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Comparative Study of Innovative Didactic Methodologies for Primary and Secondary Schools in Croatia, Bulgaria and Greece

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Abstract

This study refers to the comparison of innovative didactic methodologies, applied both in Primary and Secondary Education in Croatia, Bulgaria and Greece. The purpose of this paper is to highlight these methodologies, through the identification of their similarities and their differences respectively. To achieve this, bibliographic review is primarily used (through books, e-journals, websites, databases), as well as the methodology of comparative education. After investigating this issue, what transpires, as the most fundamental outcome, is that considerable efforts are made in these countries to implement innovative teaching approaches, such as the project method, working with small workgroups, the experiential learning, the role-play, experiment, problem solving, and the utilization of Information and Communication Technologies. In general, the conclusions of this study should broaden our knowledge in the pursuit of innovations in the field of teaching methodology both in Primary and Secondary Education of the countries that are studied. In addition, they are given the incentive to improve the teaching practices applied in schools, not only of the aforementioned countries but also of other countries, as well as the trigger for further investigation of the issue by the scientific community.

Key Words: comparative study, innovative didactic methodologies, primary education, secondary education

1. Introduction

The purpose of this proposal is to highlight the similarities and differences of the innovative didactic methodologies applied both in Primary and Secondary Education in the Balkans, more specifically in Croatia, Bulgaria and Greece, which are also member-states of the European Union. The methodology which is used is the comparative one (Kazamias, 2012; Lauwerys, 1984) and what are examined in the aforementioned countries are the innovative didactic methodologies applied both in Primary and Secondary Education.

Taken for granted that innovation is *"the introduction of new methods, the novel creation"* (Bambiniotis, 2004, p. 459), as far as education is concerned, according to Fullan (1991, as ment. in Sryropoulou et al, 2015) it requires the change of principles and convictions, the application of new teaching approaches and the use of new teaching means. In addition, it should be noted that both Primary and Secondary Education are mentioned since there are differences among these countries as far as the age the students start and finish school in each grade of education is concerned. The innovative didactic methods, after being detected, interpreted in a *"socio-political, historical-cultural, philosophical-ideological and financial context"* (Kalogiannaki, 2012, p. 63), wherever they emerge, using the element of comparison and highlighting their similarities and differences.

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2. The Balkans, The European Union And The Education

The Balkans consist of a number of countries in the southeast edge of the European continent and are characterized by a long-term eventful history (wars, riots, revolutions), which eventually influence each civilization and determine it. On the other hand, the European Union consists of a number of countries or member-states (28 in total) as they are so-called, some of which are also countries which belong to the Balkans (such as Croatia, Bulgaria, Greece, Romania and Slovenia).

According to the article 165, par. 1 Lisbon Convention, the EU (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2008) is primarily interested in providing quality education to all member-states but at the same time it respects their competence to decide on their citizens' education supporting them in the alternative. However, the EU does not leave them in the lurch but sets educational goals of strategic importance for all: a) promotion of the life-long learning, b) improvement of the provided education, c) upgrading the social consistency and the active participation in public life and d) enforcement of innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship spirit.

3. Croatia

In Croatia both Primary and Secondary Education is student-oriented. His needs, abilities and interests are detected and the teaching methods used by the teachers are chosen accordingly based on the analytical curriculum. Cognitive sources and didactic means are used since they promote participation, observation, independent research, experiment, discovery, analysis, student curiosity and skill development. Talented students as well as students with learning disabilities or behavioral difficulties are detected. Special attention is paid to the last category while the rest of students are appropriately educated in order to accept and support them (http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/index_en.php).

As far as the didactic goals are concerned, the teachers are enabled to decide on the suitable didactic approach needed in each case: inquiry classes, classes based on the students' experience, projects, use of multimedia, personal approach, multidisciplinary approach, problem solving, learning in pairs or in groups. A requirement is that these approaches are in accordance with the formal analytical curriculum, whereas the books or any other extra material are eligible for the competent Ministry (http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/index_en.php).

Based on all aforementioned approaches, significant research is conducted in relation to the application of innovative didactic methods for the development of the students' creative thinking (Marusic & Slisko, 2015), the use of computers in teaching (Kontosic, Kontosic & Biloslav, 2015) as well as the need for students of Primary and Secondary Education to take an active role in the process of learning, to take initiatives and to participate in alternative methods of analyzing issues and solving problems (Lowther, 2015).

4. Bulgaria

Efforts are made for the modernization of the teaching procedure emphasizing on the development of the students' abilities through the encouragement of the analytical and critical thinking and the students' creativity both in Primary and Lower Secondary Education (Getova-Dimitreva, 2015). The individual expression and the development of the reflective behavior are of significant importance (http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/index_en.php).

The Ministry of Education, Youth and Science does not provide specific guidelines for the pedagogical approaches applied in the action of teaching. The teachers use both traditional and modern methods. The traditional methods are the narration, the explanation, the display and the lecture where as the modern methods are the inquiry, the dialogue, the presentations, the reports, the essays and the dramatizations. Emphasis is laid on the access of students to technology and internet by the National Curriculum for the school and pre-school education (2006-2015), without having always the proper results (Ackovska, Erdosne Nemeth, Stankov & Jovanov, 2015). The National Educational portal www.start.e-edu.bg has been operating freely since 2007 for students, teachers, parents and principals. Through this portal online lesson, tests, digital school archives and numerous information is provided. In addition, there is access to the Ministry of Education, books of study and methodology as well as materials for students and teachers (http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/index_en.php).

In Upper Secondary Education, the applied teaching methods usually are: a) the presentation of the lesson by means of narration, explanation, lecture with the help of visual aids and technical instruments, b) discourse methods such as speech, discussion, debate aiming at the motivation of the students' logic, c) individual work on literature, d) direct study of the real world, observation, school experiment, archives' research, e) indirect study-demonstration, simulation or modelisation, f) practical activities (e.g. practice, laboratories), g) role-play methods. The effort to modernize the Upper Secondary Education focuses on most active teaching methods which encourage the independence, the creativity and the initiation of students (Teneva, 2015), while at the same time a better use of Technology of Information and Communication (ICT) is promoted (http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/index_en.php).

5. Greece

The focal point of the educational procedure is the student. New teaching methods, new analytical curricula, innovative actions, cultural, sports and environment involvement, as well as the use of modern digital means such as interactive boards, e-book, digital educational material and pc are promoted. Therefore, specific didactic methods are suggested such as: a) student-oriented teaching approaches, b) flexible student environment, c) empirical learning, d) active participation of students in activities and planning of their individual learning, e) utilization of the new technologies, f) personalized teaching (http://www.pi-schools.gr/). More specifically, the basic didactic approaches which are encouraged are: *a) cross-curricular approach, b) projects, c) group teaching, d) differentiated pedagogy and e) utilization of new technologies in teaching.*

In Primary Education, the use of ICT, of educational software and of available websites is of great significance. In parallel, environmental, cultural and health-education programmes based on empirical, cross-curricular and group approach of knowledge are promoted. The ultimate goal is students to develop social skills and critical thinking in addition to schools to be open to society (http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/index_en.php).

In Secondary Education, all the modern didactic methods are applied according to the cognitive objective and the teaching purposes. The teachers are instructed according to the goals as well as the teaching approaches which can be used. Nevertheless, they are free to choose their teaching methods appropriate for their students' abilities and either modify the exercises in the book or omit them at all. Moreover, it should be noted that science and ICT laboratories are used and the digital updating, the mobile laboratories, the use of interactive boards and the use of the website http://www.e-yliko.gr/ are promoted (http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/index_en.php).

6. Results-Discussion

By means of inquiry of the innovative didactic methodologies in Croatia, Bulgaria and Greece and bearing in mind the *"socio-political, historical-cultural, philosophical-ideological and economical context"* (Kalogiannaki, 2012, p. 63) certain similarities are noticed, such as: A) The active participation of students in the learning procedure which is organized based on their needs and interests. B) The promotion of ICT as a basic element of teaching. C) The differentiated teaching according to the students' abilities and singularities. D) The actions inside and outside of the school environment with emphasis on the projects, the empirical learning, the cross-curricular approach and the group work. E) Especially in Secondary Education the balance between theoretical and practical education is promoted, enriching the teaching process with laboratories and practice.

Nevertheless, certain differences are noticed, such as: a) In the study case of Bulgaria in Primary and Secondary Education, where both modern and traditional methods are equally used (e.g. narration, explanation) and b) in Greece, in Secondary Education, where the use of science labs is promoted.

7. Conclusions

In conclusion, the innovative didactic approaches applied in Primary and Secondary Education in Croatia, Bulgaria and Greece, converge to a great extent, yet having some differences. The influence of the educational principles in the EU seems to be strong in the educational systems of its member-states and more specifically to the teaching approaches promoted to both grades of education. This influence is mainly detected on the two strategic educational goals of EU: a) the improvement of quality in the provided education and b) the enforcement of innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship spirit.

With the completion of this specific comparative approach a question arises whether all these teaching methods mentioned in the analytical curricula and applied in the member-states of EU could be put into practice or merely remains in theory. Consecutively, this question could be under further investigation at a later time.

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