7th grade, the content of the course is focused mainly on the knowledge of science of geography [...]; the 8th grade, the main program objective is to study Geography Regional geography of the world [...]; the 9th grade deals with all Albanian territories: Republic of Albania, Republic of Kosovo, Albanian territories to Serbia, Macedonia, Montenegro and Greece by the regional perspective*" (p. 5-6). This makes the program logic to elaborate guidelines about 2.5 pages geographical knowledge integration with other areas of knowledge, but offers no recommendation for the development of generic competencies and specific subject competencies.

In these conditions, our schools will still continue to experience difficulties in their attempts to be free from the clutches of behaviourism and pedagogical models inspired by it. Through fragmentation of the contents in micro-topics, and their treatment after the model "theoretical training - practical application", through subject contents secession from concrete or specific contexts (de-contextualized knowledge presented in educational programs) resulting in students' passive attitudes and in the memorization without understanding the meaning, etc., the reformed programs will create "dark areas" identical to those of the PMO, which inspired by the behaviourism, failed to enlighten them.

3. Conclusions and recommendations

Based on research findings, we conclude that:

1. Although the university education law puts students at the centre of learning process and supports personal choices, and based on the curriculum on the competence, **the drafts of the curriculum package documents do not meet the requirements of the educational law that help the transition from the subject-based curricula to the competence-based curriculum.**

2. Curriculum package refers to the behaviourism, which cannot serve as an epistemological reference for the competence-based approaches.

3. In the draft curriculum documents there are encountered formulations that do not express clearly or accurately the message, because there is a lack of a consensual curriculum theory (including professional vocabulary).

These findings suggest that the development of the curriculum package should be improved or clarified:

a) The dialectical link between the new educational philosophy and the curricular elements;

b) The theory and the practices on the design and implementation of competency-based curriculum: reconstruction of the curriculum model, development of educational goals and objectives, renovation of teaching, etc.

c) Contemporary understandings on the role of student, learning process, subject content and learning situations: an active learning model, the renewal of curricular tools, new evaluation system, etc.

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