

THE IMPACT OF THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM ON THE LITERARY WRITING OF CHILDREN IN LOWER SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract:

The Curriculum Framework of Pre-University Education has set some basic goals. One of the fundamental goals (article 1.3.) is to cultivate personal identity, and national and cultural affiliation. This means that the education system of the Republic of Kosovo is based on the promotion of cultural identity to students, enabling them qualitative education, promoting awareness and cultivating these affiliations through this curricular content.

Curriculum Framework has also clearly defined basic learning competencies. One of them is the competence of communication and expression. Book content and teaching methodology can both significantly affect the interface between students' creative works and the stimulation of their imaginative creativity. One of these habits, dealt with through this content is artistic work.

In this paper, we analyze the relation between the *National Curriculum*, especially its aims, competencies and areas, which are connected to the cultural identity, in one hand, and the content of books and teaching methods applied by teachers of the lower secondary schools (grades 6-9), on the other hand. After that, we analyze the impact of the curricula, the book content and the teaching methods on the stimulation of students' imaginative creation.

We found that only 10 percent of the book content is connected to the first goal of the *Curriculum*. The methodology often is not in harmony with the content, and no additional content is provided to cover this gap.

Keywords: national curriculum; goals, competencies; teaching methods, book content, imaginative spaces; artistic writing

1. INTRODUCTION

The relationship between goals, competencies and areas, defined in the *Curriculum Framework of the Pre-University Education*, on one hand, and the content of textbooks of the course *Language and Literature*, on the other hand, has not been subject of any fundamental research in Kosovo. Consequently, there are no clear results that show the extent to which goals and/or competencies have been achieved. For this, it is necessary to explore other associated dimensions, such as the pedagogical aspect, in fostering language habits and personal and collective identity, or the promotion of artistic creativity as a result of curricular content. The paper aims to answer whether the system of education in Kosovo, at the schools' lower secondary grades (6-9), fulfills the goals of the *Curriculum Framework of the Pre-University Education* (in particular paragraph 1.3): *cultivation of personal and national identity*, and the cultural belonging, and the extent to which the content of the curriculum is reflected in the textbooks of the Language and Literature courses. Additionally, it is important to see whether the goals of the curriculum and textbook contents are compatible and what teaching methods are used by teachers.

So, do teaching methods influence the promotion of a personal and collective identity through language, culture and ethnicity? And, do they encourage students' imaginative creativity? What are the main forms of expression through the art of the personal / collective identity and which of these forms are driven by the curriculum content? Does the focus on the first goal of the curriculum promote "ethnocentricity views", or it simply fulfills the creation of personal and collective identity as a necessary curricular purpose?

2. CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK / LEARNING GOALS

As noted, the *Curriculum Framework of Pre-University Education of Kosovo* determines the cultivation of personal identity, national and cultural affiliation of the state as one of the fundamental goals. For this purpose, the framework provides that *education should enable to the students to understand, respect and cultivate national traditions, as well as the community they belong to; to value family traditions, to cultivate the cultural heritage and contribute to its continued enrichment*.

As it is well known, content is crucial to every curriculum framework. For purposes of this evaluation, an analysis of the content should address whether it meets the current and long-term needs of the students. What constitutes the long-term needs of the students is a value judgment based on what one sees as the proper goals and objectives of a curriculum (On Evaluating Curricular Effectiveness – Report)

The National Curriculum Framework of Kosovo has set the cultivation of the national traditions as a priority goal. But, the Curriculum goals, as mentioned, are a matter of interpretation of the content by teachers and students themselves. Therefore, it is important to have professional explanations and trainings on how to solve the issue of different approaches to the course programs or the book content and to create a set of standards which is based on the common values with students. As it is well known, the challenge facing education systems and teachers continue to intensify (OECD Report, 2009). On one hand, the knowledge-based societies have set the transformation of the traditional model of schooling and the structure of the courses as one of the priorities. This task aims to identify and develop the students' talent. On the other hand, the course structure and, above all, the methodology of teaching (at least in transitional countries like Kosovo) have not been fully adapted to this task. Therefore, the curriculum should provide the exact course program and content as well as the methodology of teaching to students regarding the ethno-symbolic content. We found that the course program does not always derive from the goals of the National Curriculum, and the book content is not in full accordance with course program.

American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAA) has proposed a new connection line between the national curricula's content and the learning goals, proposing a preliminary inspection of the curriculum materials to see whether they are likely to address the targeted learning goals as far as analyze the curriculum materials for alignment between instruction and the selected learning goals.

For this purpose, we call for a specific program which would explain the fundamental learning goals and the methodology of achieving them, as far as the stabilization of the content in the course programs and in the curriculum framework is concerned. Teachers should have an established teacher guide for analyzing the course program and adaptation of teaching methods. This would allow the measurement

of learning outcomes and take into consideration the learning environment and students' learning behaviors, bringing them closer to the curriculum goals. The cultivation of the identity should be based on giving students an idea of the context in which the tradition was developed and its role on people's the social life, involving students in knowing about identity and its promotion through the improvement of the learning environment.

1.1. Correlation between curriculum goals and course structure

Based on *The Curriculum Framework of Pre-University Education*, the structure of the course *Language and Literature* has set several goals, the fulfillment of which is achievable through the provision of works/ literary texts of the authors, from the Middle Ages onwards. These targets consist primarily in *acquisition of knowledge, language training and cultural formation, as an individual and as a citizen*. Basic means to achieve this goal are "popular literary works." They provide the students with language skills, structuring thoughts and independent judgment, as well as widening the scope of their imagination. Thus, communication with the literary texts becomes a key in meeting these goals. Curriculum foresees common goals that must be obtained, as well as the identical results as a result of communication with these texts.

Curriculum Framework provides a strong correlation between its objectives and content of teaching curriculum, namely the way of the transmission of knowledge. Not infrequently these dimensions do not match with each other. But before we see their reflections in the textbooks / teaching methods, let's treat one of the dimensions of the book content, which is crucial in achieving one of the curriculum's goals, the cultivation of the identity. That dimension is achievable through the literature based on the collective history or the national feelings. Anthony D. Smith would define this type of literature as a *symbolic distinctive repertoire* (Smith, 2009, pp 23). He found on it a deep dimension between the members of communities and the role of literature as a means of gaining a sense of shared cultural, ethnic and religious values. This repertoire influences the creating of awareness for the values of the community. Members of the cultural or ethnic community want to see these values as the inherited ethnic capital. They create a kind of ongoing relationship with earlier generations, to enhance the lives of their symbols within social reality. By contacting the other communities, with their inherent symbolism, they increase desire for their symbolic identification. Therefore, the literature becomes the tool of expression of the sense of belonging. Hence there is an increasingly open discussion about the function of the literature, which is theoretically articulated through confrontational relationship between Herder and Goethe. Herder, as known, saw literature as a "reminder of the nation", while in the Shakespeare's work he was finding the principles of creating of a national literature. Goethe (Goethe), on the other hand, insisted that literature should not be seen as expression of national memory and ethno-nationalist signs, but as a common field of humanity. But would the Curriculum emphasize the identity of the children if the course program was not supporting the expression of national identity?

Based on the Curriculum, the development of this type of literature is closely related to the existence of ethno-myths. Therefore, ethno-myths have active power as the earliest structure which, in the light of a new consciousness, seek to explain the "old" world from the "bosom of the gods" until today. Ethno-myths are of simultaneously *invariant* and the *variant* structure which reinforces the Archi-structure, being remodeled. The myth of the national hero and one of ethnic origin, are two of the most powerful myths of literature, mainly that romantic. The romantic writers express their love for the common territory by "Amor patria" to their ancestral land, *Homeland*, as reflected through one of the most popular romantic poems, *Bageti e Bujqesi (Livestock and Agriculture)*, written by Naim Frashëri, and which is part of the textbook for the 6th grade students.

The second distinguishing feature of the rapport that the romantic literature creates with the national culture and identity are anthems. Anthems are part of distinctive symbolic repertoire. They create strong emotional connection because they help in making the continuation of the ethnic or cultural communities' life. So, anthem (or/and the flag) touches the deep feeling of the existence of a nation in history; it is immortalized symbol in the inheritance of the history. *La Marseillaise*, for example, as well as other universal anthems, became famous not so much for the artistic language, as for the touching, motivating language they express. Albanian anthem, unlike *La Marseillaise*, is a "dedication of a national symbol – anthem to another national symbol – the flag". This dual symbolism has been reflected in the textbooks' content through the poem of Fan Noli, *The Flag Anthem*.

And finally, the language is another distinctive element, which is treated as a tool for the creation of "togetherness". "Literary reading 6" raises the issue of *ethno-language* through the poem *The Albanian language* of the priest Gjergj Fishta. He treated the language not only as a sign of the identity, but also as an important means to express the uniqueness of ethnic, cultural and national identity. *The Albanian Language* is a typical expression of the "spirit of the nation".

1.2. Curriculum goals and the learning outcomes in the traditional course's structure

Now let's try to define the relationship between the Curriculum's goals and objectives and the learning outcomes and see how they influence the imaginative and artistic work to the young children. How does the course create the link between the curriculum content, the content of the book, and the way how teachers convey this knowledge to their students?

Based on the *Curriculum Framework* and the course's programs, these aims, along with communication skills, are gained mainly through: a) listening and speaking; b) reading and c) writing. The curriculum does not, however, specify two very important tools in achieving the communication skills, the *questioning* and *discussing* (Musai, 225). The listening and speaking (mostly through the interpretation of the text's content and ideas or the recitation of the poetry with an ethno-distinguishing content) do not enough stimulate the imaginative process of the students. They do achieve some basic learning objectives, but do not accomplish the functional role of stimulating the imaginative process of the students. Reading is very important, but it is very much connected with the methodology through which it is treated within the framework of the learning objectives. The techniques of using the interactive questioning or discussion can create an attractive and creative space and stimulate students' imaginative process. But, these processes are very closely connected with the methodology of teaching. Considering that the program of the *Albanian Language and Literature* course is still based mostly on traditional teaching methods, which neither create an encouraging learning environment, nor stimulate the integrative approach of achieving the learning outcomes and the evaluation of the learning habits, it is quite difficult to consider that the communication skills students get in the lower secondary schools are enough stimulatory for the students to achieve the necessary competencies, provided by the *National Curriculum*. Therefore, the questioning is important for the high level of thinking, a process which could stimulate the imaginative activity.

Knowledge of the book content derives mainly through the provision of discussing terms of actual text, mainly in relation to the *Homeland* and the interpretation of related ethno-symbolic parts of the text, including the nation's antiquity, the heroism of generations, territory and the language, as a means of identity. But, in practice, we have not seen a strong connection between the objectives and the active participation of children, which could be a focal point of achieving high learning outcomes, but also would develop children's imaginative work. Musai (2014) has set three important steps in creating a link between teaching activities, learning and the evaluation of the acquired knowledge: the concrete formulation of the specific results of the teaching, teaching of the specific duties and testing of that specific duty (Musai, 2014, pp.100). Traditional methods of teaching the Albanian Literature have not specifically created a learning environment in which the children of the lower secondary grades would be actively participating in the class and expressing their experiences. More »integrative and oriented teaching method« (Musai, 2014, 101) would encourage not only the achievement of the basic requirements, but would also stimulate the creation of the »new thinking habits«.

The strong connection between the teaching objectives, the learning objectives and the evaluation objectives, as a strategy of integrative approach of learning, would stimulate the achievement of a new habits and communication skills, as a tool of expression of the internal word in an open way.

3. INTEGRATIVE TEACHING METHOD AND ACHIEVEMENTS

The teaching method which encourages the students to express their own experiences and create learning environments which enables students to actively participate in the classroom, is crucial for the achievement of the learning objectives, like the expression of the personal and collective identity. Therefore, the planning action is an important issue.

As mentioned, the methodology of the teaching in Kosovo is still based on the traditional way of transmitting the knowledge to the students. Specifically, the distinctive repertoire, meaning the book

content which is based on the history, identity and cultural values of the nation, is offered to them in a very traditional way.

Students are still asked to memorize the poems of national writers like Gjergj Fishta, Fan S. Noli and Naim Frasheri, and recite with “a sort of pathetic discourse”, expressing “identity feelings” through tonality.

We have seen that even though it derives from the texts, the methodology of providing views on culture identity is not fully clearly provided in the methodological aspect. The teachers are likely to create an unfavorable environment as educators, overloading students and withholding ideologically curricular goal: the formation of language and cultural skills. Therefore, this discrepancy between the goals of the curriculum and teaching methodology makes it necessary to design a new structure of the course.

One of the missing dimensions is the inclusion of the different ways of thinking and the opportunity to confront different points of view. An integrated teaching method is still just an aim, but not a concrete achievement. Therefore, teachers must be trained in applying the new integrative teaching method and using the new tools and materials to teach. Above all, it would be helpful if they would apply concrete evaluation procedures (asking the students to demonstrate their learning throughout their own experiences), beyond the learning objectives and teaching methods. This dimension, must be seen as a crucial part in the planning process as well, but also as a concrete tool in creating a learning environment which would address students’ needs, but would also serve as a platform for achieving the learning objectives, like the expression and the communication.

2.1. The evaluation of the students’ progress

The evaluation of the students’ progress could create an effective mechanism of evaluating whether the goals and objectives written in the National Curriculum have influenced the imaginative space in the learning process or, whether the school has been successful in creating a positive learning environment. As it is known (Grigg, 2010, 366), the evaluation process has set several objectives. One of them is to assure that of motivating students to determine their learning objectives. Evaluating their achievements in using the literature as a tool of stimulation of their creativity would stimulate the imaginative process in the students. Besides that, the evaluation of students’ progress would also stimulate teachers to follow-up the progress of each student and be able to understand more deeply the students’ needs and affinities.

The evaluation of the students’ progress could, herewith, create an opinion whether the students like one specific type of literature more than another, and would help teachers to identify whether the students’ writing skills have been improved and if this improvement has been achieved as a result of the curriculum’s goals and objectives, and the extent to which they have accomplished the curricular intentions of improving the awareness on the national and personal identity. Moreover, it would create an opinion whether it has been any definable progress in imaginative creation and artistic expression of the children of the lower secondary schools. Teachers could stimulate students in offering a specific approach to the literature and could make a creative environment, where students could express their artistic creativity.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The treatment of the goals and competencies of pre-university education in the curriculum materials, content of textbooks and teaching methodology regarding lower secondary schools in Kosovo, pointed out discrepancies between the goals of pre-university system and skills that students acquire during their formation, especially in the cultivation of personal and collective identity and expression of skills.

The structure of the course "Albanian Language and Literature" has set several goals, which aim to be achieved mainly through the provision of textbooks, as a fitting tribute to achievement of skills. Through the contents which allow *distinctive symbolic repertoire*, literary texts represent ethnic symbols, language, territory (Homeland), ancient myth of the hero, as well as ethnic symbols, like the flag and the national anthem; they cultivate personal and national identity of students. But the methodology of teaching and their delivery, as well as the ways to obtain communication skills, are often covered by pathetic teaching ways of offering opportunity to the students to obtain these skills. Curriculum does

not adequately specify the methodology of teaching, and the system does not provide any additional content to enable students acquire knowledge.

Therefore, to improve the *learning environment* and the *individual learning behaviors*, it is necessary to develop a modern structure of the course, and include the evaluation of the students' progress in such debates as how the national curriculum can further stimulate the imaginative process of the students and offer a functional mechanism to teachers to help them in identifying students' needs and affinities. That would be an effective mechanism to offer these students an attractive learning environment in which students would be able to cultivate and express their own identity in a creative way and develop further the language skills and get their thinking to higher level.

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