THE SCHOOL EDUCATION SYSTEM REFORMS IN MODERN POLAND

ABSTRACT

The article studies the reforms that took place in the education system of the Republic of Poland in 1999 and proceeded in 2009. The structural changes were characterized; the types of educational institutions were given; the changes in programs, forms and methods of a teacher with a student work were analyzed; evolutionary processes in the evaluation system were traced. Special attention was paid to structural changes in school education. The problems of the education system reform in Poland were highlighted (the convergence of learning with the realities of modern life, the upbringing of a modern individual, deprived stereotypes of the past, the democratization of the education system in the light of European experience, preparation for an accession to the EU, the self-regulation possibility of a new education system). The new accents of the school education contents were analyzed (safe and healthy for the pupil’s health, focusing on the construction of their own values systems, their development and improvement, the obligation to enhance children’s independence through the provision of a high level of internal self-government, the elimination of a single educational programme in the senior classes and the opportunity for students to choose their own future profession). It has been concluded that reforms implemented at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries in the Republic of Poland reflected obvious advantages in systemic educational processes. One of the major trends in systemic reform was the introduction of the three-level structure of the school system “6 + 3 + 3” (six year primary school, three-year gymnasium and a three-year profile lyceum). The result of reforms was the adaptation of education levels and upbringing to periods of children and young people development, ensuring their better understanding of themselves, other people and the world; educational chances equalization; improving the quality of education. The prospective areas of research in this area include the study of reforms in preschool education as a starting point for a holistic education system in Poland, the disclosure of organizational and content aspects of child’s preparation for schooling.

Keywords: the education system in Poland, stages of school education, pre-school education, elementary school, gymnasium, post-gymnasium school, “block system”, competence test, exam on maturity certificate, ”New Matura” program.

INTRODUCTION

Reforming education in Ukraine is an important part of updating educational systems that has taken place in recent years in European countries and related to the knowledge importance as a guarantee of public welfare and progress. These changes concern the creation of educational standards, the modernization of curricula, the content of teaching and training materials, textbooks, forms and methods of training. The purposeful acquisition of knowledge, skills and abilities by the youth, their transformation in competence contributes to personal cultural development, the evolution of technologies, and optimizes the ability to respond quickly to time requests.
As a result of expanding the scope of international cooperation, in the theoretical and practical aspects, the creation of the development problem and dissemination of advanced pedagogical experience in all branches of education has been actualized. The state national program “Education” (Ukraine in the 21st century) among the priority areas of education highlights the substantiation of theoretical and methodological principles of the national education system, taking into account national and foreign experience. The National Doctrine of the Education Development of Ukraine in the 21st century states that education is subordinated to the formation of a system of national interests as the main priorities of a person’s world-view culture, and also contributes to the mastery of the world culture wealth. An appeal to the experience of other countries with established traditions in the field of integration of the society through all educational forces allows identifying positive moments in the organization of the national education process, outline ways to improve it.

Ukraine’s aspiration to become a full member of the European community in all spheres of social and political life prompts specialists to study foreign, specifically, Polish educational experience. The Polish education reform was the result of the Polish society productive work from the middle of the 20th century. The main achievement of the reform lies in the fact that it enables Polish education to take a worthy place in Europe, to get rid of “ideologymania”, to respond to the new challenges of the modern world, to educate people not as an instrument in the hands of the state, but as a free individual.

Similar problems are topical in Ukraine today, where there is an urgent necessity to educate a person of the 21st century as a harmoniously developed independent person, self-assured and professionally trained.

The experience of the Polish education reform is a clear example of systemic changes due to the community needs to have high quality modern education. In the context of the countries’ geographical and cultural proximity, such an experience is very valuable to Ukrainians.

THE AIM OF THE STUDY
The purpose of the paper is to identify the main areas of the school education reform in the Republic of Poland.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH METHODS
The Polish education system was studied by Ukrainian and foreign scholars. Various aspects of the school work are devoted to a number of studies in Polish pedagogy (Ya. Gnietczki, Y. Hanish, D. Klyus-Stanska, M. Tsatskovska, M. Shehpska-Pustkovska et al.). Some aspects of the school education development in Poland in the 20th century were studied by Ukrainian and Russian scholars (M. Dobrynin, A. Maisner, M. Popyuk, A. Savina). The Polish education reforms in the late 20th century – the early 21st century were investigated in the works of M. Chepil, P. Gusak, I. Kovchyna, M. Popyuk, A. Vasylyukets et al.

In the study such methods of pedagogical research are used: theoretical analysis of scientific and pedagogical literature and documentary sources, generalisation, systematization.

RESULTS
One of the reasons for reforming the education system was the prospect of Poland integration with the European Union. In this regard, an attempt was made to adapt the Polish system of education to European norms.

The latest reform of education in Poland can be conditionally divided into two stages. The first one (1989–1999) was the development of a new national educational program, the decentralization of the education system (the transfer of education institutions under the authority of the Gmin), the new types of schools formation, and changes in the
examination system. The second stage (since 1999): content, mainly related to changes in the content of education, which meant the continuation of part-time schooling for children under 16 (for a year) and the formation of a new school structure: six years in elementary school, three in the gymnasium and three in the profile lyceum. Previously it was the primary school lasted for 8 years, and the comprehensive was 4 years (O rozwoju systemu oświaty i wychowania, 1961).

The main documents defining the directions of reforming education in Poland were: “The main directions in improving the educational system in Poland” (1994) and “The Program Basis of Mandatory General Subjects” (1997). According to them, the priority for the Polish system of education is the upbringing of a person who easily uses modern achievements, understands the world and is well-orientated in life difficulties, takes on different points of people’s view. This is a person who has mastered the knowledge that helps him/her in the art of living with other people, highly humane, cultural, which is part of the world and takes its place in it, develops its own abilities and interests, is physically and spiritually improved.

The reform, started in 1999, has been planned for several years. Changes took place both in the structure of the Polish system of education, in training programs, and in bringing educational institutions to European standards. The result of the changes should be the increase in the number of young people with secondary and higher education. It was meant that graduates of Polish schools would receive a wide-ranging training, in which particular attention would be paid to computer science, foreign language, preparation for self-education, independence in the employment, and the ability to behave in the labour market.

The following goals were set before the reform (Ministerstwo Edukacji Narodowej i Sportu, 1998):

– raising the level of society education through the spread of secondary and higher education: the secondary education, certified by the final exam (Matura), in the coming years should receive about 80 % of young Poles, the remaining 20 % of young people must complete basic vocational schools;
– measuring the chances to education;
– improving the quality of education, understood as “the integral process of education and upbringing”.

The realization of these goals should serve:

– continuing the joint education up to 16 years of age and displacement per year of acceptance by the student’s decision on the choice of further education path;
– restructuring the school system, in which separate stages of training will cover groups of children or young people at the same stage of mental and physical development, which will help to adapt the school to the specific needs of this age group;
– reorganizing the vocational education, its reliance on broad-profile, integrated with the general education, training in profile lyceum, technical school, as well as in two-year basic technical schools, which qualify in the specialties of a broad profile. In the future, this should allow relatively rapid award of specialist qualifications and facilitate the retraining process in accordance with the labor market needs;
– establishing two-year additional lyceum for graduates of basic technical schools, which creates the possibility of further training of those students who after vocational training have chosen professional training;
– introducing the system of control and examinations to ensure the possibility of school system increasing capacity the equivalence of school certificates, as well as the provision
of tests for diagnostic features and functions of vocational guidance. Examinations should summarize each study cycle and, thus, influence the quality of learning.

The education system reform has changed practically in all areas of its functioning, starting from the financing public education fundamentals, through the new types of schools creation and a new trainings organization, up to the principles of teachers’ recruitment and remuneration.

The reform was carried out parallel to different directions (Ministerstwo Edukacji Narodowej i Sportu, 2001):
1. Structural reform is the school system change.
2. Reform of programs related to changing the forms and methods of a teacher – student work.
3. Reform of the evaluation system.
4. Reform in the field of management and supervision of the education system resulting from administrative reform.
5. Reform of the teachers’ promotion and salary system, as well as changing the role of the teacher in the learning process.
6. Reform in the field of education financing.

Education reform has changed the school system. The reforming process of the school system has been divided into several stages. Since September 1, 1999, according to the law of January 8, 1999, which contains the rules for the introduction of the education system reform (Ministerstwo Edukacji Narodowej i Sportu, 1999) the introduction of a reformed system of compulsory education has begun, which includes the following schools: i.e. a 6-year elementary school; a 3-year gymnasium.

On September 1, 2002, in accordance with the law of November 21, 2001 on the amendment of the Law “Teacher’s Map” (O zmianie ustawy – Karta Nauczyciela, 2001), the law on the system of education, and the law “Rules that establish the reform of the school system”, the following types of so-called “post-gymnasia” schools were introduced: 2–3 year basic vocational schools, 3-year secondary schools, 3-year profile lyceums, 4-year technical schools (Ministerstwo Edukacji Narodowej i Sportu, 2002).

As a result of the educational system reform, there have been significant changes.
1. In the teacher’s position: the teacher was only the agent, who implemented a detailed program, in the existing school, which was mandatory for execution and was not evaluated by the teacher.
2. In the relationship between the teacher and the pupil: the didactic process subject was a teacher, and the subject of his/her actions was a student. In this sense, the school was a place where the child was considered “tabula rasa” and was subjected to didactic “processing” by teachers.

The school wanted to get the graduate, as close as possible to the model, without paying attention to the individuality of the young person. The principle of the previous education system was the process of mastering general knowledge of the world and culture by students.

However, civilization progress has caused enormous knowledge expansion, and the regular attempts to update the curricula led to the fact that they became the main achievements of science and culture. This has led to a situation in which the students were not able to absorb more and more portions of encyclopedic knowledge, and the learning process became shorter.
Program changes in line with the new education system were aimed at abandoning the outdated didactics, in particular:

– reduction of the acquisition of knowledge methods role by students in favour of methods that activate the student in the process of education and upbringing;
– restriction of collective forms in favor of differentiated individual trainingforms;
– usage of interesting didactic tools that provide the opportunity to directly cognize and overcome verbalism in learning.

The organization of occupations is markedly different from the occupations organization, which is still applicable in new types of schools. The basis of the reform is the departure from the overloaded curriculum, where individual subjects correspond to academic disciplines, in favour of such classes, through which it can nurture the child’s individuality, emphasize the development of his/her personality, abilities and capabilities.

The most difficult and important element of the reform was the creation of new types of schools. Structural reform involves a clearer division into learning stages. The new school system encompasses phased studies in the kindergarten for doctoral studies. The six-year elementary school unites students of the I and II levels of education and prepares them for a general three-year gymnasium (stage III). Education at the middle level (stage IV) should continue to be a conscious, well-prepared and properly directed gymnasium graduate. Thus, the continuity of the education system is ensured (each stage of education graduate can continue to study at higher levels).

However, the reform has sidestepped the problem of pre-school education. No attempt was made to formalize the children formal education at six. Teaching in kindergartens is not compulsory. An optional kindergarten is intended for children aged 3–6, but almost all children at the age of 6 attend kindergarten or special departments organized in elementary schools. Participation in so-called “zero-class”, that is a special preparatory class for children aged 6 is also optional.

Another reform of the educational system introduces changes to the beginning of school age (O zmianie ustawy, 2009). From September 1, 2011, children under the age of 5 are obliged to complete pre-school education (during 2009–2011 parents and the school principal decided on the question of early school adoption of the child). Reducing school age means that 6-year-old children will be required to go to school on September 1, 2012 and will begin their primary school education.

Compulsory seven-year education begins in the first grade of the new six-year elementary school. Primary school is intended for children aged 7–13. It focuses on the child’s transmission of basic skills and on the education in close cooperation with the parents. In view of their tasks, the primary school should be as close as possible to the child's place of residence.

At the first stage of learning, a step has been taken to reject the traditional division into lessons, breaks and subjects, leaving the organization issues to the teacher. During the first three years of elementary school, pupils attend “general classes”, 15 hours per week in the first class, and 16 and 17 hours in the second and third grades. The purpose of these lessons, except mastering the basic skills of reading, writing and accounting, is the development of the ability to use various simple tools, the social behavior development and the morality foundations.

The form of lessons organization depends on the teacher. There is no division into lessons i.e. the teacher independently decides on the length of individual fragments of classes and breaks, adapting their duration to the activity and capabilities of children. Also,
the teacher determines how to combine mental and physical activity during a lesson (previously known as “physical trainings between classes”) in the amount of three hours each week.

When implementing the training program, the teacher adapts the duration of the classes, the content of the programs, as well as the way of conducting classes to the opportunities and interests of students. Substantial change not only for students and teachers but also for parents is the elimination of the points (numbers) assessment system and its replacement by a descriptive assessment that is presented to the student in the middle and at the end of the school year. The teacher of the first grade does not put any assessments, but monitors the advancement and development of the child. There is no didactic failure or the phenomenon of secondary education in accordance with the installation that each child develops to the best of his/her ability and at the appropriate pace. There are not used such words as the student is very good, bad, satisfactory, and so on. At this stage of training it is not critical remarks, but instructions on work; the appropriate motivation and a friendly attitude of the teacher is a guarantee of success.

At the second stage of studying in elementary school a refusal to divide into traditional subjects was implemented, the so-called “block method of learning” was introduced. Students get acquainted with individual subjects during classes that have the character of subject blocks that cover two to four traditional academic disciplines.

Subjects are grouped into four subject blocks: culture and Polish language, mathematics, nature, history and society – six hours weekly, as well as art and technology – two hours.

In the system of “block study” introduced the so-called educational programs (patriotic and civic education, information culture). In senior classes of elementary school pupils improve their skills acquired at the previous stage of education, as well as develop their cognitive interests. The new goal is to achieve autonomy, clarity and effectiveness in solving problems, as well as the assimilation of socially positive behavior and the ability to consciously make decisions.

At the age of thirteen, students complete their elementary school and pass the first serious exam in their lives i.e. a competence test (Ministerstwo Edukacji Narodowej i Sportu, 2003; 2007). This exam is not selective in nature, but its main objective is to provide information to all participants in the learning process (student, his/her parents and teachers) about the knowledge level and skills acquired by the graduate. The results do not determine who passed and who failed, they are presented in terms of the points that the student have got. Regardless of the exam outcome, all students continue their studies in the gymnasium.

All graduates of elementary school continue their studies at the three year high school that is compulsory secondary school of the first degree. Gymnasium is a compulsory, non-professional general secondary school for younger children 13–16 of age. Traditional subjects are taught in the gymnasium such as the Polish language, mathematics, history, physics with astronomy and chemistry. Innovation is the introduction of computer science classes (two hours weekly). The lessons of music, fine arts, techniques, and computer science are organized in groups with different levels of knowledge. Classes from individual subjects contain educational content. The material volume on topics related to ecology, philosophy and civil defense has been expanded. At this training level, these subjects are called “cross-curriculum communications”.

The reform has improved even better, and since September 1, 2009, the next reform has begun and it relates to the new Program Framework for General Education (Ministerstwo Edukacji Narodowej i Sportu, 2008). As a result there are eliminated isolated
“educational communications” and they are attached to descriptions of basic subjects, for example: joining “educational communication” cultural heritage of the region to the basic subject of history, and the promotion of a healthy way of life to the basic subject biology.

Studying in a gymnasium ends with another exam that is professional orientation test and its result determines the direction of graduate further education. The purpose of the exam is to determine the level of knowledge and skills of students, as well as their abilities. In this case, the results of the exam are also presented in the form of the points without determining whether the exam has been passed or not. At this stage, a 16-year-old young person, according to a conclusion that is drawn on the basis of a compiled exam on his/her abilities, makes the first choice of the further education direction.

After finishing the gymnasium, students can continue their studies in: 3-year secondary schools, 3-year profile lyceums (since 2012 the profile lyceums have been eliminated), 4-year vocational schools, 2–3-year basic vocational schools.

Graduates of vocational basic schools may pass an examination on maturity certificate on condition they have completed a 2-year supplementary general secondary school or a three-year secondary vocational school.

The 3-year lyceum, ending with an examination on maturity certificate, four-year technical school, also ends with an exam on a maturity certificate, or the two-year professional broad-profile school is the last stage of school education.

The students attend three classes in the three-year profile lyceum: 1) classes that correspond to the profile of the lyceum are high-level classes that are mandatory for those who choose this profile; 2) integrated classes (culture and art, people and the environment, people and the modern world), supplementing the programs of individual profiles; 3) all attend comprehensive education classes such as Polish language, mathematics, foreign language, physical training, civil defense and religion or ethics (generally education lessons are given weekly for about 16–18 hours).

A comprehensive lyceum organizes studying subjects in accordance with academic classification. A student has the opportunity to choose a class with a basic or advanced level of the subject study. There are a certain number of study hours of subjects at an advanced level, which compulsory graduation examinations are required in all lyceums.

Another part of the curriculum is the different subjects in the academic classification. A student has the opportunity to choose a course with a basic or advanced level of the subject study. There are a certain number of study hours of subjects at an advanced level, which compulsory graduation examinations are required in all lyceums.

Visiting all these subjects at the time of the end of the so-called “post-gymnasium” school, graduate selects the subjects on the final exam. In comparison with the gymnasium, the number of interdisciplinary connections has been increased. Additional content of education concerns issues related to media, reading and information education, as well as general technical education.

In the technical school, as before, students, with general educational subjects, study special subjects for the future profession.

A 2-year special basic vocational school prepares for a profession in such a way that its graduate is able to retrain and adapt to the changing demands of the labor market through special term-level training. In the event of a desire to complete secondary education for graduates of this type of school, an opportunity should be created for completing a two-year supplementary lyceum, which ends with an examination on maturity certificate.

After graduating from the lyceum, you should pass another state examination i.e. an examination of maturity certificate. The state matriculation exam in accordance with the New Matura Program (New Maturity Examination) was conducted for the first time throughout Poland in April-May 2005. The internal exam (oral) is held at the school and
covers: Polish language and modern foreign language. An external examination at the basic or advanced level is prepared and accepted by the Central and Regional Examination Committees: from the Polish language, foreign language, as well as the chosen subject.

The new system of assessment – through the system of state examinations – creates an opportunity for a fair assessment of the student’s knowledge and skills. Attention to abilities is an essential element of assessment during the examinations.

The lyceum, technical school or basic vocational school graduation completes the period of compulsory education the so-called “school duty”.

Completing the exam and getting a maturity certificate gives you the opportunity to continue education at higher education institutions or at three-year colleges (for example, language colleges) or in biennial post-lyceum schools where the training ends with a professional exam. An examination of maturity certificate in accordance with the provisions of the reform must simultaneously be an entrance examination for admission to the university. Higher education institutions do not have the right to organize entrance examinations, which are the repetition of the exam on the maturity certificate. They have the right to arrange the testing of special abilities or skills, for example: artistic giftedness, physical training, etc.

CONCLUSIONS
Reforms implemented at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries in the Republic of Poland reflected obvious advantages in systemic educational processes. One of the major trends in systemic reform was the introduction of the three-level structure of the school system “6 + 3 + 3” (six year primary school, three-year gymnasium and a three-year profile lyceum).

The result of reforms was the adaptation of education levels and upbringing to periods of children and young people development, ensuring their better understanding of themselves, other people and the world; educational chances equalization; improving the quality of education.

The prospective areas of research in this area include the study of reforms in preschool education as a starting point for a holistic education system in Poland, the disclosure of organizational and content aspects of child’s preparation for schooling.

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