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Expectations of the Educational Reform of High School Geography

Rositsa Vladeva

Shumen University, Faculty of Natural Sciences, Shumen, 115 Universitetska

Str., Shumen, Bulgaria

e-mail: rosivladeva@abv.bg

Abstract: *The study is an attempt to present the latest developments in legislation for implementation of the reform in geographic education in secondary school. Through conducted survey has been taken into account the views and expectations of teachers of Geography and Economics in terms of the new law, a framework curriculum, State educational standards and curricula. Expectations of educational reform are formulated as positive and negative sides. Referred to a recommendation for overcoming some of the problems were identified.*

Keywords: *educational reform, school geographical education*

Introduction

The regulatory base of Bulgarian education is characterized by big dynamics. This suggests the quality of normative documents and designed them for the predictions regarding the European and world educational trends. It forces us to think about, whether the school is a non-partisan educational institution and whether there is an institutional intervention in their preparation, consideration and approval.

The actuality of the topic stems from changes brought about by the new law on pre-school and high-school education, effective 01.08.2016 [10]. The following arguments are a motive for analysis of the regulations and for the study of the opinion of the main actors in the educational process in Geography and Economics – teachers.

Materials and Methods

To take into account the expectations of teachers in Geography and Economics from presenting to educational reform of the school geography survey is conducted with 63 teachers of Geography and Economics from Rousse, Shumen, Silistra, Valchi Dol, Varna, Dobrich, Devnya and Zavet.

To study the legal framework provided by the laws, regulations, curriculum content is applied – analysis and benchmarking.

Results and Discussion

The most important legal documents that define the strategic framework and basic parameters for realization of educational process in the Bulgarian school are the laws and regulations for their application. As an example of the dynamic pace of changing those for the purpose of modifying and updating can be mentioned:

- The Education Act of 1991, which by 2015, underwent more than 30 changes in the form of amendments [8];

- The rules for the implementation of the Education Act from 1999, which until 2014 impose 25 legislative amendments [7];

- The law of the State of education requirements and curriculum from 1999, which by 2016 is changing over 10 times [9].

That legislative Dynamics affects directly the organization and functioning of the educational process and makes it difficult for most of the participants that implementing regulations. Most victims are teachers, directors, representatives of the education inspectorate. At the same time, the direct participants in the learning process – students have testing of new curricula and textbooks and the measurement of the extent of their availability.

In hopes of greater stability in the educational space is considered the new law by 2015 due to the highlights of the change in him and the expected long-lasting results. In it as a basic principle in the system of pre-school and school education specifies education as a national priority [10, art. 3, par. 2]. Awareness and acceptance of education as a national value proves its importance for modern society and requires application of radical measures to improve its condition.

In objectives of educational policy attend those that are closely tied to geographic education: preservation and affirmation of the Bulgarian national identity; acquisition of competences for the implementation of the principles of sustainable development; the understanding and application of the principles of democracy and the rule of law, human rights and freedoms, and promote active and responsible citizenship; formation of tolerance and respect for ethnic, national, cultural, linguistic and religious identity of each citizen; knowledge of the national, European and world cultural values and traditions.

Finding the meaningful support between global educational purposes at the level of the General theoretical idea and the main purpose of geographical education at the level of the subject prove the great educational potential of geography. This is confirmed by the trends related to the development objectives of the geographical education referred to in the declarations of the Commission on Geographical Education of the International Geographical Union [2, 3, 4].

According to theoretical didactic productions is expected when offered, indicating what is educational goals related to their reorganizing tree and their hierarchical structure formation at the level of teaching material in geography and economics, to develop specific objectives in individual classes, sections and topics and objectives tree is formed [1, 70]. Therefore, the objectives set in the law should specify in curricula, textbooks and teaching materials in geography and economics, to be subject to absorption by the students. Reorganized in this way, the objectives form a system that develops in the horizontal and vertical plan.

In the framework curriculum for junior high school stage of primary level of education of the subject „Geography and Economics“are provided for a total of 174 hours. This as a proportion of the total number of hours in the middle school stage is nearly 6.1% (Tabl. 1).

In comparison with the other subjects that are studied by grade V to grade VIII, taking into account that this number is lower than subjects such as – „Sport“ (242), „History and Civilization“ (208), „Music“ (190), „Fine art“ (190). There is a slight preponderance in comparison with class „Biology“ (72 h), „Chemistry and environmental protection“ (54) and „Physics and Astronomy“ (54 h), which are taught only in grade VII, but are preceded by the subject „Man and nature“, which is taught in V and VI grade with a workload (170) or 2.5 hours a week.

In the framework curriculum in high school the first stage, the total number of hours is greater due to the passage of the grade VIII from junior high school stage. The measures provided for 162 hours represent only 5.6% of the total number of hours in the first high-school stage. In both education plan does not provide for compulsory teaching of „Geography and Economics“in the XI – XII grades. This may adversely influence and reduce the motivation of students to take State exams on geographical learning content, which is studied VIII – X grades, and apply successfully in high schools after grade XII.

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Corresponding author: rosivladeva@abv.bg

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The realization of educational objectives is situating on the basis of specific geographical content, forming his system in vertical and horizontal plan. Educational reform of high school geography directly affects the system of geographical education and proves that it is dynamic and should meet the requirements of society.

Problems in the construction of school geographical learning content derives from complex factors as leading are – the educational potential of geographical science and didactic requirements to be met by educational content.

Table 1. Hours of the subject „Geography and Economics“by educational stages

Educational Stages								Total	
Junior High School				First High School					
Grades			Number of hours	Grades			Number of hours	Number of hours	
According to the Framework Curriculum (profiled education) [6]									
V	VI	VII	V-VII	VIII	IX	X	VIII-X	V-X	
51	51	72	174	36	36	90	162	336	
				-	72	90			
According to [5]									
V	VI	VII	VII I	V-VII I		IX	X	IX-X	V-X
51	51	51	51	204		54	54	108	312

The complexity of geography as a science learning allows for the formation of key social and civic competences, but also of those in the areas of natural sciences, environmental protection, economy and sustainable development. This diversity requires certain difficulties in the reduction of scientific knowledge and their structure in the system for learning in school.

Grade 5

An introductory course in General Geography, Geography of Africa and Antarctica

Grade 6

Geography of North America, South America, Asia, Australia, Oceania

Grade 7

Geography of Europe, Balkan Peninsula and Bulgaria

Grade 8

Natural Geography

Grade 9

Socio-economic and regional geography

Grade 10

Geography of Bulgaria

Figure 1. A new structure of academic content in Geography and Economics

In the proposed system of geographic content, there should be links between the various hierarchical components – knowledge, skills, competences and relations in individual classes and in the entire system of school education in Geography and Economics. At the same time, it does not need further straining the students, and to meet the requirement of accessibility and compliance with the level of their cognitive abilities.

The model of system design of new learning content in Geography and Economics, which began to be implemented in the 5th grade in the school year 2016-2017 school years, is presented in Figure 1. It partly overlaps with the existing system of educational content and 9 10th grade. A positive feature is the inclusion of courses on natural geography of Bulgaria, which traditionally present in geographic learning content. Under the current system, he is reduced to the volume of the section of selected topics for natural-resource potential. It is understandable and explicit strategy of educational content for Europe, the Balkans and Bulgaria of 8 in 7th grade, due to completion of junior high school stage for part of the students and the likelihood that they will not continue their education in a high school stage (Fig. 1).

Most debates in the geographical field of education cause the transformation of the course „Geography of the continents and oceans“. It's rupture with the inclusion of two absolutely opposite continent, both in terms of the components of the natural environment and on the agriculture and public organization-Africa and Antarctica in the curriculum for grade 5.

According to methodological developments and the views of the teachers course in Introductory Geography and Economics from starting in junior high school stage always causes difficulties in the fifth graders. His load with the inclusion of two more continents, except learned up to this point, will undoubtedly increase the difficulties, both for students and for teachers. Its losing the logic of the geographical knowledge of the continents, which until now have been studied on the basis of similarities, such as the beginning was in the sixth grade. Now in the foreground stands out the highlighting of differences that cannot be explained logically to the children with poorly developed geographical conception and logical thinking ability still in grade 5.

In view of the confirmation or rejection of these claims on the basis of the carried out comparative analysis and content analysis – part of the new regulations in the field of school education, geographical survey took place with 63 teachers of geography and Economics from Rousse, Shumen, Silistra, Valchi Dol, Varna, Dobrich, Devnya and Zavet in September and October 2016. It shall examine the expectations of teachers from change in geographical education in respect of the provisions in LSE [1] the new curriculum in geography and economics for 5, 6 and 8 grades.

The questionnaire includes a total of eight objects, six of which require eligible response and two-free response. Profiling data of the respondents is as follows:

- Gender structure: 72%/28%, women/men;
- Educational structure: 63% 37% M.D, Bc.D.;
- Qualifications: 21% with the first, second and third vocational degree, 15% with the fourth vocational degree, 23% in 5th vocational degree and 41% without professional qualifications.

The objects from first to sixth including require determining the attitude or opinion, as the possible responses are similar:

1. predominantly positive
2. predominantly negative
3. absolute positive
4. absolute negative.

First object explores the relationship of teachers to act on pre-school and school education in relation to planned objectives and principles. The results show a positive attitude towards changes in the underlying law in 69.7% of respondents. The answer to the second question reported that 58.7% of teachers expressed a similar attitude toward the state educational standards. That proves approval

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regarding the concept of a legislative framework to change the education of today's stage and the basis of their ideas.

Radically opposite is the opinion of the respondents regarding the dropping of 8th grade of junior high school stage of basic level and its inclusion in the first junior high school stage, which is examined by a third object. Consolidation of 79.3% of teachers of geography and Economics around the negative opinion is related to the probability of dropping out of high school students who will not continue in the high-school stage and reduce classes in geography and Economics in primary schools. Unfortunately, this trend will be manifested mainly in small villages and places with mixed ethnic population, as will cause the formation of the merged classes and shortening of the teachers (Fig. 2).

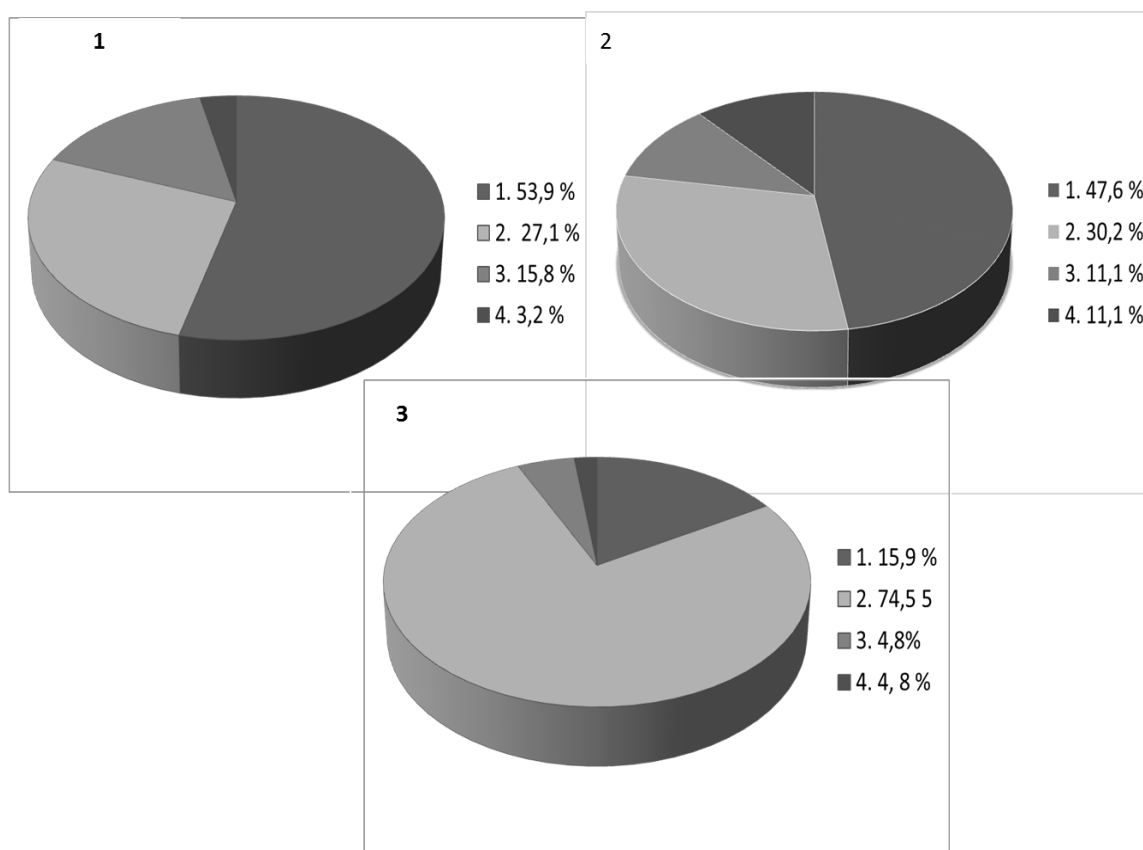


Figure 2. Statistic of Objects 1, 2, 3

Results of the 4th object show the views of teachers of geography and economics for the groups of key competences in the law and opportunities for their realization. The positive attitude towards them prevails at 65.1% of respondents. The other declared partly or wholly negative opinion in connection with their poor knowledge and difficulties in the implementation of key competences in learning process in Geography and Economics (Fig. 3).

Significant polarization of the answer shall be taken into account in the fifth object, the required opinion on classes in geography and Economics in the new curriculum framework. Missing answers with overwhelming positive opinion, while those with entirely positive feedback are 3.2%. Others resent 96.8% of teachers with the expression of a negative vote for the number of hours of the subject in the curriculum. In discussions with them on account of the unequal presence of the subject „Geography“ in comparison with „History and civilization“, both in junior high and high school stage.

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Sixth object require sharing your opinion on new curriculum in Geography and Economics and opportunities to work with them. The prevailing opinion of the teachers is positive, as% of 60.4 approves them. This is a motive for the expected new structure of curricula and fewer concepts. Working with them is yet to come and the emerging problems will be resolved in the course of the learning process.

In objects seven and eight respondents argue their opinions in the form of free response.

Seventh object explores the attitude to new structures in the system of educational content in geography and economics. Teachers as the most troubled educational content in the fifth grade. Their arguments are related to the high volume of learning content, which is preserved in almost the same form as in the previous curriculum, and is supplemented with continents Africa and Antarctica.

At the same time in fifth grade teachers must devote additional time to form a geographical language of the students and for placing the basics of map cartography skills and culture. Approved by most teachers is the inclusion of a course on natural founding geographic geography in the eighth grade, which was marked as a significant failure of the previous system of educational content. There are references to unload the educational content of the course on the „Socio-economic and regional geography” in the ninth grade.

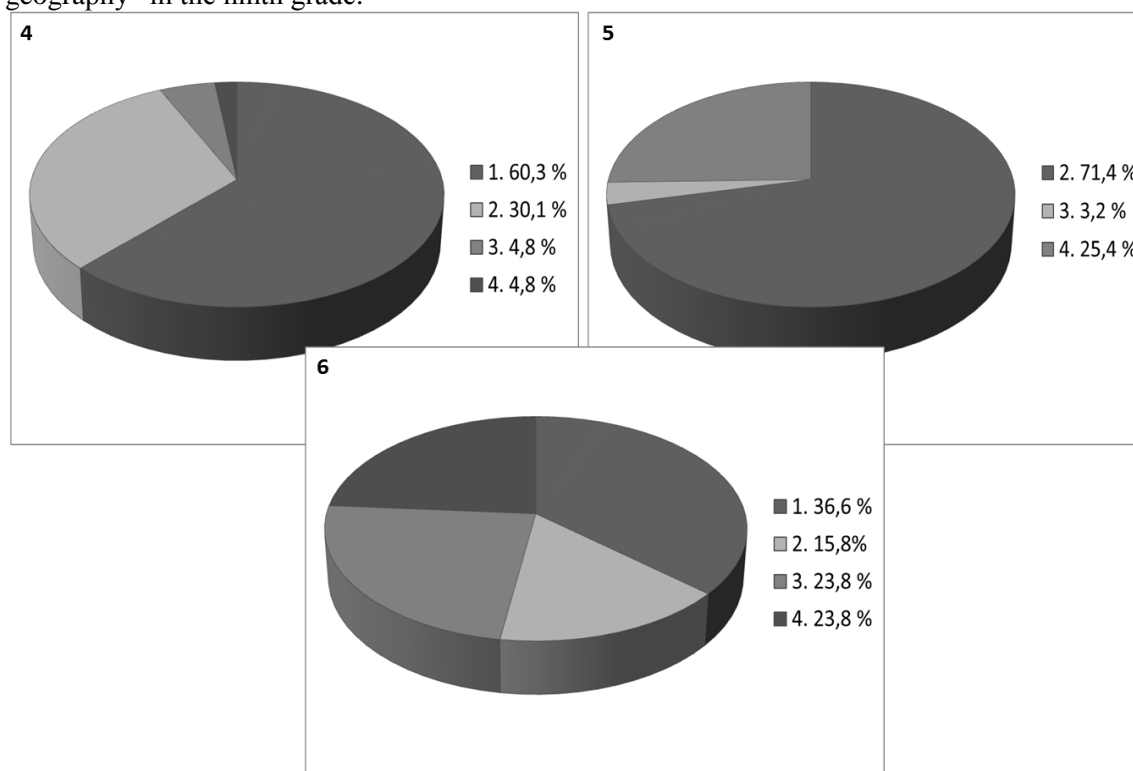


Figure 3. Statistic of objects 4, 5, 6

The answer to the last object requires an indication of the main positive and negative sides of the educational reform. They are combined and summarized in the conclusions of the study.

Conclusions

Conclusions the results of the study to define the expectations of the educational reform of high school Geography can be assembled as positive and negative.

Positive are the following:

- The following global objectives and principles of contemporary Bulgarian education defined his vision of education at European and global level.

- The educational change is necessary due to the compelling replacement of outdated stereotypes, both in society and in education.

- Offering a greater choice in preparing the course documentation at the level of the school provides an important tool for the management of the training process, depending on the specific characteristics of the students.

- Typing of the new curricula for all subjects in the realization of the General requirements for the inclusion of new topics for 60% and 40% knowledge topics for exercise and summary, as well as compliance with the key competences and the pursuit of new direction and updating of educational content, will lead to the unification of requirements and facilitate the learning process.

- Curricula in this form will result in stimulating activities for the realization of interdisciplinary synthesis and stimulating the cognitive activity of students.

Negative expectations are related to certain difficulties in the realization of innovations in the regulations as:

- An unequal presence of the subject „Geography“ in the framework curricula in comparison with other school subjects.

- Difficulties in applying the compression options within one academic year of educational content in geography and economics for 7th grade and part of the 8th grade in the current and the next school year. This is due to the fact that students in the seventh grade will complete his primary education after grade VII, rather than as planned on the former lesson's plans after grade VIII.

- Uncoordinated the correlation between curriculum and textbook for grade 5 during the academic school year 2016-2017 causes difficulties in learning process, which implements a new curriculum and is working with the old textbook, developed under a different curriculum.

- Expanding the educational content of Geography and Economics for grade 5 with the inclusion of two continents, which was lacking in the old textbooks that will be studied in scrolls of individual publishers.

- Lack of skills in the part of the teachers of geography and economics to measure the expected results of the level themes through the competences which have as a requirement under the new curriculum.

Part of the problems relating to the implementation of the legislative framework of school's Geographical education will be delay in time, due to testing of the documents and their degree of suitability. Another part will be solved by conducting consulting and methodological work with teachers, as well as in investing in a variety of training courses.

The change in school geographical education requires time, responsible attitude and laying of a lot of effort from all the participants in it.

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