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Intercultural Education in Teacher Training in Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” - Challenges and Perspectives

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Abstract

The 15th years experience in the teacher training on topics of the intercultural education in the Faculty of Education, Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” is presented. Different possibilities to include these problems in the education of Bachelor and Master degree students are commented – as special subjects, in the frame of the content of compulsory or elective subjects, content orientations of diploma works etc. Some challenges to the intercultural education as a topic of the pedagogical theory and practice in Bulgaria and teacher training are discussed.

Key words: teacher training, intercultural education.

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Introduction

One of the main contemporary challenges of the cultural plurality in the educational system of Bulgaria to the theory and practice of the intercultural education is its insertion in the university teacher training. This challenge is the necessary prerequisite to the applying of the results of teacher training in the educational practice - implementation of the intercultural education in concrete educational activities (Chavdarova – Kostova, 2010).

The quality of teaching and learning in multicultural schools depends on the respective quality teacher training in the higher education institutions – pre-service and in-service. Contemporary teachers need to be prepared to work with children with different ethnic, religious, national identity – from traditional and non-traditional minorities.

There is more than 15 years experience in different Bulgarian universities to include intercultural education topics in the teacher training – Bachelor, Master and Doctoral degrees. Main determinants for the effectiveness and stability of such predominantly elective courses are personal engagement of the respective lecturer and administrative support to include such disciplines in the students` curriculum.

It could be said that teacher training on intercultural issues in Faculty of Education, Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” characterizes with stability, constancy and development in the above mentioned period. Because of that it is well known on national level as place with intensive and successful results in this area.

Purpose and objectives of the study

The main purpose and objectives of this study are to present the results from the engagements of the Faculty of Education, Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” with teacher training on different aspects of the intercultural education.

Methodology

The content of his paper is based on the description and self-reflection (Koleva, 2013) of the results of personal engagement of the author – as initiatives and realizations of the variety of elective subjects on different intercultural topics in Bachelor degree specialties, Master degree programs and dissertations.

Results

In the Faculty of education, Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” there is experience more that 15 years in the teacher training and training of other students in Intercultural education and related to this area courses. As a result of this work there are hundreds of students that have finished successfully the elective courses as:

- Intercultural education (specialties Pedagogy and Social work, Bachelor degree and Master program Educational management);
- European intercultural dialogue trough education (specialty Non-formal education, Bachelor degree);
- European intercultural dialogue (specialty Library and Information Studies, Bachelor degree, Faculty of Philosophy);
- Culture and education – management aspects, Equal access to education – management aspects, Inclusive education (Master program Educational management);

- Social work with refugees (Master programs Social work with children and family and Clinic social work);
- Projects and programs with minorities (Master program European projects, Faculty of Philosophy);
- Basics of the social work with refugees and migrants; Protection and care for children refugees (Master program Social work with refugees and migrants).

Now these problems are included in the compulsory subject Inclusive education (specialty Pedagogy, Bachelor degree; Post-diploma teacher qualification; Master program Religion and education, Faculty of Theology; master program History education in the secondary school, Faculty of History).

The practical realization of this direction of the teacher training shows that 2 main ways are possible:

- As a concrete elective subject that responds to the special interest of the students to such topics;
- In the frame of the content of other subjects – mainly compulsory, to present main aspects of the intercultural education to all students (for example – Theory of education, Pedagogy, Family pedagogy /specialties Pedagogy, Non-formal education, Philosophy, English philology etc./).

For many of students such courses provoked their attitudes to the diversity as a concept and as a practice – school and social. Bulgaria historically is a multicultural society but this fact is not enough to develop intercultural competences. It's necessary to work for their development especially when the social experience in multicultural communication is missed. At the beginning of their study many of our university students have not knowledge about specifics of the main ethnic groups in our country, other religious practices, immigrants and refugees. Many of them have not rich experience in communication with representatives of different cultural groups because their personal living in predominantly monocultural settings. Because of that such university subjects are very important for their personal development especially for their attitudes to diversity.

One of the main aims of the subjects is to develop understanding on the base of the knowledge – necessary condition for the tolerance. It's not an easy work. Based on the personal experience, historic events and media influences students could have a mixture of positive and not so positive attitudes to different cultural groups. Sometimes it's very difficult to cope with such mixture of attitudes and emotions in the auditorium – results from previous family and social influences. But the final results are hopeful.

The content of each elective subject in the curriculum of teacher training in the Faculty of Education, Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” in the area of the intercultural dimension in education reflects some specifics of the university degree or program. Some examples:

The subject *Intercultural education* has more than 15-years experience in the Bachelor degree (Bachelor programs Pedagogy and Social work) and in the Master degree program Educational management. Main topic in the content of this subjects are: Philosophical “roots” of the idea for interculturality, Determinants of the intercultural education, The attitude toward diversity, Cultural interactions, Legal bases of the intercultural education, Social integration of people with differences, Intercultural pedagogy as an idea, The process of intercultural education within the school institution, Religious diversity, ethnic diversity, language diversity in the context of the intercultural education, Intercultural education – limitations, Intercultural competence, Patriotic education in the context of the intercultural education, Teacher training and qualification in the field of the intercultural education.

This was the first attempt to include intercultural dimension in the teacher training of future teachers in the Faculty of education. After, several other subjects were developed to meet additional interest of students in this field. For example, in the master program Educational management many students decided to learn additionally subjects as Culture and education – management aspects, Equal access to education – management aspects or Inclusive education. Some students decided to study three of these subjects. This is an indicator of achieved goals in terms of increasing interest in intercultural issues and the readiness to work effectively in a multicultural school environment.

The subject *Equal access to education - management aspects* was developed to clarify specifics of legal bases and practical realization of this very important not only for Bulgaria aspect of the intercultural education. Because of that main topic of the content of this subjects are: The idea of equal access to education - history and content. Relationship between the concepts equal access - equal start - equal chance in education, Main international and state documents presupposing the realization of the idea of equal access to education, Bulgarian state institutions, ensuring the realization of the idea of equal access to education - Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, other ministries and agencies, The specificity of realizing the idea of equal access to education in different educational degrees - pre-school education, secondary education, higher education, Non-governmental organizations committed to implement the idea of equal access to education, Supporting functions of the religious institutions for the realization of the idea of equal access to education, The school principal as the responsible implementer of the idea of equal access to education, Public attitudes to the idea of equal access to education, The teacher as a factor in realizing the idea of equal access to education.

Faculty of education has 10-years experience in the special preparation of professionals in the area of the non-formal education – Bachelor program Non-formal education, Bachelor degree. For these students a special elective subject was developed - *European intercultural dialogue through education* with main topics: The notion of diversity - at the center of the idea of intercultural dialogue and intercultural education, Intercultural dialogue - a priority in European education policy, International organizations and communities realizing the idea of intercultural dialogue, Normative documents for realization of intercultural education and intercultural dialogue at European level, Intercultural dialogue and human rights, Ethno-cultural dimension and religious dimension of the intercultural dialogue and intercultural education, Education for democratic citizenship - Intercultural dialogue - Intercultural education, Intercultural competence.

It was developed a subject in responding to the specific needs in the training of professionals in the Master program Pedagogy of deviant behaviour - *Preventive and corrective activity in multicultural environment*. Among the main topics within the content of this subjects are: The notion of ethnicity - concepts, approaches, definitions, essence, content, key features, Ethnicity and socio-cultural identity - ethnicity and nationality, religiosity, mother tongue, socio-economic status, race, Multiethnic environment: concepts, approaches, definitions, essence, content, key features, Ethnicity and multi-ethnicity in strategic and normative documents at European and national level, Attitudes towards ethnic diversity in European and non-European education systems, Subjects and specifics of preventive and corrective activity in a multiethnic educational environment.

The subject *Inclusive education* was initially developed as an elective subject and now it is a compulsory subject in teacher training according. Main topics of this subject are: The idea of inclusion in education, Global and European policy on inclusion in education, Inclusive education in Bulgarian context, "Different" children as objects/subjects of inclusion in education - children with SEN and children with

socio-cultural differences as the main "target" groups - typology and characteristics, Methodological specifics of the inclusion process in the school educational environment, Non-governmental organizations focusing on inclusive education, Teacher as realizing the idea of inclusive education: planning, organizing lessons in an inclusive learning environment, Parents and inclusive education, the interaction teachers – parents, Inclusive education in a community context: models, approaches, practices.

There is a special interest to the subjects Intercultural education and European intercultural dialogue through education from many Erasmus and other foreign students from different countries that have been in the Faculty of education in the last 5-6 years – students from Spain, Belgium, France, Portugal, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Japan. This fact could be interpreted in the context of the internationalization in the higher education institutions as an answer of needs of foreign students to develop themselves in intercultural topics area.

Since 2004 more than 15 diploma thesis on different topics of the intercultural education were developed from Bachelor degree students and more than 30 diploma thesis from Master degree students, there are some PhD successfully finished dissertations also /for example: Albena Todorova, 2012 - Out-of-school educational activity with children refugees in Bulgaria; S. Nalbantian – Hacherian, 2010 - Educational possibilities of the cultural institutions for integration of ethnic minorities in Republic of Bulgaria”/ and dissertation for scientific degree Doctor of pedagogical sciences: S. Chavdarova – Kostova, 2010 – Intercultural education in the university teacher training.

Some examples of diploma works that have been developed from Bachelor and Master degree students on different topics of the intercultural education could illustrate their interests:

- Training of pedagogical specialists in the field of preventive educational activity in multicultural environment in Bulgaria and Spain, 2018 (Master program “Pedagogy of deviant behavior”);
- Intercultural competence of the employees of the Ministry of the Interior, 2018 (Master program “Pedagogy of deviant behavior”);
- Management of extracurricular and out-of-school activities in the field of civic, health, ecologic and intercultural education, 2018 (Master program Educational management);
- Teacher`s management roles in intercultural competence formation of children at primary school age, 2017 (Master program Educational management);
- Management of the process of intercultural competence formation through foreign language teaching, 2017 (Master program Educational management);
- Management aspects of the education of children speaking Western Armenian language in Armenia, 2017 (Master program Educational management);
- Management of the process of development of the Bulgarian national identity in the Bulgarian schools in London, 2016 (Master program Educational management);
- Parental approaches in raising and educating Roma children, 2015 (Bachelor degree specialty Pedagogy);
- Management aspects of the process of integration of Roma children in kindergarten, 2014 (Master program Educational management);
- Management approaches to the integration of Roma children in the basic school, 2014 (Master program Educational management);
- Pedagogical approaches in the teacher`s work with children of different nationalities, 2014 (Bachelor degree specialty Pedagogy);

- Management of the projects for educational integration in schools with dominant number of Roma students, 2013 (Master program Educational management)
- The role of the European funds for the educational integration of people from Roma ethnicity, 2011 (Master program European projects)
- Organization and management of educational activities in schools where Bulgarian-Mohammedan children are educated, 2010 (Master program Educational management);
- Status of children from traditional ethnic groups in Bulgaria in the group of peers in the class, 2009 (Bachelor degree specialty Pedagogy);
- Organization of international programs for educational and cultural exchange of pupils and students, 2008 (Master program Educational management);
- Our-of-school pedagogical activities with children refugees in Bulgaria, 2006 (Bachelor degree specialty Pedagogy);
- Educational activities to preserve Russian national identity among Russians and their descendants in Bulgaria, 2005 (Bachelor degree specialty Pedagogy);
- Religious diversity in the state educational policy, 2005 (Master program Educational management);
- Educational traditions of the Turkish ethnic group in Bulgaria, 2004 (Bachelor degree specialty Pedagogy), etc.

The character of the themes shows a diversity of interests of the students - graduates to aspects of the intercultural education – toward children from traditional minorities and refugees, ethnic and religious diversity, school and out-of-school activities for educational integration, etc. The choice of a topic for many students is personally determined – as a representative of a concrete socio-cultural group or as having experience in communication and interaction with members of other socio-cultural groups.

Discussions

What are the main perspectives in front of the teacher training development in this area? Intercultural education is one of the most dynamically developing spheres in the contemporary pedagogy. There is a complex of challenges to the intercultural education as a topic of the pedagogical theory and practice in Bulgaria and teacher training:

- Development of the intercultural education issues based on the concept of “diversity” in its richness of dimensions – biological and socio-cultural determined (Chavdarova – Kostova, 2010; Nalbantian – Hacherian, 2009);
- Development of the critical approach as regards presenting main guidelines that are given to the students for their work in multicultural environment – from the positions of science to the results of activities in the educational policy and practices areas at their different levels /global, European, national, local/ (Makariev, 2008);
- Development of the intercultural competences of the students – future and current teachers;
- Development of research activity to measure the effectiveness of the university teacher training on intercultural topics.
- Development of the relation intercultural education – inclusive education in the context of the teacher training (Chavdarova – Kostova, 2019; Makariev, 2017).
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Conclusion

As a conclusion it could be said that there are clear tendencies toward the recognition of the importance of the intercultural problems in the Bulgarian university teacher training. This is a necessary answer to the social need to prepare teachers that could work successfully in a heterogeneous educational environment – one very serious challenge to the higher educational institutions.

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