

EDUCATIONAL PROJECTS – AN INSTRUMENT FOR RAISING THE POTENTIAL OF HUMAN RESOURCES

Kliment Naydenov, Maya Vasileva

Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", 1504 Sofia; kl.naydenov@gmail.com

ABSTRACT. Education as a high public value is the key to the preparation of human resources in the modern conditions of the rapidly changing labour market, the development of specific skills and personal qualities (teamwork skills, mutual assistance, understanding, initiative, creativity, entrepreneurial spirit, attitudes towards informed solutions, international, intercultural and inter-religious tolerance), the path for acquiring professional qualification and inclusion in the European educational space. Education is defined as one of the most conservative social sectors. This is the result of both its internal characteristics (continuity, attitudes and time for changing scientific and pedagogical paradigms, etc.), as well as of the requirements of the society itself (family and traditions, financial resources, etc.). In recent years, education in our country has become one of the subjects of greatest public importance. There is a growing prevalence of the opinion on the need to redefine the objectives of Bulgarian school education in view of the new requirements of dynamic globalisation and the challenges of a highly competitive labour market within the European Union. Educational projects are one of the leading tools that underpin social and occupational development and the desired change. In Bulgaria there has been a talk of educational reform for a long time, various proposals for changes have been made, new practices have been introduced, taken from the European model of education and training, but the real reforms are partial and extremely insufficient.

Keywords: educational projects, personal qualities, pedagogical paradigms

ОБРАЗОВАТЕЛНИТЕ ПРОЕКТИ – ИНСТРУМЕНТ ЗА ПОВИШАВАНЕ ПОТЕНЦИАЛА НА ЧОВЕШКИТЕ РЕСУРСИ

Климент Найденов, Мая Василева

Софийски университет "Св. Климент Охридски", 1504 София

РЕЗЮМЕ. Образованието като висша обществена ценност е ключът към подготовката на човешките ресурси в съвременните условия на бързопроменящия се пазар на труда, развитието на специфични умения и личностни качества (умения за работа в екип, взаимопомощ, разбирателство, инициативност, креативност, предприемачески дух, нагласи за информирани решения, международна, межкултурна и междурелигиозна толерантност), пътят за придобиване на професионална квалификация и приобщаване към европейското образователно пространство. Образованието се определя като един от най-консервативните социални сектори. Това е резултат както от негови вътрешни характеристики (приемственост, нагласи и време за смяна на научни и педагогически парадигми и т.н.), така и от изисквания на самия социум (семейство и традиции, финансови ресурси и др.). През последните години образованието у нас се утвърди като една от темите с най-голяма обществена значимост. Все повече преобладава мнението за нуждата от предефиниране на целите на българското училищно образование, с оглед новите изисквания на динамичната глобализация и предизвикателствата на високо конкурентния пазар на труда в рамките на Европейския съюз. Образователните проекти са един от водещите инструменти, които лежат в основата на социалното и трудово-професионално развитие и така желаната промяна. В България от доста време се говори за образователна реформа, правят се различни предложения за промени, въвеждат се нови практики, взети от европейския модел на образование и обучение, но реалните реформи са частични и крайно недостатъчни.

Ключови думи: образователни проекти, личностни качества, педагогически парадигми

Education as a high public value is the key to the preparation of human resources in the modern conditions of the rapidly changing labour market, the development of specific skills and personal qualities (teamwork skills, mutual assistance, understanding, initiative, creativity, entrepreneurial spirit, attitudes towards informed solutions, international, intercultural and inter-religious tolerance), the path for acquiring professional qualification and inclusion in the European educational space. Education is defined as one of the most conservative social sectors. This is the result of both its internal characteristics (continuity, attitudes and time for changing scientific and pedagogical paradigms, etc.), as well as the requirements of the social system itself (family and traditions, financial resources, etc.) (Pantaleev, 2005). Education plays a central role in the life of every person and prepares him/her for further professional realisation. Knowledge and skills acquired as a result of education are a key factor for integration or exclusion from the labour market.

They determine the economic impact of education on the labour market. Links between education and employment are multi-layered and higher education is not always a guarantee of (high-paid) work and higher productivity in the economy. A major problem in the education process in preparing the necessary experts is the lack of well-established relationships and contacts between the administration and the higher education institutions to encourage prospective students to seek their public sector engagement (Ivanov, 2018).

The system of vocational education and training is the one that prepares citizens for realisation in the economy and other spheres of public life, creating conditions for acquiring professional qualification (qualification in a profession or part of a profession that includes the set of professional competencies and the necessary for their forming general knowledge and skills) (Zakon za profesionalnoto obrazovanie i obuchenie) and for its continuous improvement. A secondary education programme is professional if its orientation is "primarily

intended to lead participants to acquire the practical skills, know-how and understanding needed to work on a specific profession." Vocational education can be a school-based or part of a dual apprenticeship system. For comparison, general education is only school-based and does not necessarily lead to qualifications relevant to labour market requirements (Ganchev, 2014).

The vocational education and training system has a complex structure covering three areas: vocational guidance (providing information and counseling to pupils and others about their choice of profession and career development), vocational training (ensuring the acquisition of qualification by profession or part from the profession, as well as its improvement) and vocational education (it assures the absorption of the general education minimum for secondary education and the acquisition of a profession).

Vocational training is an integral part of each person's education. It is based on the principles of humanism and democratisation, which require: the commitment of education, respectively training with personal interests and public needs; basic level – a minimum of professional competencies (proven ability to use knowledge, skills (personal, social) during training, at work or in professional and personal development at the completion of a certain level of training; free self-determination – the right of everyone to determine their personal development according to the requirements of the basic educational level, the public needs and interests and the effectiveness of the training - training for everyone in the optimal boundaries and quality of education.

Vocational education and training in Bulgaria offers the acquisition of four degrees of professional qualification that are comparable to the European ones. This system allows each student who has passed a certain educational stage to obtain a corresponding degree of qualification. Degrees of professional qualification are interdependent with the possibility of transition from lower to higher level of qualification (*Obrazovanie za vsichki*, 2002). They are regulated in Article 8 of the Vocational Education and Training Act. According to it the relevant degrees of professional qualification require:

- for the first degree – acquired professional competences for practicing professions, including routine activities carried out under non-changing conditions;
- for the second degree – acquired professional competences for exercising professions involving complex activities carried out under changing conditions;
- for the third degree – acquired professional competences for practicing professions, including complex activities carried out under changing conditions, as well as assuming responsibility for the work of other persons;
- for the fourth degree – acquired professional competences for exercising professions involving a wide range of complex activities carried out under changing conditions as well as assuming managerial responsibilities for the work of others and for the allocation of resources. (*Zakon za profesionalnoto obrazovanie i obuchenie*).

Over the last decades, vocational education and training (VET) has become a key factor in sustainable socio-economic development in Europe. There is a growing need to apply new approaches in vocational education and training. In their realisation it is necessary to take into account the circumstances facing our country. In the short term, they are directly related to the socio-economic situation after the crisis

and to the long-term demographic processes and changes. European initiatives are aimed at improving vocational education and training systems so that these systems can help increase employment and social inclusion, enable everyone to take up lifelong learning and facilitate access to higher education in accordance with the needs of society and the labor market (*Strategia za razvitie na profesionalnoto obrazovanie i obuchenie v Republika Bulgaria za perioda 2015-2020*).

The current state of secondary vocational education and training in Bulgaria reveals a picture of the problems in several directions:

- the quality assurance system for vocational education and training needs updating and adapting to European quality requirements;
- there is no programme for qualitatively improving of the educational and training environment in schools;
- the network of schools in which vocational training is carried out needs urgent optimisation;
- lack of flexibility in school vocational education and training;
- the number of pupils in vocational education sharply decreases;
- there is a steady trend towards inclusion in vocational education of students with low success and poor motivation for training in high-tech professions;
- decrease in the number of trainees in occupations with II and III degree of professional qualification;
- the number of teachers in vocational schools is "melting";
- the "aging" of teaching staff in vocational schools is visible, as well as the obsolete approaches and methods that are applied in the process of training young people;
- there is a pressing need to review the role of the institutions involved in setting up and organising vocational education and training policy in the country;
- it is necessary to update the processes and standards directly related to vocational education and training;
- the vocational education and training system is experiencing the need to apply European tools for modular training;
- there is weak communication between secondary vocational education and business.

The positive effects of education accompany the person throughout his or her active life and provide the opportunity to acquire social knowledge and skills necessary for personal and professional realisation. The vocational education and training system needs qualitative changes that will in the future create trained personnel necessary for the modern, fast-changing and information-secured labour market. In Bulgaria, in recent years, the quality of human resources has dropped considerably, due to a number of significant reasons – lower levels of vocational education and training, lack of innovative methods, outdated curricula and programmes that do not meet the needs of the modern Bulgarian economy, discrepancy between the acquired qualification the possibility of realisation and a number of others. An essential tool for achieving the desired quality educational change and for raising the potential of human resources in our country is the so-called "Educational project". A project in education is a collaborative process, frequently

involving different teacher and educational staff that is carefully planned to achieve a particular aim of learning.

In Bulgaria, educational projects have a long history, but their results are accepted by society with different attitudes and responses. One reason for this is the lack of an assessment of the impact of programmes and projects on the education system. European practice has long introduced project interventions in education and has helped to improve the quality of human resources. Bulgaria, as a member of the European Union, should follow the good practices and impact models for improving the quality of the secondary vocational education and training and its effects on the future professional staff. Project work is this credible opportunity for change and innovation in the education sector.

Educational projects are the group of social projects whose main objectives are related to the achievement of a change in the field of education and education as a whole. This change can be related both to material gains (improvement of the material and technical base) and to the educational process of pupils and teachers. As a result, new knowledge can be acquired, different types of skills (communication, organisational, technical, etc.) can be learned, new relationships and values, learning new patterns of behaviour, etc. (Totseva, Kozhuharova, 2008). This process is called socialisation (Genova, 2009). Personally, one learns basic knowledge and skills; develops his abstract thinking; learns to solve problems; communicates with basic values of society; is trained on professional knowledge and skills, techniques and practices of professional activity, models and standards of professional behaviour that help the person to present and offer to the labour market; prepares for meaningful and complete relations with others; acquires a civilian position. From a social point of view, one develops his sense of commitment, responsibility, desire for a high level of education and qualification, striving for prestige in society, knowledge and skills to cope with the pressures and challenges of the social environment (Genova, 2009). Through educational projects, one becomes socialised and builds himself as a person. It is important in this process to obtain continuous feedback on the development and achievements of the individual pupil.

Educational projects are implemented in the area of secondary, secondary vocational and tertiary education, as well as in lifelong learning. The present study pays attention to the educational projects developed and applied in secondary vocational education and training. In recent years, not only in Europe, but also in Bulgaria, an increasing number of enrichment activities have been carried out on a project basis (Totseva, Kozhuharova, 2008). There are generally two approaches to the implementation of education and training programmes and projects within the European Union. The first approach, conditionally called horizontal, involves activities related to:

- exchange ideas for policies, innovations and good practices within vocational education and training;
- exchange and mobility of learners, creation of opportunities for enhancing language training;
- research in the field of vocational education and training, distance learning and the introduction of information technologies in education.

The second approach is based on the regional principle (a basic principle of support in the European Union). The regions of the EU Member States apply for funds to improve

educational and training activities. This approach also allows for direct investment in educational infrastructure. Increasing the competitiveness and quality of human resources through education and training is the main goal of the thousands of projects funded annually by the European Commission (Pantaleev, 2005).

"The two approaches complement each other and provide education and training institutions with the opportunity to produce and distribute their own know-how, to use already created ones and to use financial resources to implement educational innovations" (Pantaleev, 2005).

The mission of educational projects is rooted in supporting smart, talented and motivated students to work to maximise their potential and capabilities through the projects they are involved in.

The vision of educational projects is their transformation into the means, which will improve the quality of human resources and will contribute to their future professional realisation.

The main objectives of the educational projects are directly related to the achievement of the social and labour-professional development of the participants. School projects play an important role in creating democratic attitudes (to be tolerant and to accept the different, all people to have equal rights in society, everyone to freely express their public position – freedom of speech, etc.) and education in the values of mutual understanding – qualities that accompany the individual throughout his social and professional life. Educational projects aim at developing foreign language, entrepreneurial, communication, presentation, professional, intercultural and many other competences and skills necessary for the realisation of young people. By participating in an educational project, the learner is involved in a learning process - has the opportunity to develop his/her potential, provides an initiative to acquire new knowledge and skills, to learn to communicate and to work effectively in a team, to solve solutions and deal with specific problems, to touch on innovative methods and approaches, to be socially responsible, and develop and implement constructive personal strategies in different life situations.

Project activity is not just a move forward, it is not just enthusiasm and success, there are resources and conditions for "normal work". It also includes a peculiar overview of capacity, human resources, and readiness for change (Pantaleev, 2005). So far, no comprehensive assessment of the impact of educational projects on final recipients (recipients) has been carried out in our country. Expert observations and feedback in this area reveal that:

- pupils are very positive about innovation in education and training;
- the competition, selection for project participation and mobility are extremely positive and have a huge motivating impact on them;
- language training for students is usually good and sometimes excellent for participation in projects;

Lecturers usually observe significant positive changes in the pupils involved in projects (Pantaleev, 2005).

Educational projects in Bulgaria have a positive impact on the development and quality of human resources. The implementation and management of school projects has proved to be a good European practice in Bulgarian secondary vocational education and training and requires the use of

different techniques and technologies in the development of educational projects.

"Projects in themselves represent a violation of established rhythm of work, interconnections and interactions in one system. In this sense, it is accepted to use the term "intervention" without any negative workload. It merely takes into account the fact of interfering with the system." (Pantaleev, 2005). Educational projects are the kind of intervention in the education sector which overturns the perceptions of modern education in Bulgaria and gives new hopes for change. Achieving this desired change is through the use of specific techniques and technologies in developing and implementing educational projects.

All projects are developed and managed using the same methods and using specific techniques and technologies. The implementation of educational projects as a kind of social projects also applies to common methods, techniques and technologies. It is generally accepted that work on projects is divided into different stages, which in the vocabulary of the project activity are called phases of the project cycle.

"The design cycle is the way in which projects are planned and implemented, following a sequence that is pre-agreed. It includes a series of actions that are carried out and evaluated in such a way as to achieve the underlying idea and its stated purpose. The previous practice in implementing projects in education in Bulgaria has shown that project management suffers from a lack of knowledge and skills, namely for the phases of the project cycle and the sequence of actions that ensure success of each phase." (Pantaleev, 2005)

In project management, it is accepted to follow the logical sequence of six main phases of the project cycle: programming; project identification; formulation of the project; negotiation / financing of the project; implementation of the project; evaluation.

Effective management of an educational project involves defining its scope (detailed description of intermediate and final results, including the work required to achieve them); hierarchical alignment and planning of the necessary activities that determine the success of the project; coordinating efforts to achieve the results and objectives of the project; forecasting and analysis of possible risks (unexpected deviations from planned outcomes); quality management (good quality in educational projects is linked to meeting the expectations and requirements of stakeholders and stakeholders) (Totseva, Kozhuharova, 2008); reasonable management of resources (human, financial, technical); ongoing monitoring and evaluation of project implementation. The process of managing an educational project is long, requiring consistency in actions that are subordinate to specific goals and aimed at achieving concrete results for a specified period of time.

Conclusion

In the modern conditions of a fast-changing and dynamic labour market, education is the key factor contributing to the professional realisation and career of young people. The acquisition of specific knowledge, practical skills and

competences at school develops both personal growth and professional development and social inclusion of students.

A major tool for enhancing the potential of human resources are the education projects that represent much more than a training method for modern education. They are the means by which students develop a vast array of non-technical skills and personal qualities highly valued by business. In this way, the young people become socialised and build up as a person. An increasing number of students are willing to take part in an educational project which shows that young people are awake, ready to change and integrate into the European educational space, and to follow the European principles of the concept of lifelong learning.

Bulgarian society must realise the need for reform of our education system and make education a high value and a national responsibility. Bulgarian children deserve quality education and vocational training that meets the European standards and is in line with the challenges of our economic and social development.

The secondary vocational school education in Bulgaria should be based on the Bulgarian traditions and correspond to the European trends. Education policy should focus on improving the vocational education and training system, because it creates and perfects the future professional staff who are developing the economy of our country.

References

- Ganchev, P. 2014. Vrazka mezhdru profesionalno obrazovanie, visse obrazovanie i pazar na truda; https://www.karieri.bg/biznes_obrazovanie/2245132_vruzka_mezhdu_profesionalno_obrazovanie_vishe/ (in Bulgarian).
- Genova, Z. 2009. *Sotsiologia*. UI "P.Hilendarski", Plovdiv (in Bulgarian).
- Ivanov M. 2018. Government systems and practices in the educational process of the public administration in Bulgaria. – *Conference: 5th SGEM International Multidisciplinary Scientific Conferences on SOCIAL SCIENCES and ARTS SGEM*; DOI: 10.5593/sgemsocial2018H/11/S01.003.
- Obrazovanie za vsichki: Sastoyanie i problemi*. 2002. Nauchen doklad na Ministerstvo na obrazovaniето i naukata (MON). Natsionalen institut po obrazovanie (NIO), Sofia (in Bulgarian).
- Pantaleev, T. 2005. *Proektni interventsii v obrazovaniето: Vliyanie i vazmozhnosti za razvitie*. Sibi, Sofia, 16 (in Bulgarian).
- Strategia za razvitie na profesionalното obrazovanie i obuchenie v Republika Bulgaria za perioda 2015-2020* (in Bulgarian).
- Totseva, Y., P. Kozhuharova. 2008. *Razrabotvane i upravlenie na obrazovatelni proekti*. Siela, Sofia (in Bulgarian)
- Zakon za profesionalното obrazovanie i obuchenie* (in Bulgarian).