Partial or Comprehensive Reform of the Education System in Kosovo: Overcoming Students Difficulties in Learning through New Teaching Strategies

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Doi:10.5901/jesr.2014.v4n4p0509

Abstract

Reform of the education system always has as an aim quality improvement in education. However not always students achieve to learn and gain new knowledge in successful way. Problems which appear among students during the process of teaching and learning different courses are not as a result of their intellectual abilities, but often they are as a result of lacking contemporary and adequate teaching strategies from the teachers. The way how teachers organize the whole teaching process is crucial in successful learning from students and increasing their achievement in learning. In this paper work I will present the results of research which is part of my PhD research paperwork which is done with 661 students of different elementary, middle and high schools in Kosovo. Out coming results of this research give as concrete data for courses which seems to be more difficult for students and in which their achievement is not at satisfactory level. Also this research will present the reasons why students consider those courses difficult and the reason which demotivates them have better learning achievements. Methodology: The part of research we will present is quantitative. The research has been conducted through questionnaire which consisted of variation of different questions; testing articles with optional selection of answers, and open type questions. The measurement scale of questionnaire is nominal, ordinal, interval and ratio. The data analyses where conducted with SPSS program. Analysis of this research is done through cross tabulations.

Keyword: *Teaching courses, learning, teaching, etc.*

1. Introduction

Teaching and learning process in Kosovo as in other parts of the world is crucial for the quality of education. The key role in this process is played by teachers, as the way how teacher transmits the knowledge to students, determines students achievement and success. Beside teachers, other important factor is the curriculum through which are foreseen the achievement results that students should achieve at the end of their class.

In 2001 Kosovo prepared the New Curriculum Framework which started to be implemented by schools during the 2002/2003 school year.

Within this changing initiative through new curriculum was aimed to increase the quality of teaching and learning and by doing that to increase the quality of education in Kosovo. Even though changes in education system include updating the textbooks, as they were not followed by quality, content and clearance.

Therefore Kosovo education system was aiming to adapt to current trends in international education. In this matter Kosovo took several steps toward reforming its education system in the last few years. One of the areas that were given a priority was also the teaching strategies and teaching methodologies, Training was provided to teachers of different school levels to enable them with skills relevant to the contemporary teaching strategies.

Regardless from trainings offered to the teachers, education system in our country still is facing the low level of students' achievement on particular courses.

This study research which is part of PhD thesis deals with courses that are difficult to understand by students and identifies the reasons that cause those difficulties.

2. Methodology

Part of this research that I am presenting uses the quantitative methodology. Questionnaire was used as measuring instrument and they had enough testing articles to cover this matter. Questionnaire was prepared with variety of questions. Each question had up to 5 answering options to be selected. The questionnaire also included open questions

in order for the respondents to be able to give their additional comments related to the learning process. The measuring scale of the questionnaire was nominal, optional, interval and report. Research analyses are done through cross tabulation.

3. Literature Review

Teaching itself has traditionally had a number of different meanings, as the Concise Oxford English Dictionary shows: To give systematic information to a person (about a subject or skill), to practice this professionally, to enable a person to do something by instruction and training, to be an advocate for a moral principle (my parents taught me forgiveness), to communicate, instruct in a moral principle, to induce a person by example or punishment to do or not to do a thing (that will teach you to sit still; that will teach you not to laugh), to make a person disinclined to do a thing (I will teach you to interfere).

There are a lot of debates among education scientists, scholars and politician about the role of teaching methodologies and strategies of teaching in the efforts to reform education reforms around the world. Some researchers support the idea that teaching strategies play an important role in the learning process and students' achievement.

Artful teachers approach the subject matter not as static knowledge or inert ideas, but as ways knowing. Using ways of knowing—thinking within a discipline—means to command a set of concepts and a set of strategies for asking questions and creating knowledge. To think across disciplines means to identify problems, to ask the right questions, to bring the right knowledge to bear, to find the right solutions, and to apply the right measure of one's success. Although teaching is more than a set of strategies, there are some teaching methods that should be part of every creative teacher's repertoire. Some of these are comprehensive strategies that can shape a whole lesson. Others can be combined to make a complete lesson plan.

So besides the content's importance and relevance there is also the way how that content is interpreted and communicated to students. The way in which the will get the most of what they are taught during the class.

On the other hand there are researchers who see teaching and learning more than technical activities related to a certain strategy, style and individual activity ". . .teaching and learning are primarily social and cultural rather than individual and technical activities; they should therefore be studied in authentic settings; this in turn means addressing their complexity, through a cultural perspective on the interrelationships between individual dispositions and agency, and institutional and structural contexts...".

Colley and his co-writers suggest that despite the fact that teaching techniques and strategies are very relevant there is a need for contextualization of any teaching activity with cultural and social settings where the teaching is taking place and who is the audience. This requires application of Pedagogic Content Knowledge skills as introduced by Lee Shulman "To teach all students according to today's standards, teachers need to understand subject matter deeply and flexibly so they can help students create useful cognitive maps, relate one idea to another, and address misconceptions. Teachers need to see how ideas connect across fields and to everyday life. This kind of understanding provides a foundation for pedagogical content knowledge that enables teachers to make ideas accessible to others"

Lacking this kind of skills by teachers may lead toward losing their professional credibility in the class which will affect the whole teaching process, class management, student achievements, etc.

Hargreaves a great contemporary scholar and researcher points out that "There is also a minority of teachers, who, for a variety of reasons, cannot manage an orderly classroom, and who are judged by students and colleagues alike to be of doubtful competence".. He goes on by explaining how effort of improving the education system and its teaching and learning will be difficult particularly because of this kind of teachers; "Most of these teachers survive; few are dismissed or guided into alternative employment. The measures for removing incompetent teachers are slow and complicated, demanding remarkable patience and skill from a complainant head teacher. Worse still, everybody in schools knows this is a problem that needs to be addressed, but are too embarrassed to do so openly.

Another relevant factor in the teaching and learning that is related to the teaching methodology and strategies is the need to recognize the teacher and students perceptions and their needs. Much classroom disruption occurs through a clash of needs and a clash of perceptions. According to Wilson "Teachers cannot be effectively supported without taking into consideration pupils' needs and their perceptions of what is going on in the classroom"..

One of the ways that a teacher can get to know his/her students is by involving them into different activities in the classroom by incorporating the cooperative learning approach. Cooperative learning has been used in schools around the world for several decades. The methods of cooperative learning have proved valuable for several reasons. Cooperative learning allows students to learn actively, even in large classes. Learning experts tell us that in order to learn, students must act and communicate. But in classes of 60 or more, the amount of time any one student can talk is very limited.

Cooperative learning techniques allow every student in the class to participate for much of the time, but they organize the activity of many students at once so that the activity will be productive and not chaotic. .

The self-evidence of the teaching methods assumes that either teacher will be didactic or that they will use the most efficient methods they know to achieve their specified objectives. Teaching involved the transmission of knowledge/theory or the teaching of a skill – it was an instrumentally rational activity: the outcomes of which can be measured and so the techniques employed can be assessed. This is the science of teaching.

A scientific approach to teaching and the wise use of different teaching methods is an important factor in teaching despites all above criticism. Teaching is still, in part, a technical process. Assessing the competence of teachers to employ certain methods is perfectly justifiable. Indeed, teachers who cannot use a wide variety of teaching methods, who do not evaluate the success of their teaching methods, and so on, are unprofessional. But, as every teacher knows, two teachers using the same techniques to teach the same content will frequently do so in entirely different ways and the outcomes of their lesson will not be the same. Learners know that – they evaluate a teacher as someone who: makes it interesting, lets you find out for yourself, respects our ideas, is friendly, and so on.

Tony Wagner is quoted in "Partnership for 21st Century Skills", as he speaks to the magnitude of this task: "Teaching all students to think and to be curious is much more than a technical problem for which educators, alone, are accountable. And more professional development for teachers and better textbooks and tests, though necessary, are insufficient as solutions. The problem goes much deeper-to the very way we conceive of the purpose and experience of schooling and what we expect our high school graduates to know and be able to do" .

On the other hand Collicott thinks that "There is a direct relationship how teacher organizes the learning in her classroom and how she selects what knowledge she presents to the children. Both aspects need to be based on the needs and experiences of the child, and we must remember the children in our schools draw on diverse backgrounds and experiences".

Comparing the two thoughts of Wagner and Collicott, while one orients the success in perceptions and expectations that society has about the achievement of students, the other orients success in the way how teacher organizes the teaching process based upon the students' needs, we can conclude that success in students' achievements with needed knowledge and skills, necessarily requires preparations from the preparing of curriculums, when is determined the expectations of students for particular levels of education as well as the teachers' preparation for enabling them to organize the class with strategies and techniques that involve every child in class and motivates them to be an active part of it.

Hamachek's thought "Consciously, we teach what we know, unconsciously, we teach who we are" supported by Palmer, who says "We teach who we are" , helps us understand how important is the teachers professional preparation. More prepared and professional are the teachers more they will help students not only to gain new knowledge but they will enable students with the necessary skills as critical and creative thinking, cooperation and group work, development of communication skills, research on different matters and increasing of student self-esteem.

4. Research Outcomes

In this research were involved (N=661) students from 11 municipalities of Kosovo. Out of 661 students, 442 were students of elementary and middle schools (grades 1-5 N=100, grades 6-9 N=342), and N=219 were students for high schools (grades 10-12 N=219). From 661 students female were N=368, and male were N=293.

Those analyses are done through the cross tabulation with the purpose to get data outcomes about the difficulties student face in particular courses. In those analyses the focus was identifying the course in which students face difficulties in order to take the appropriate steps in improving the organization of those courses in order to directly influence in improving the quality of teaching and learning of those courses.

Among question students were asked was related to the information on how much active are the students during a class. This question was asked in order to evaluate the working methodology of teachers in particular course.

On the question:" How much active are you during a class", 54.7% of students declare to be very active during a school class; while according to the grade level of education we can see that more active are students of elementary level-62.8%. Through this we understand that the teachers of secondary level schools should change their teaching strategies in order to include the largest number of students to be active during a school class.

How much active are you during a class

	School level:		Total
	0-9 grade level	High school level	
A lot	62.8%	38.4%	54.7%
Average	34.9%	54.8%	41.5%
A little	2.0%	5.9%	3.3%
At all	.2%	.9%	.5%
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	38.100[a]	3	.000
Likelihood Ratio	37.918	3	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	37.535	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	660		

a. 2 cells (25.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.00.

Students except that they are less active during a school class, they face difficulties in different courses. This is confirmed through this research. On the question: "In which courses you have the most difficulty", students have given different opinions about their experiences in certain courses. However the course which according to the students is most difficult is the subject of mathematics. Major differences we find out at the secondary level. Mathematics course is more difficult for both, high school and elementary school students. The percentage for high school students is 44.8%, while for elementary school students are 24.1%. The second course that is more difficult for primary level is the course of chemistry with 18.4%, followed by the course of physics of primary level 10.7%: primary level course of history 12.6% and secondary level English course 6.1%.

In which courses you have the most difficulty?

	School level:		Total
	0-9 grade level	High school level	
Mathematics	24.1%	44.8%	31.0%
Albanian language	3.6%	3.3%	3.5%
History	12.6%	2.8%	9.3%
Geography	5.5%	2.8%	4.6%
Chemistry	18.4%	8.8%	15.2%
Physics	10.7%	9.4%	10.3%
Biology	1.6%	5.5%	2.9%
Information and technology	3.3%	3.3%	3.3%
Civic Education	3.6%		2.4%
Humans and nature	3.6%		2.4%
Music	2.5%	1.1%	2.0%
Arts	3.6%	.6%	2.6%
Physical education	.8%	1.1%	.9%
Handcrafts	.5%		.4%
English Language	5.8%	6.1%	5.9%
Astronomy		.6%	.2%
French Language		.6%	.2%
Professional practice		5.5%	1.8%
German Language		3.3%	1.1%
Philosophy		.6%	.2%
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	102.509[a]	19	.000
Likelihood Ratio	118.487	19	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	.233	1	.629
N of Valid Cases	546		

a. 17 cells (42.5%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .33.

Identification of the most difficult courses for students has followed the reasoning on what makes these courses difficult for them. Students gave various reasons why they have difficulties in certain courses. Also in this analysis are compared with secondary school students in the secondary level and the results have drawn specific factors about this issue.

Justifications taken by students of primary and lower secondary education (9 grade school), have shown that 19.6% of them fail to understand their teachers and 19.0% of them think that they have difficulties because textbooks are incomprehensible. Even high school level students expressed that the biggest difficulties they encounter in core courses because they do not understand the teacher, about 24.9%. This reasoning is also supported by 19.3% of students who feel similar that their teachers are not clear during their lecture.

Reasoning

	School level:		Total
	0-9 grade level	High school level	
Overloading by teachers	17.6%	18.2%	17.8%
Teacher is not clear	15.4%	19.3%	16.7%
The text is ambiguous	19.0%	7.7%	15.3%
Memorizing	6.6%	1.7%	5.0%
Teacher's assessing is unfair	5.0%	7.7%	5.9%
I don't like the course	2.5%	4.4%	3.1%
I don't understand the teacher	19.6%	24.9%	21.3%
Lacking of laboratories	6.3%	8.3%	7.0%
Others	1.7%	2.8%	2.0%
Not talented	4.4%	1.1%	3.3%
The teacher pays attention only excellent students		1.7%	.6%
The teacher is tough	1.9%	2.2%	2.0%
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	33.231[a]	11	.000
Likelihood Ratio	36.830	11	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.394	1	.238
N of Valid Cases	544		

a. 4 cells (16.7%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.00.

In increasing students' success an important role is played by the textbooks of relevant courses.

On the question: "How are the contents of textbooks suitable and understandable for you", elementary school level seems to have more suitable textbooks, about 45.7%,while 64.8% of the high level students declare that textbook are average suitable.

How are the contents of textbooks suitable and understandable for you?

	School level:		Total
	0-9 grade level	High school level	
A lot	45.7%	21.9%	37.8%
Average	43.0%	64.8%	50.2%
A little	7.2%	10.5%	8.3%
At all	2.9%	2.7%	2.9%
Don't know	1.1%		.8%
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	40.198[a]	4	.000
Likelihood Ratio	43.305	4	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	13.210	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	661		

a. 2 cells (20.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.66.

5. Conclusion

From the statistical data of this research we conclude that more should be invested in the professional development of teachers, mainly in developing authentic teaching strategies in certain courses. Although teachers know the content of their respective subjects, they lack the skills to transfer this knowledge to their students. Due to the inability to handle the topics to the level that is understandable for students, they fail to transmit to the planned knowledge to students. Besides knowledge students fail to develop skills as they do not manage to acquire the necessary knowledge in certain courses and apply them in their daily lives.

This affects not only their success but it blocks also the increasing of the quality of the entire educational system.

It is very important to update the core textbooks, in accordance with current changes, as part of the changes of the whole system. Current textbooks are overloaded with information and hinder development of student skills. They are unable to understand and gain knowledge, as they have learn by heart the course content, in order to get good grades. This type of learning prevents the development of critical and creative thinking and does not give students possibility to implement their knowledge in everyday life.

6. Recommendations

From the current analysis we recommended that first step to develop changes of the education system should be investments in the professional development of teachers in increasing the quality of teaching, offering them the opportunity to gain on the development of teaching skills.

Teachers should be observed during the process of teaching and through this to identify needs for assistance in order to improve the whole quality of teaching.

Also as an important part of the changes at education is not enough to prepare the framework curriculum, and determining student achievement results, but investment should be made in developing basic texts for relevant subjects, so that they are clear and understandable for students.

Project based teaching is a possibility that not only motivates students to use their basic literature, but also to explore various sources, in order to realize their projects for their respective courses.

In this way, teaching will develop through modern strategies and the development of students will be facilitated to become better familiarized with the courses, applying the theory in practice, through researches that they can develop during their education.

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