The Quality of Formation with Active Civilization in Schools

Msc. Lindita Lutaj

“Aleksander Moisiu” University, Durres, Albania
Faculty of Education, Department of Pedagogy
Email: l.lutaj@yahoo.com

Abstract: Active Civilization consists in the strategy that should be followed if we want to go on our way to civilization. To do this, it is important to grow self-consciousness in every one of us, to respect ourselves and the others, to take commitment and responsibilities to listen to every single person into further levels. In doing this research different material of education and the formation with active civilization is used. This studying is exploratory as it is based on quantitative and qualitative data, taken from interviews, questionnaires realized with teachers and students of Berat Municipality. 60 questionnaires were realized in “Gaqi Karakashi” secondary school in Kucove, 115 questionnaires were realized in “1 Maji” secondary school in Berat, interviewing teachers and students of these schools. This study is also based on the opinions taken from the focus-group organized with a group of students of civic education studying master in the “Aleksander Xhuvani” University, Elbasan. The result analyses showed that in our schools it’s not time yet for qualitative steps according to the formation with active civilization. This is for some reasons as: lack of seriousness of teachers and students in treating and evaluating this problem; lack of concern in our schools, lack of qualifying staff to teach civic education, lack of civic formation in other fields, non-coordination of all the actors that act in our schools, etc. The studying is an attempt to get access to the information, support and clear ideas of the school role in promoting active civilization.

Key words: Active civilization, participation, responsibility, commitment, actors

Introduction

The International Organization which evaluates achievement in education (IEA) has realized an international comparative studying consisting in civic education. This studying was necessary because of the changes that have happened in the world since 1971. 28 countries from the EU (European Commission) were involved in this studying and there is data about the inputs and outputs of civilization index. In this studying is emphasized that the participation in after-school activities, the participation in school clubs and newspapers is very important. These experiences help students to be close to each other, to learn and assimilate the group rules, to take into consideration different commitment speaking loudly for their school concerns.

Informal learning can be as much important as the formal one. Active civilization itself can be a teaching method through participation. Four indicators can be spotted out in the education content: learning knowledge, attitude transferring, values transferring, capacity promoting (debating, creative, social, etc.). The ones interviewed agree with the approach that in our schools students learn to understand people that have different opinions or attitudes on different issues. Understanding people with different opinions is just an aspect of tolerance. In this studying one of the options to answer the question asked to the teachers: “What should the students learn so that they become good citizens?” is “To obey the law”. It is also stated that: “The students should take part and have influence in their school” and “The participation of the students in their community is through their school”.

Four main data sources taken from active civilization are identified: Social European Survey (SES), series of Eurobarometer Survey, World Values Study (WVS) and CivEd. Civic education indicators are divided into interior ones, which refer to what is explained in education (indicator of education content, indicator of culture in education); exterior indicators which refer to what has been learnt. These indicators are factors which are taken to have an impact on the active society, which is affected efficiently by civic education.

In 2001, Carnegie Corporation of New York and Information and Research Center of civic learning and commitment came together to study civic education. The report of this study titled Civic Mission of the schools has identified six methods which lead to the improving of civic education. Every school should: assure high teaching quality; incorporate and discuss events in classes; maintain among students what they have learnt, through community service; organize after-school activities; encourage students’ involvement in schools governments; encourage students in democratic process simulations. Civic commitment should help young people to earn their rights and take responsibilities that they have as citizens of their country.

“A teacher can use the new curricular material or technology without changing the teaching approach. Or, a teacher can use the material and change part of his teaching behavior, without understanding the concepts that stand on the
foundation of change” (Fullan 2001 p.66).

Teachers’ training structure often serves as criteria to judge the society as a whole. In the system of training teachers democratic values should take an important part both in university system and pre-university system. Students who study to become teachers should know how and in what circumstances teaching is more efficiently. In the main principles of Bologna Declaration date 18.09.1988 is written: “University produces, examines, evaluates and transfer culture through research and teaching’. In 1988 in MASH (Albanian Ministry of Education) the opening of the branch that trains teachers of history-geography-education was presented for approval and in 1999 this started and teachers of grades 5-8 were for the first time trained. From 1999 to 2004 it was history-geography-civic education and in 2004 the branch that trains civic education teachers was approved. To fulfill the needs that this branch has for teachers, part–time system was opened.

Michael Fullan says: “If you read this book carefully, the greatest revolution that I am talking about is the teaching profession change. If you examine the main message that comes from the pro-government teaching commissions, you will come to the terms that teaching is a profession yet “too young”. It needs reform, status and rewards, remaking of the university training of the teachers and their first steps in the teaching profession, their further professional development, the standards and motives for professional work, and (maybe the most important one) changes in the everyday work conditions of the teachers. (Fullan 2001 p.395).

An important condition to install democracy is the educating moral values without which civic values can’t be cultivated. In this transitive period of great importance was the changing of civic education programs by orienting schools towards education on democratic civilization where: the individual demonstrates civic responsibility and a behavior that demonstrates civilization. We have participation and decision taking where all of them benefit by welcoming and encouraging free initiative. Every individual keeps his/her individuality and diversity.

To have a full civic formation of the students and for the school to play its educative role, the contribute that other subjects offer in this formation is important. When subjects as: history, mother language, geography, etc. play their role as it is supposed to, they help in having a more complete civic formation of the students. The process of teaching today is turned into a multiple and dynamic one where apart of limited knowledge in specific subjects today integrated knowledge among subjects is required. “The integrated curriculum is a guide for all of them who want to look beyond their classes, for all of them who want to pass the limits and break the walls built artificially, for all of them who want to encourage students’ curiosity, inspiration, fantasy, imagination and further more….” (ISP ed., 2007 p.69).

But how can the role of a teacher actor be understood without the involvement of the students in all the activity for their civic education? The contribute of the students government is very much important in the school. As a civic life instrument it should lead and realize active civilization. The initiative to create and strengthen students voice through their government is an innovation that makes them heard and make them decision takers in the school life.

Important researches in the field of civic education are realized earlier too. We can distinguish “Civic education inside the school and outside” which among others through a deep analyses defined correctly the main elements that affect in the overall atmosphere of the school. This is what is said: The overall atmosphere of the school life gets a special importance and in its overall context these main elements should be valued more:

- The democratic style of school managing, far from centralization and leading attitude.
- The real representation of the students in the managing organs of the school, in the different organizations and commissions for different life and work aspects in the school, far from formalization.
- The right relationship between teachers and students on the mutual respect of partnership and cooperation, far from officializing, authoritarian, dictate attitude and intolerance.
- The participation of the students in decision-taking, planning, organizing and developing of different activities in schools and out of it, that form their free initiative far from disrespectful attitudes and doubtful and skeptical arbitrary interventions.
- The democratic mutual communication among activated actors in the lesson and in the after-school activities based on understanding and tolerance, far from discriminating, arrogant and predominating attitudes, but also timidity.
- The creation of appropriate climate that fosters critical, creative and realizing thinking, that opens the way to dialogue, discussion and debate and also creates opportunities for participations in the school and community life, far from the tendency to get enclosed inside forms, schemes and stereotypical, solid or borrowed and transplanted mechanically templates. (Como etc., 2002 pp. 64 – 65).

But not in all schools and by all the students this situation is evaluated in this way. In some cases the wish is not obvious to check different problems that from the students’ point of view are encountered. It’s easy to identify the problems, but it is much more difficult to ask for changing this reality. School is still like a boat with oars that goes where the stream takes it rather than a ship that knows clearly not only where to take its passengers but also how to take them there as promised. School in Albania doesn’t have a clear contract with the clients, its passengers. They (the passengers) don’t know where they are directed to, and it (the boat)
doesn't know where to take them. Even the repairing we do to our school very rarely is a capital reconditioning of the engine. They are mainly efforts to have it at a better outside look at the quay next to the seafront. (Sinani etc., 2004 p. 101).

The aim of this study was to point out objective conclusions concerning the identifying of the different problems that schools encounter in upbringing of active citizens. In spite of all to be taken in consideration the opportunity to improve our future work in civic education and formation of the students. It's time for a qualitative point of view of civic education, to make people speak about their rights. To do this and have successful practice, communal strategies are required. School has to be the place for initiatives and taking responsibilities from all, to realize the goals in the field of civic education from “civic learning” to “civic education” up to “education for civilization”. The students learn the education for the civic right, but making conclusions in how to create partnership with all the actors, to improve the quality in this direction is the most important thing. The spirit of this partnership is the best way to face the actual challenges for civic education all around the world.

Materials and Methods

Exploratory methods of qualitative and quantitative research are used in this study so that we have a rich material and realize qualitative analyses of the problem being studied. From the subjects taken in this study about 54.9% belong to feminine gender and 45.1% to masculin gender. 60 questionnaires were done in “Gaqi Karakashi” secondary school in Kucove and 115 questionnaires were realized in “1 Maji” secondary school in Berat. Teachers and students of these schools were interviewed to explore further more the problem. It was realized a focus-group with the students of civic education studying master in “Aleksander Xhuvani” University in Elbasan. The questionnaire consisted in ten opinions that showed important elements of the formation with civic education in the school and five steps of participation: never, sometimes, often, very often, don't know which were fulfilled by every student.

Results and Discussion

The realization of the focus-group with the students aimed to check the students’ evaluation for the opening of civic education branch in the “Aleksander Xhuvani” University in Elbasan, as the only one in Balkan that trains specialists of this field. As every new branch in the beginning this had difficulties like:
- There was no propaganda by different institutions for the opening of this branch. As a result students of low grades and not motivated were enrolled.
- MASH (Ministry of Education) and other factors interested in educating democratic civilization in Albania were more focused in civic training and educating of the existing teachers than in this institution which is pro-service.
- There were no criteria in selecting the teaching students of this branch, because not everyone can teach civic education.

In the opinions that the students of civic education that took part in the consult organized with them gave, for the question why they had chosen this branch of studying, their thoughts varied in:
- Just because they wanted to be teachers.
- Incapable opportunities to choose because of the low grades in high school.
- To graduate and have a diploma.
- To fulfill their parents’ desire in pursuing a career.

It was obvious that no one of the students was enthusiastic about choosing this branch, because the liked to be teachers of civic education. They said that even after graduating they would remain without a job, because they think it is difficult systemize themselves in this branch.

This study was based on the opinions of the teachers and students of the secondary school “1 Maji” Berat and “Gaqi Karakashi” Kucove as well. The realization of the interviews and the questionnaires aimed to monitor the students opinions on their participation in the school life and out of it, identifying the levels of participation in these schools, their participation and their discussions in class meetings; the participation of the students in community activities; the information of the students by the teachers and their government for the school problems; free expressions of their thoughts; realization of planned activities in the education plan, etc.

1. Meeting participation

An important aspect of active civilization is the students’ participation in class meetings. And not only this but also the
discussion about different problems there. In the secondary school “1 Maji” 70.4% of the students say that they never or rarely take part in class meetings; while 27.8% of them say that they often or very often take part in the class meetings; and 1.8% say they do not know. While in the secondary school “Gaqi Karakashi” 58.3% say they never or rarely take part in the class meetings; while 35% say that they often or very often take part; and 6.7% say they do not know. The students get informed about the meetings but most of the cases they show no interest in being present, apart of some of them with kind of a topic that they are interested about. Even in the cases that they are part of these meetings the just listen, and very rarely they discuss about different topics. It is the pedagogical staff duty to create good relationship and a warm communication with all the students. This would help them to take part in the meetings, and feel free and safe to give opinions and becoming part of the discussions.

2. Participation in activities in communities

The students that take part in the discussions have more opportunities to get involved in the participation category in and out of the school area than the students that don’t take part in the discussions. The students are very active in the different activities that the school organizes, but the fact that they take part as a decoration or they organize these all including activities by themselves is important. It is the teachers’ duty to enable the students’ active participation in all activities. This takes civic consciousness of the students into higher levels. In the secondary school “1 Maji” 56.5% of the students say that they never or very rarely take part in the activities in the community; 33.1% of them often or very often take part; while 10.4% say they don’t know. In the secondary school “Gaqi Karakashi” 45% say they never or rarely take part in the activities in the community; while 55% say that they often or very often take part.

3. The informing of the students and the teachers by their government

The students say that the members of the students government gather, discuss and make decisions without asking their opinions. In many cases it is the headmasters and teachers the ones who decide for the problems encountered and give few chances to the members of the students’ government to deal with these problems. That’s why they themselves are not much informed about the different problems of the school. In the secondary school “1 Maji” 26% of the students say they never or rarely get informed by their teachers or their representatives; 66.1% say they often or very often get informed, while 7.8% say they don’t know. In the secondary school “Gaqi Karakashi” 56.7% say they never or rarely get informed by their teachers or their representatives; while 33.3% say that they often or very often get informed; while 10% say they don’t know.

4. Free expression of opinions

The ways used to get the students’ free opinion in schools were:
- The thoughts box
- The school newspaper
- Opened meetings
- Discussions
- Surveys
- Questionnaires
- Direct complaints

In the secondary school “1 Maji” 13.9% of the students never or rarely express their opinion; 85.3% of them often or very often express their opinion; while 0.88% of them say they don’t know. In the secondary school “Gaqi Karakashi” 51.7% say they never or rarely express their opinion; 45% say that they often or very often express their opinion; while 3.3% say they don’t know. During the interviews with the teachers and the students a number of factors that affect the creation of barricades for not saying their opinion freely were encountered as:
- The fact that they are students and they are teachers.
- Putting pressure through the grades.
- Giving extra homework when they do mistakes.
- When the teacher doesn’t know or doesn’t want to know the students’ problems.
- The teacher’s mentality that he is the only one who knows.
- Age difference.
Lack of experience in treating problematic cases.
Lack of trainings in this issue.
Not knowing the students level of knowledge.
Not knowing their psychological and age features
Asking too much.
The teachers' indifferentism.
Not tolerating the students when they do mistakes. The good teacher can look beyond the outer part of the students.

Lamenna said: “All see what I see in a rough sea, but no one observes what I do”.
The more favorable the school climate is for the students more space will be given to them to express their opinions freely, as greater will the opportunity to gain attitude for active participation in the future be. The encouragement of the expression of the opinions freely by the students, takes their civic consciousness into higher levels. The children learn how to talk when it is their turn, they learn to listen and respect the other people opinions.

5. The realization of the activities of the educative plan

The activities planned in the educative plan of the teachers in schools serve for the formation of the students with active civilization in the school and out. They are an important element for the students’ participation and their all-including in the school life and in the community. In the secondary school “1 Maji” 25.2% of the students say that the activities of the educative plan are never or rarely organized; 67% of them say they are often or very often organized; while 7.8% of them say they don’t know. In the secondary school “Gaqi Karakashi” 33.3% say they are never or rarely organized; 61.7% say that they are often or very often organized; while 5% say they don’t know. The above results show that not everything planned by the teachers is realized. Today it is strongly recommended that not only they should be realized but their efficiency should be higher, through cooperation teacher-student in schools.
Conclusions

The analyses of this study came to the conclusion that in our schools qualitative steps in the formation of the students as active citizens of the future have not been taken yet. This is for some reasons as: lack of seriousness in treating and evaluating this problem by the teachers in schools; lack of graduated staff in teaching civic education, because even the ones who graduate in this branch were not given the opportunity to teach it; lack of civic formation in other subjects; The indifferentism being present in our schools by the teachers and the students, not giving the school the right place in realizing its mission in initiating active civilization; lack of participation in different activities in the community, not sufficient level of cooperation teacher-student; lack of constructive dialogue between them; not coordinating the work between all the actors that act in schools, the indifferentism of the teachers and lack of seriousness in treating and evaluating the students as active citizens of the future.

Through this study the information, support and clear ideas of the role that the school should play in initiating active civilization get access. At the same time this study is helpful in sensitizing the teachers and the students in schools to take responsibilities in solving different problems, encouraging self actions, participating in civic actions, aiming in avoiding negative phenomena that are encountered in the today society and improving the level of civilization. To improve the quality of service by the teachers, by offering qualitative and periodic training and qualification, close to their needs in preparing active citizens of the future. The creation of opportunities for schools involvements in projects and programs that are connected with civic education. Knowing and maintaining positive practice by other countries, by making it suitable for the conditions of our country, to enlarge the participation of the students in the community. Creating the contact circle for experience sharing, giving support to programs in schools, where the impact of education with active civilization find favorable circumstances. Encouraging self actions to the students, for participation in civic acts. It is obvious that the request toward the school for a qualitative civic education and formation should become stronger, where the initiating of active civilization should take an important part.

Even so, this study has not faced all the real problems, therefore further steps will be taken to be fulfilled in the future.Identifying different problems and offering them for the teaching department students, teachers and students will serve to the improvement of the existing situation and launching new visions towards the future, in upbringing a new generation with expressions to judge in an independent way the existing models and making suggestions and giving recommendations to improve the future.

References

Electronic Yournal of sociology, Cultural Citizenship and the creation of European Identity. 1997
Tamo, A., Çomo, B., Karaj, Th., Civic Education in schools and out, CRS, Tirana, 2002.