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THE CIVIC EDUCATION IMPACT AMONG YOUTH IN A DEMOCRACY

Theoretical
article

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Abstract

This paper seeks to address awareness, importance and applicability of the concept of "citizenship" based on the assumption that schools can play an important role in the development of youth civic education. Such education and the role that the school plays in the development of participatory citizenship has become of considerable importance in recent decades due to the fact that, in most developed countries, schools are required to provide civic education and active youth.

Studies addressing youth civic education led to the conclusion that there is a noticeable lack of involvement and education of young people in terms of their ability to meet the challenges of civic behavior. It must be necessary to consider mandatory continuing training civic and social skills to another level of understanding as education level ISCED 5 and ISCED 6, where the generalization and abstraction concepts already previously acquired, can develop flexible civic and social skills pointed directly through a constructive participation in community life and decision-making process at all levels, by the turnout.

Introduction

Youth civic education and the role that school can play in the development of this direction generated multiple debates over the last decades. The emphasis on civic education introduced in the European school curricula tend to reflect the major impact on the youth manifesting later by their active participation in the public decision making process and in the electoral process.

Over the last two decades, in almost all European countries (Eurydice, 2005), civic education has been introduced compulsorily in the school curricula. The necessity of introducing this subject within the curriculum is based on the hypothesis that school can genuinely contribute to the development of this youth civic side. No doubt about the role of educational policies implemented in certain periods of time, which can generate influences by curriculum formulation and development and the development of teaching and learning methods.

On the assumption of these considerations, through the present study we propose to identify and describe the most important theoretical aspects regarding the impact of civic education on the youth. The study continues with the narration of the main theoretical debates and the analysis of various approaches of the specialized literature in order to build a clear vision of the studied theme. In the last part of the study we have made an investigation of the civic education and culture level, as it is found in the approved curricula pursuant to Order no. 5198/01.11.2004 regarding the approval of the education curriculum framework both for 3rd and 4th Grades and the new curricula of the 3rd Grade, Order no. 3919/20.04.2005 regarding the approval of the new curricula of the 4th Grade, Addendum no. 3 of the Education, Investigation and Innovation Minister's Order no. 5097/09.09.2009 Addendum no. 2 of the Education, Investigation Minister's Order no. 3552/08.04.2004.

Literature review

Being considered in general, civic education is learned during people lifetime, by participating to different social practices (Biesta, Lawy, & Kelly, 2009). Civicism distinguishes as a fundamental dimension of an individual's personality and this is why participatory civic education is reflected on the individual's entire behaviour. For the youth, school is not only one of those practices, but it is also an institution explaining reasons of facilitating and optimizing the development of civic education.

The recommendation of the European Parliament and the EU Council regarding the key competences of the lifelong learning perspective establishes eight key competences which are relevant for the lifelong learning: communication in the mother tongue, communication in foreign languages, competences in Mathematics and basic competences in sciences and technologies, digital competence, learning to learn, spirit of initiative and entrepreneurial spirit, social and civic competences, respectively the cultural awareness and expression. The subjects developing such competences are the building subjects who target more than the assimilation of knowledge and skills, respectively the acquirement of values and formation of attitudes. Social and civic competences suppose an interest in the collaborative attitude, assertiveness and integrity, socio-economic developments, interpersonal communication, diversity appreciation, respect for alterity, overcoming prejudices and accepting the compromises constructively in different environments, showing tolerance, expressing and understanding different points of view, , negotiating tactfully in order to receive trust, empathizing, managing the stress and frustration situations, expressing constructively, distinguishing between the personal and professional sphere.

Based on these considerations, civic education is an important component of education, urging citizens to participate to public life of democracy, to know their rights and responsibilities together with the necessary competences and skills. In this respect, Romania has adopted as a strategy of training these competences, the development of some distinct subjects or some subjects involving them in compulsory and the secondary education (ISCED 1-3). But, a simple analysis of assimilation level by the youth of the key competences, as they are defined in the European Framework on the Key Competences for the Lifelong Learning, although emphasizing general positive evolutions, concerning the civic and social competences acquirement, we notice a worrying situation as a representation in concrete cases in which the student is trained as a civic subject: in family, school, during different activities in which he takes part, turnout, distance to power, etc.

Therefore, education should help new generations to build a strong but also flexible identity, based on solid principles which should guide them through change. International literature indicates a decrease of participation (Schulz & Sibberns, 2004; Birzea et al., 2005) in the western societies where the legal framework is influenced by the political, social and cultural changes such as migration, neoliberalism and globalization (Benhabib, 2002). These changes also affect the identity building processes of the new generations due to the fact that participation, membership and civics are rooted in building this identity (Bell, 1999) being organized within family and school.

In literature, the concept of civic education overlaps, is associated or interconditioned with related concepts such as moral education and/or character's education (Althof & Berkowitz, 2006). The tradition of moral education, in particular, emphasizes the values and their development while civic education is

focused on the involvement in society. Both traditions, however, are connected, in the sense that development of citizenship involves the development of personal identity.

But, the Romanian school seems to ignore that moral education and civic education have their own languages, according to which the goals, contents and types of organization of these subjects, respectively the teaching and evaluation methodologies are configured. It must become more and more obvious that various forms of civic education interfere with the languages of political, ecological, professional or sociological education, but this doesn't mean that they identify with them.

According to Haste (2004), the everyday situations help the youth to build an image of them as citizens. Classically, school is the place where the youth accumulate democratic experiences, adding previously accumulated experiences (Daniels, 2001). Such a reflection contributes to the development of the youth identity and, as a result, it increases the quality of their involvement in society. Civic education should be primarily focused on the reflection intensification by stimulating the youth critical capacities (Lawy & Biesta, 2006).

The detailed objectives and content of civic education varies across the European territory but the main goal of the study field is, generally, to ensure the fact that the youth become active citizens on four levels (a) political literacy, (b) critical thinking and analytical skills, (c) attitudes and values and (d) active participation.

Notwithstanding, the institutionalized goal of civic education is to motivate the youth and to offer them the possibility to play their role as informed, responsible and involved members of a modern political democratic system. This action can be performed through many methods but an efficient program of civic education should include youth orientation towards the political values, knowledge

and the political skills which are necessary to differentiate deliberate choices between real alternatives. Efficient civic education states that the youth have different interests and capacities but the goal is to get, if possible, a common understanding and commitment to the alleged democratic values.

Methodology and data

The investigation of the specialized literature reveals us that there is no doubt on the importance education has in the enforceability of certain rules, values and essential activities of participatory democracy. Therefore, a teaching orientation towards a plurality of perspectives but also critical analyses based on certain experimental materials and instructive practices by the participation in decision making, by involving feelings of confidence and cooperation, can counteract the deficiencies of an inappropriate implicit learning.

But, at the same time, it is important for us to understand that the learning process doesn't only depend on the formal inclusion of a subject in the curriculum, being either a compulsory subject or an optional one, but it also depends on teachers, community, students and those specific competences, especially if they aren't of a disciplinary type but a transverse cross-curricular type. In Romania, civic education has the shape of a distinct subject both in the primary and secondary education but it can be also found as a subject integrated into other subjects, usually in the social sciences.

Therefore, an investigative view over the syllabuses of the primary education, secondary education and high-school level reveals us, for Romania, a compulsory curriculum in the primary and secondary education and an optional one approached at the high-school level, when the capacity of the notion understanding and assimilation is more complex. (Table no. 1)

If the curriculum developed in the pre-university education on the civic education/culture theme is clear to us, we remark that at the academic level we still face an attempt of including certain notions which are specific to participatory democracy, in the curriculum, but without having a transverse type.

It is hopeful that, however, in the recent years, the issue of participatory citizenship has an increasing tendency regarding its presence in the professors' concerns. Various universities try to include a non-formal approach of civic education through different activities, such as different courses on globalization or culture awareness, international studies and researches for the teaching staff, projects in community service, various tests and questionnaires applied to students, their involvement in certain decision making, etc. These programs must be elaborated for students so as to be in accordance with their academic choices. However, although an increasing number of universities encourage students to acquire abilities of participatory citizenship, few of them possess a system to permit them the measurement of the performances.

As we have previously mentioned, civic education within a formal framework of educational institutions has the role of contributing to the circulation of ideas and practices that should support the instauration of a democratic mentality, with a fragile construction within the society. In this respect, we remark that in Romania, the approach of civic education is found in the concerns of the faculties with this specialization, for instance the Faculty of Political Sciences, Philosophy and Communication Sciences, the Faculty of Sociology and Psychology and the Faculty of Law and Administrative Sciences, directly dealing with compulsory subjects developing civic and social competences.

Conclusions

A genuine analysis of civic education among young people cannot be limitative to the curricular analysis even if curriculum involves actions of reflection over the interpretation of the contemporary world and over the social condition. But a first step is the awareness of the paradigm change necessity and the reconceptualization of civics field of study.

Unfortunately, a characteristic of our country is that the study subjects of civics are focused on formal curriculum, based on contents, therefore we consider that the term of civic information seems more appropriate than the term of civic education which uses an interactive methodology focused on the learning-training process. In addition, civic education, in the present context, cannot be limited to formal school period of the youth, ISCED 1 and ISCED 2 levels, but it must be understood as a process running during lifetime in close interrelation with the transformations and challenges offered by society.

The crucial importance of family in the contribution to civic education is insufficiently recognized. Government and schools should encourage the extracurricular activities for learning the civic education, related and correlated to international changes. There is an important lack of research in the informal learning process, especially in the civic society. The importance of participatory democracy has led to the idea of introducing in the academic curriculum a transverse-type subject which should approach civic education to a higher level taking into consideration students' knowledge and experiences accumulated during the previous years, their perception and flexibility degree being more developed.

Therefore, we consider that youth participation must be encouraged in the area in which they elaborate projects, and equally, the youth structures or organization should be supported. The

non-formal approach of active citizenship is noted to be imperative, through a complementarity with the themes approached in the formal curriculum. The answer may be by a transverse student-centered curriculum to which civil society organizations bring a relevant contribution and in accordance with the rigour of the education institutions.

Finally, different learning methods of civic education must be supported at a more intensive level and methods of encouraging the youth regarding their participation in activities targeting this aspect. From this point of view, it is essential to develop synergies with actions undertaken in the field of education.

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Table no 1.
Status of civic education in school education

Name of the subject	Grade	Type of subject	Responsibilities objects/ competences	Approached themes
<i>Civic education</i>	3 rd grade, 4 th grade	Compulsory, the curriculum being used according to school decision	Knowledge and use of the language in the civic values area; Knowledge and respect for the child's rights and the rules of conduct in society; Development and manifestation of certain favourable attitudes for decision making and opinion expression concerning the activity of the groups they belong to;	<i>Person;</i> <i>Our relations with things and human beings;</i> <i>Our relations with the other people;</i> <i>Community;</i> <i>Society and state;</i>
<i>Civic culture</i>	6 th grade, 7 th grade	Compulsory, the curriculum being used according to school decision	Use and application the specific concepts of social sciences; Participation to decision making and solving the community issues; Interest stimulation for the participation to social life and for the exercise of the citizen quality;	<i>Life in society;</i> <i>Political system in Romania;</i> <i>Citizen – state relationship: the power of public opinion and individual's force;</i> <i>Freedom and responsibility;</i> <i>Justice and equality;</i> <i>Patriotism;</i>
<i>Civic/ entrepreneurial culture</i>	10 th grade	Compulsory	Participation to decision making and solving the community issues	<i>Initiation and running a business ;</i> <i>Risk and success in businesses.</i>

Note: centralized information from Syllabus design