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1.

Cultural diversity is a one of the principles of school education in Serbia and the issue of cultural diversity is prescribed in the Law on Foundations of the Education system (Official Gazette 88/2017, 27/2018, 10/2019, 27/2018, 6/2020). At the normative level, the cultural diversity is represented in aims of education as well as educational competences. Educational institutions are encouraged to support development of individual and national identity, sense of belonging to the Republic of Serbia, Serbian language and cultural tradition, but also to affirm the respect and understanding of national minority cultures, strengthening intercultural dialogue and protection of national and world cultural heritage. In the field of competences standards, intercultural competence is one of them. In national educational system, intercultural competence means that student recognizes basic phenomena and process of different cultures, its basic historical periods and territories where their culture developed, most important historical personalities and their works, and shows intercultural understanding. At the advanced level of intercultural competence, student should celebrate the cultural diversity, valuing its own culture and valuing diversity of other cultures in the positive light as well as nurturing openness and curiosity. At the practical level, some research has shown that cultural diversity is not sufficiently involved in school curriculum, and it has only folkloristic dimension (Gašović, 2009, 11). In secondary education, the knowledge about other cultures should be acquired through lessons of history, geography, language and poetry as well as through teaching activities outside the classroom such us national culinary days, field trips, presentation of heritage and handicrafts of different communities, etc.

Secondary Educational System (high schools and vocational schools) support cultural diversity in the different ways depending on specific area of education. For example, the Economic schools deals with cultural diversity as a subject of economic development and how cultural diversity can lead to economic growth. In some curricula, this issue is linked to innovation and knowledge creation (e.g. management of intellectual capital). In the field of the Management and Business Economics, cultural diversity is explored through intercultural communication, marketing, international business or organizational culture. Literature on cultural diversity and economics is not developed. According to the COBISS data there is just a few books on this issue, particularly those focusing on intercultural communications and management.

Objectives of education in Serbia are (according to the Law):

− The development of key competencies necessary for further education and active role of citizens to live in contemporary society;

− Training for independent decision-making on the choice of profession and further education;

− Awareness about the importance of health and safety;   
− training in problem solving, communication and teamwork;

− *Respect for racial, ethnic, cultural, linguistic, religious, gender, age, and gender equality, tolerance and respect for diversity;*

− Development of motivation for learning, training for self-learning, self-evaluation and the ability to express their own opinions;

− Full intellectual, emotional, social, moral and physical development of each student, according to his age, developmental needs and interests;

− The development of self-awareness, creative and critical thinking skills;

− The development of non-violence and the establishment of zero tolerance towards violence;

− Raising awareness about the importance of sustainable development, protection and conservation of nature and environment and environmental ethics;

− Development of positive human values;

− *development of competencies for understanding and respect for human rights, civil liberties and the ability to live in a democratically organized and just society;*

 − *the development of personal and national identity, raising awareness and the feeling of belonging to the Republic of Serbia, respect and cultivate the Serbian language and the mother tongue (minorities in Serbia have education in their mother tongue), traditions and culture of the Serbian people and ethnic minorities, the development of intercultural relations, respect and preservation of the national and world cultural heritage.*

It is clear that policy takes in account the issue of cultural diversity (relevant aims are in italic), but there are still numerous implementation problems, especially in mixed communities, where children are separated in different schools (i.e. Serbian and Hungarian children living in the same neighborhood in the same city). These separations underline differences, and prevents mutual socialization, foster stereotypes gained in families, etc. This tradition was developed during socialist times, but in those times, media were not spread ethnic hatred, that was the case since the beginning of 90s till today. Thus, children might hear very often pejorative names for other ethnic groups, even proclaimed by politicians, to provoke humoristic or other kind of effects, and it is easy to repeat those. Special attention within implementation is given to Roma children integration, but curriculum still do not have enough “content elements” to inform both children of majority and children of other minorities, about culture and habits of Roma, valorizing this culture positively.

2.

Overall reform of the education system began in 2017, when they first set outcomes for each subject according to competencies and standards (especially for native language, arts, history, geography; and cross-curricular competencies: participation in civil society - democratic competences: respecting the attitudes and beliefs of others, a critical examination of unscientific information that are placed by various sources (false news, the conspiracy, gender and any other discrimination ...).

All teachers have passed the three-day training, which, of course, is not enough to change the entire paradigm, especially in post-conflict environment. Schools need counseling, not just control.

Plus, to come back to Roma issue, there are now, in some schools, specially engaged teachers to work additionally with Roma children – but, as a difference toward other minorities, there is no education in Roma (and in Vlach) language. This is also “kind of a tradition”, as these two national groups in socialist period of Yugoslavia did not have the status of NATIONAL MINORITY (this status was giving rights to education in mother tongue, to publicly supported radio and television programs, journals and cultural journals, cultural centres etc.) but the status of ETHNIC GROUP, that could have its amateur cultural groups, festivals and manifestations, but NO public cultural and educational institutions.

To conclude, in accordance with Law on Foundations of the Education system (Official Gazette 88/2017, 27/2018, 10/2019, 27/2018, 6/2020) the principal of cultural diversity calls for schools to affirm respect of human rights and dignity, openness, cooperation, tolerance and consciousness of cultural and civilization link as well as to respect of ethical norms, value of truth, solidarity, freedom, honesty and reasonability that respect right of children and students. Some researches confirmed existence of regulatory and strategic framework for intercultural education in Serbia (Petrovic, Jokic, 2016), but there is gap in acquiring intercultural knowledge and skills for teaching staff and their unpreparedness in using cultural diversities as a tool for personal development and opportunities for learning (Zorkic-Jokic, 2018).

3.

In Serbia, there is a tradition of education for national minorities in their mother tongue, during pre-university education, but it leads to problems in the adoption of the official (Serbian) language in homogeneous environments.

On the other side, national curriculum does not integrate much of information regarding history of national minorities, their artistic traditions etc. However, there are schools in Serbia that have name of the great Hungarian poet Sandor Petefi, but this example is more exception than rule.

There is no comparative religion subject, but children might choose to have religious education of their ethnic group, or civic education. Thus, school do not provide mutual information – for example, about Islam or Protestantism to Orthodox children, and vice versa. Thus, stereotypes and prejudices about “others” gained at home and through tabloid media, might even be reinforced during religious classes, whose curricula were prepared by different churches, and are not thoroughly monitored.

Even in city museums (except in some cities of Vojvodina), there is not much materials (artefacts and narratives), regarding minorities (especially Roma and Vlachs), but also regarding women participation in social, political and cultural life. Thus, when pupils go to museum visits, they implicitly get the information that the culture of the other is not important. However, there were organized exhibitions like the one in the Sombor Museum in 2006: “Living together”, about 500 years of Serbians and Hungarians in Sombor. Educational and cultural policies should be more integrated, and in a synergy.

Education in Languages of national minorities, 2015. (primary schools)

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Albanian | Bosnian | Bulgarian | Rumanian | Hungarian | Slovakian | Rusini | Hrvati |
| No. School | 16 | 28 | 1 | 18 | 74 | 17 | 3 | 5 |
| School Department | 341 | 302 | 3 | 78+19 mixed | 884+37 mixed | 154+12 mixed | 30 | 27+6 mixed. |
| No. Students | 5546 | 6596 | 25 | 921 | 14308 | 2804 | 443 | 244 |

Education in Languages of national minorities, 2015. (secondary schools)

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Albanian | Bosnian | Bulgarian | Rumanian | Hungarian | Slovakian | Rusini | Hrvati |
| No. School | - | 2 | 3 | 2 | 37 | 3 | 1 | 2 |
| School Department | 125 | 8 | 9 | 8 | 310 | 17 | 4 | 8 |
| No. Students | 2365 | 224 | 114 | 204 | 5170 | 415 | 57 | 144 |

Source: Bašić, 2015.

Data from 2014/2015.

School books, 2016

Serbian 9413

Hungarian 135

Bosnian102

Croat 101

Russian 36

Slovak 28

German 30

Romanian 27

Albanian 20

Bulgarian 14

Ruthenian 13

Macedonian 2

Slovenian 2

Greek 1

Turkish 1

Bilingual publications

Serbian – German 54

Serbian Russian 44

Serbian – French 37

Serbian – Slovak - 8

Serbian - Macedonian 6

Serbian - Slovenian 6

Serbian – Roma 4

Serbian – Romanian 4

Serbian – Ruthenian 4

Serbian – Turkish 3

Multilingual - 196

Source: Statistical Office, Republic of Serbia 2018.

4.

As it was said before: there are two optional courses that students may take: Religious education (of its own religion) or Civic education. Religious education can be performed for all religious communities that have been registered in Serbia. This is allowing cultural diversity and endorse cultural rights of individuals and collectives. But – that also divides communities. However, next year in secondary schools will be introduced one more electoral program Religions and civilizations. This should enable pupils to understand different religions, offer them through lectures initial information for their future individual research, and with the help of project-based learning (with a series of proposed topics which address virtually every civilization in history) it might create condition for the interreligious dialogue and better understanding of the other.

5.

Key stakeholders are still not fully involved in the design and monitoring of the curriculum (especially parents). Although every school has a Parent Council, we still expected the full participation in the future.

From school to school the system is differently organized to enable children voices to be really heard. Participative governance was abandoned when socialist self-governance went to history. In this system, representatives of the pupils have been in every governing body, and pupil organization (would it be pioneers, or Youth organization) had a lot of possibilities to influence. Then, overnight this system is forgotten, and very hierarchical decision-making process introduced, while today it is changing, but not sufficiently quick.

Also, although tradition of Children rights is long, and many things were done to ensure its implementation. For example: Bukvar dečjih prava – Abecedaries of the Children rights, were printed even in the form of poems (poet Ljubivoje Ršumović), so that children can easier remember their rights, it would be difficult to say that Children/Pupil`s Parliaments are functioning in every school. But, they exist, many are very active, and are forming future active citizens.

6. What recommendations should be provided to States and other stakeholders on these issues?

The education system in Serbia is still struggling with the traditional scientific and pedagogical approach in primary and secondary schools, because teachers usually receive both subject and teaching competence at universities, that often neglect innovation in methodical approaches, development of communication skills etc.

Schools should develop more:

Research-based learning for both professors and pupils;

Problem-based learning (problem solving etc.);

Project- based learning (hands-on learning);

Practice-based learning / going to communities, in different organisations, debating, observing, etc.

It would be especially important for the multicultural environments, where schools might apply freely some project-based learning. For example, the project: One school - one cultural monument, could enable children to take care of the monument of the other, of the disappeared, or still present minority, thus opening children toward intercultural dialogue issues.

Also, Peer-learning should be better valorized, etc.

In total, a lot was done to change and reform curricula, but there are still more needed to implement everything that was conceptualized and planed. A lot depends on the innovativeness of teachers and professors, and those that are brave enough to experiment and propose new forms of works should be encouraged and supported (that is rarely the case). More content about minorities, especially about minorities that are subject to hatred and prejudices (like Albanians in Serbia) should be integrated in a program, but not only as information about the other, but as achievements of that culture that deserve to be presented in every case.

History representations also should be much more sensitive / and civil society had developed a lot of alternative tools for learning Balkan history for example, but those are not used. Center for democracy and reconciliation in South East Europe from Thessaloniki, had involved many researchers and historians since 1998, and till 2012 complete serial of history books and training manuals had been published in all languages of the Balkans. More than 800 teachers had been trained, but still these books are not used in school practice nowhere. The aim of this project was prevention of the manipulation with history data, demystification of certain events, promotion of European values, encouraging the debate, intercultural dialogue, affirmation of equity and promotion of tolerance. All of these are still needed not only in History teaching, but in humanities in general.

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