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Natka JANKOVA¹

THE NEED FOR NEW REFORMED EDUCATION AS AN IMPORTANT FACTOR FOR EASIER EU INTEGRATION

Abstract: At the beginning of the 21th century, the countries of the West Balkan are challenged to follow the contemporary societies where education is fundamental for creating a quality professional staff that would be the basis of the society. Educators and policy makers in West Europe fail to follow the contemporary trends of education and this makes the adverse circumstance.

The need for changing the type of education within the countries of the Western Balkans in order to follow the dynamic change of the society leaves the challenges they need to face in order to succeed within the European Union and on the global level as well. In order to achieve that, what is needed before is resolving the problems that limit the development of these countries. This process is delayed because of the conflicts of priorities in the political and skilled structures of the governments that decide about the priorities of the taken activities, the slow economic growth, the lack of resources and the limited capacity of personal staff and their skilled experience.

This paper deals with all the above mentioned problems in the countries of the Western Balkans and gives a possible solution of them including the projects for lifelong learning, changes and innovations in secondary and university education curricula and of course, studying languages and intercultural communication in order to avoid stereotyping, coming out of common classrooms and getting closer to more sophisticated tools and approach towards successful integration in the modern society.

Key words: education, integration, solutions, communicative competence, studying languages, intercultural communication

Introduction

At the beginning of the 21 century, the countries of the West Balkan are challenged to follow the contemporary societies where the education is fundamental for creating a qualified professional staff that would be the basis

¹ Natka Jankova, M.A. FON University, Skopje, Macedonia.

of the society. Educators and policy makers in West Europe fail to follow the contemporary trends of education and this makes the adverse circumstance. The need for changing the type of education within the countries of the West Balkan to follow the dynamic change of the society brings the challenges they need to face in order to succeed within the European Union and on global level as well. In order to achieve that, what is needed before, is resolving the problems that limit the development of these countries. The delay of this process is because of the conflicts of priorities in the political and skilled structures of the governments that decide about those priorities of the taken activities, the slow economic growth, the lack of resources and the limited capacity of personal staff and their skilled experience.

Seen from the perspective of the market-based economy of these surroundings and the fast change of the global economy, the system of high skilled education in the countries of West Balkan is considered as old-fashioned and seriously insufficiently financed. At the same time there is a huge tension within the framework of the system which is about to change and should fulfil the needs of the different social groups or clients and should be applicable to the political system which turns to be decentralized and with wider representative form of governing. The system of skilled education and training has a potential to bring economical realization of the countries in the West Balkan. As the biggest component of the state system, the education serves as a tool for better future to many young people and a better professional career.

Based on analysis done by visiting different schools on the Balkan, the results show that the skilled education is on a low level starting from its curricula content to the pedagogical perspective. No matter the obstacles, the countries from West Balkan have to improve the human resources base remained from the socialistic system into imposing formal sectors for employment. The changes should be in the direction of the type of education and training youths on different levels. The questions about quality, equality and efficiency (internal and external) ask for additional efforts and improvements.

Pre-school and high school education problems with Roma children

The priority that should be imposed at this moment from the Governments of this region is to make a research of the conditions in this area for the pre-school education, especially for the children who would benefit from the very beginning. In this category are the children of Roma background who leave school earlier and become street children and will especially benefit from the

early bilingual pre-school surrounding. According to Marjan Mladenovski ² “the biggest problem with Roma students are the mechanisms of prejudices through generations which continuously disable their social integration and the other attributes imposed to them such as poor, deceitfulness, indolence etc.”

From a methodological research directed versus examination and analysis of stereotypes towards Roma students versus teachers in primary school³ it is concluded that educators consider that Roma people like music, wedding ceremonies instead of knowledge and education.

From my own experience as an English language teacher at a skilled high-school and my own analysis of the first test of my students it can be concluded that the results from the test (see Table 1 below)⁴ in the mixed classes where there are Roma students (given in bold – I⁴,I¹²,I¹³) the results are on a very low level compared to the other classes. This test was made after the “transition” of the eight-graders to high school which is a big change for them. Because they do not possess the habit to study continuously and because of the problems of the educational system, they stay behind with most of the subjects.

Table 1

class	Number of students	Grade					average
		5	4	3	2	1	
I ²	33	/	4	1	3	25	1.51
I⁴	29	/	/	1	3	24	1.13
I ⁸	33	/	/	7	4	22	1.54
I ⁹	31	7	7	6	3	7	3.03
I¹²	34	/	/	/	3	31	1.08
I¹³	28	/	/	3	2	22	1.25

From the experience of the teachers and the observations, it can be summarized that they do not possess working habits and live without conception for the future and always complain about something. This is part of their culture, behavior and customs i.e. it is within their lifestyle. Because of that fact, I am convinced that the educators should find a way to help them

² Mladenovski, Marjan, *Ethnic stereotypes and prejudices in primary school*, p. 108.

³ Ibid., p. 112.

⁴ Analysis of an English language test.

during their studies. With the help of the teachers and other pedagogical staff, they can learn that education is even more important than their “music” habits. It is obvious that in this way, they make a living but with the obligational high school in our country, they face with problems of being expelled from school because of bad discipline or continuously showing low results.

From one hand, the problem with these students occurs not because of their fault but the fact that students from Turkish and Roma background follow different systems and programs and at the end, they go to the same high school and do not achieve good results. Another thing is that maybe the teachers follow the stereotyping of them that they are not good students. On the other hand, of course, they are bad students, but what is the reason for that? A first grade student from Roma background goes to school and studies all subjects in Turkish language up to fourth grade. After fifth grade, they are faced with the problem of studying different subjects in Macedonian language which is something new to them. They speak in Turkish language with their friends and families and they go to school where they have to study Macedonian language only twice a week and with the new curricula English language too. They are not familiar with the Macedonian alphabet and start studying another foreign language too. Obviously, it is very hard for them to achieve good results and everyone in this situation will be probably the same.

For that purpose, it is inevitable to support the opening of centers for the Roma kids in such areas full of people of this background. These centers should help them learn study and improve Macedonian language at first place. The fact that these children do not have knowledge of the state country language where they live and the pre-school education means that changing the system and doing something for them would be better if transition towards elementary education is made and this more important to them and for the country itself.

Another thing that is very important here is to avoid stereotyping by studying the rules of Intercultural Communication. Intercultural communication teaches us about different cultures, how to behave in different surroundings without having prejudices about anyone but accepting the people the way they are. Without having knowledge of the culture of the minorities, their traditions, customs, their education and habits, we will always have problems of this type.

Communicative competence and studying foreign languages as an important factor for EU integration

The world has become a global society nowadays. To be able to communicate people all over the world, have to learn and enable themselves to understand each other. At first sight, it does not seem so difficult. But, many

other components interfere with this matter. In order to achieve successful communication with the persons involved, communicators must draw attention to a number of domains that have to be considered and taken into consideration. Communicative competence is a linguistic term which refers to a learner's ability for second language. It does not refer only to a learner's ability to apply and use grammatical rules, but also to form correct utterances, and know how to use these utterances appropriately.⁵ So, in order to be able to learn a new language, one must be aware of the communicative intercultural competence.

An essential development of globalization is beneath the increased cooperation and communication among cultures. By doing this, the integrated competencies in foreign languages and intercultural communication are deemed as important keys for successful participation in modern life and society. The foreign language education is seen as essential factors in fostering intercultural communicative competence. The merging of a foreign language with content subject matter seems to provide an ideal environment to initiate intercultural learning; content is never culturally neutral.

On the other hand, it seems quite plausible that we can go far beyond the formalization that has been achieved so far in the fields of literary criticism and descriptive ethnographies of communication. In order to be able to study and learn foreign language we have to be familiar with communicative competence. Studying foreign languages opens doors and opportunities within the European Union for a better career and involvement in education. By studying the language, we also study the culture of the same language and by having that kind of knowledge we will avoid stereotyping as a problem mentioned in this paper below.

The reformed higher education

The situation is a little better in the sector for higher education where the reforms have already started. The attention should be towards the change of the curricula that should make available more optional subjects. Another thing is the bigger participation of the students in increasing the competence based on studying. The content of the subject should be less theoretical and more practical. All these factors should be supported by better education and materials for studying. The need for a bigger offer of the European language courses (English, French, and German) is an undoubted obligation and more opportunities for usage of computers for easier studying. A special attention should be paid to the natural sciences and information technology to upgrade

⁵ Paulston, C. Brat., Linguistic and Communicative Competence Topics in ESL (OP).

the educational materials, the equipment and training of the teachers as the biggest priority.

The Globalization and the Society of knowledge brought further implications for higher education by transforming the nature of our private and professional lives. Today's economy supported by the education gives the clear message that you should give an effort and study for life. In this way, the universities became and they will probably remain a developing industry. At the beginning of the new millennium in Great Britain there were 1, 5 million students or double more than a century before.

With a bigger participation of life-long learning the "employment – power" decreased dramatically because of staff with university diplomas and this caused a need for more specialized and bigger academic qualifications. For that reason, there is a bigger need for master degrees and professional qualifications. Beside this, the increase of the qualifications coincide with the increase of the professional status and brings the universities in a stronger position as a purpose to fulfill the needs for new professionals in companies, i.e. entrepreneurship and social services – medical technicians, social workers etc. in the same way as fulfilling the needs in the industrial field such as engineering and pre-industrial professions such as lawyers, doctors and priests.⁶

If the universities want to deal with this challenge as some of them who already tried, they have to change the type of organizing the studies dramatically. Actually, they have to change their organization, not only putting the student at the center of attention but also to ensure that the conditions are adapted to their personal needs. In other words, they have to maintain a wider surrounding for studying, access to resources (from colleagues, library, e-libraries, computer and media rooms) and this is how they will be freed from the obstacles of time and space; they will organize their studying according to their needs for courses and at the end of the day they will be active participants under the surveillance of their teachers – mentors.

Conclusion

Based on the analysis, observations and personal experience of teaching in pre-schools, high-schools and universities it can be noted that ethnic-based stereotypes and prejudices are very common nowadays and should be avoided abruptly by studying foreign languages, studying their customs, beliefs, way of living in order to understand their culture and try to behave in an

⁶Schlumberger Business Consulting: *Surviving the skills shortage, results of a global survey quantifying the supply & demand of petrotechnical expertise.*

“intercultural” way. The situation with Roma and Turkish students should be solved by imposing the above-mentioned centers for advice and help of these students who are in a way “victims” of the educational system.

When speaking about universities as mentioned above, the situation is better but should continue improving too. A very important thing for students and university staff is the possibility of mobilization and exchange through different programs such as Erasmus, Fulbright, Comenius that are very popular within the countries of the European Union and recently in the countries of West Balkans and that is why the students and the academic staff should get informed and they will certainly find a way to succeed in avoiding stereotyping and solve the problems of today’s education.