

STUDENTS' PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICE IN THE CONTEXT OF THE SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH APPROACH

(Professional paper)

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Abstract

The quality of students' practical training in the education-related majors is determined by the students' ability to meet the requirements of the practice in educational and social institutions. The solution for a balanced higher education for future pedagogues can be found in the sum of social needs, goals, requirements, norms, standards and the conditions of the contemporary educational system and social activities. It is also a task of extreme importance for ensuring of the quality of education that is related to the various forms of practical training of the students. These forms provide the students with a good opportunity to develop in accordance with their own attitudes and needs and to acquire competences what will further improve their professional and social realization to their own competitive advantage. The paper presents a particular conceptual vision how this should happen.

Keywords: *professional qualification, research approach, practical students' training*

INTRODUCTION

The development of the modern education is directly related to the search for different approaches which foster personal development in a variety of aspects: psychological, emotional, intellectual, cognitive, and socio-cultural. The influence of the environment – namely the practical educational setting and its dynamics – stimulates the development of personal skills, such as quick adaptation, which is associated with the constantly increasing professional demands. The main priority of the professors comprising the Faculty of Pedagogy is to create a practical educational environment, which stimulates effective learning, enhances motivation and maintains the interest of the students. The increasing demands towards the preparation of the students within the education-related majors require finding and implementing of more efficient educational technologies and practices, which in turn to give the practical training the opportunity to become a research start and competitive advantage for the students. Motivation and interest are essential elements of students' attitude towards education, and make learning a dynamic and active process. It is based on satisfaction from the results achieved in practical conditions, in a competitive environment and ever growing demands of the labor market.

Strategic collaboration: „Science and economics”

In March 2000, the European Council in Lisbon, set a strategic goal for the EU, namely to become the “*most competitive and knowledge-driven economy in the world.*” The Lisbon strategy introduced a requirement

for all the member states to contribute to the accelerated growth of the economy of the EC via technological innovation and higher education. A revision of the Lisbon strategy, which took place in 2005, emphasized the importance of the human capital development through investments in science and education, including lifelong learning to enhance the employability of the workforce. In line with the current world trends, the economy and education should mutually stimulate and collaborate with one another in order to bring qualitative development of the human resources and their competitiveness on the labor market. The trend observed in Bulgaria towards deterioration of the quality and competitiveness of education is expressed in a gap between the educational training (qualification) of the workforce, including the pedagogical ones, and the demands of the labor market. It is also the reason, which underlie the search for alternative ways to bridge this gap through practical training of the future pedagogues and teachers, firmly grounding it in research and transforming it into a competitive advantage. A number of changes in the curricula and the design of the educational setting are under consideration, which, however, are not very well accepted and rarely lead to positive results mainly due to their spontaneous nature and lack of connection with the labor market. Thus, the critical gap between education (both high school and higher education) and the businesses gets deeper. The connection between the scientific research in education and the social sciences is also very weak.

The strategy „Europe 2020” (<http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/priorities/>) has three reinforcing and mutually

complementing priorities, which will determine the vision of the European knowledge-based market economy in the XXI century:

- Smart growth – fostering knowledge, innovations, education and digital society;
- Sustainable growth – more efficient use of resources in production, thus increasing the competitiveness;
- Inclusive growth – increased participation in the labor market, reduction of poverty.

Smart growth requires development of the knowledge and innovations as key factors for the future growth, which in turn necessitates better quality of the higher education and the practical training of the students in particular. Higher performance is expected in the field of research as well as the use of the research approach in the planning and design of the practical training.

Employers (Education and labor market – the requirements of the employers 2004. www.econ.bg/) report the following important problems with respect to the preparation of the specialists:

- Insufficient educational qualification training in their major discipline as well as lack of certain practical experience.
- Relatively weak motivation and self-discipline as necessary qualities for fulfilling practical realization.
- Unreal self-assessment on the part of the recent graduates, higher financial expectations on the part of job applicants, which do not match their competence

Hence the reasons, which require the search for new ways of dealing with the problems associated with the interaction between the higher education institutions and the employers in Bulgaria. But the trend of recent graduates facing severe difficulties on the labor market still remains. They are in turn interrelated with the incompatibility of many traditional university courses with the actual goals and priorities of the labor market, especially in the practical context.

Innovative collaboration:

Education - science - research

The theory of “socio-technical networks,” coined by Michel Callon and Bruno Latour, has served as methodology of the study and the accomplished project activities. They allow us to clearly see the capitalization of scientific knowledge and its “investment in forms.” We assume that “the pedagogical practice” of the students is an example for such an “investment in forms. “Applying the concept of capital to science is important because same as in economics, the capital is not defined by its nature, but by its movement” (Chalukov (Чалъков), 1997.) This changes the main relation in both the fields of science and education: A transition from “SITUATION-KNOWLEDGE-SITUATION” to “KNOWLEDGE-SITUATION-KNOWLEDGE-PRIM”. This is the principle of human progress, where production is “wedged” in between the purchase and the sale, as well as of the modern science, where the

“knowledge” is the link between “applying the knowledge” and the “actual learning.” In the first case, this progress is associated with the emergence of the factory, whereas in the second – with the presence of the scientific laboratory. The socio-technical networks, which define the Information Age and relate to the capitalization of knowledge, raise the question of intermediaries, including non-human intermediaries such as artifacts and “investment in forms.” The latter are unworkable, outside the ability to know texts (scientific, educational), work with artifacts – information and communication, and have the required human resource at their disposal. The representation in this case is carried out by all the major mentors, senior scientists, and teachers, who have the necessary expertise and knowledge. The point is to make this knowledge available to the students as participants in the „labyrinth“ of information, theory and practice, where the knowledge plays the role of a resource. The pedagogical practice plays the pivotal role of the „situation capitalizing knowledge“.

Professional collaboration:

Pedagogical theory and practice

Modern education and the sciences that study it focus increasingly on the difficulty in reconciling the profession of the teacher and pedagogue with that of the researcher. This is why more and more people talk about two professions in the field of education – teachers (who do it) and researchers (who study it) (Toshev (Тосhev), 2009. The search for ways to integrate the activities, which guarantee the natural amalgamation of the two professions in the education and pedagogical practice, allows us to provide a competitive preparation to the future specialists in these areas. The practical training of the students, brought to its most optimal version is one way to provide this competitive advantage.

All of this requires finding ways to make university education, and the practical training of the students in the pedagogy department in particular, a conscious, active, motivated, creative and personally-fulfilling activity. It should be based on the research approach and oriented towards the free development of the individual and its creative initiative. The latter must include the independence, competitiveness and mobility of a competitive and educated product.

Practical training is a major segment of the overall and systematic educational training of the students in education-related majors, which has the potential of providing solutions to the problematic areas discussed above. The Faculty of Pedagogy strictly follows the requirements of the Regulations governing the educational activities of the Southwest University “Neofit Rilski” regarding the implementation of the practical training, namely: the professional practical training is held at base schools and educational facilities, interschool centers, social institutions, cultural institutions, and others. Its implementation also comes in various forms such as: practical exercises, observation, ongoing pedagogical

practice and pre-graduation pedagogical practice.

The significance of the indicated problem fields, their conceptualization and methodological validity form the basis of the current project and scientific research in several aspects:

- public aspect – seeking opportunities to resolve the existing contradiction between the objective demands of the employers, the recruitment of teaching staff and their university education through the application of a model for systematic practical preparation of the students based on the research approach;
- theoretical aspect – developing models to serve as the basis for designing and implementing the practical training of the students in education-related majors;
- practical application aspect – contributing to the improvement of the educational practice at different levels in the Faculty of Pedagogy through the development of structural-functional models for practical training of students, which are crucial for their professional development and competitive advantage on the labor market.

Working solution:

Project activities

Analyzing the indicated problematic areas, the current project and its methodological definiteness emphasize the importance of looking for the link between higher education and the demands of the labor market, via complete and quality organization and implementation of the practical training of the students in education-related majors. This project aims at searching for opportunities to integrate and adapt the education and research, and transform the practical training into a competitive advantage for the students from the Faculty of Pedagogy. This is one way of enhancing the quality of education through achievements, motivation, and interest in studying and research in a real practical setting.

Looking at the pedagogical practice in the context of the “scientific research approach” for its implementation poses the following problems and solutions:

- dependence of the Bulgarian education upon the European standards for quality and effectiveness of the educational service and results;
- the connection between the education, labor market and economy, associated with the search for a quality educational product;
- the relation of education to the training of

future pedagogical staff for professional development and career advancement;

- the connection between the education, science and research, which implies “investment in forms” of the education itself. The pedagogical practice has classical forms of practical training, but lack the innovative and radical ones. The latter involve participation in experimental educational projects in the School, the University, and Research units as institutions;
- the link between the pedagogical practical training and the new “intermediaries”, such as computers, machines, books, which are officially used and not always for their intended purpose;
- the relation of the pedagogical practical training to the new European projects, Internships, Voluntary Associations, Unions, Associations, which are out of sight, except for a specific period, and project with temporary earmarking;
- implementation of the pedagogical practical training of the students through exchange of best practices and experience at inter-university level – national, Balkan, European;
- Creation of a “Balkan University Center” for applied research in the field of pedagogical sciences.

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