

Functions of European higher education in the context of students' mobility

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Abstract

The paper presents a new phenomenon of European education in the context of European social and cultural integration. The emphasis has been put on functions of European higher education in the context of students' educational mobility in LLP-Erasmus Programme.

In the first part of the article, definition of European education was presented. Moreover specificity of different forms of European education ("education about Europe", "education for Europe" and "education through Europe"), have been explained. The author shows new perspectives in the field of European education as a result of multiculturalism in Europe.

The author, in the second part of the article, specifies different functions of European education in the context of international students' mobility. Practical example has been given by analyses of experiences and reflections by the students who had participated in LLP-Erasmus Programme.

Key-words

European education, Functions of european education, LLP-Erasmus, Students mobility

Introduction

Education becomes more important in the European Union policy. For the first time tasks about education was included in The Treaty of Maastricht (in 1993). Then consequently new declarations have been signed by different European countries. In 1998 Sorbonne Declaration, then in 1999 Bologna Declaration has been signed.

At the beginning of XXI century (in 2000) new strategy of European Union policy was established in Lisbon Strategy. The aim of this Strategy is to make European economy most dynamic and competitive what is founded on professional knowledge. On the base of European integration, multiculturalism and world economy competition, new needs have been created. That is why European education has to responds and adopts itself towards new necessities.

The aim of the paper is to present functions of European education which are fulfilled by students in aspect of international mobility in LLP-Erasmus Programme (as an example of European education - learning through Europe).

Introduction to european education

Discussion about European education was caused because of cultural differences between societies from European countries and the need of integration. It is worth to emphasis two aspects of socio-cultural integration: inner and international. Inner integration is taking place inside each country to prevent from conflicts, tensions and arguments between social and/or cultural majorities and minorities. International integration was started in 1951 by signing the Coal and Steel Treaty to unify European economy. Later, international institutions (e.g. the European Parliament) and organization (UNESCO) has been created to extend economy integration towards social and cultural aspects.

Cultural diversification was caused for example by armed conflicts which brought about to borders changes (as a consequence aboriginal minorities appears). The next source of European cultural diversity is process of international migration. Internationalization, which means cooperation in policy, law, economy, science, even ecology also intense European cultural diversification.

Jerzy Nikitorowicz (2000) sets down condition that if multiculturalism is a rising social process then we have to prepare new education strategies. It enables to create all necessary competences and cultural attitudes at micro and macro level.

European education refers to preparing individuals towards living in modern, liberal, intercultural, civil society. We may say that European education means moulding somebody's personality and process of upbringing people to fulfill ideals of integrated Europe (Nikitorowicz, 2009). It would be professional training towards respecting European norms, values (as a democracy), common market, law and institutions in a civil society.

In the literature three concepts of European education come into consideration: "education for Europe", "education about Europe" and "education through Europe".

- "**Education for Europe**" means to educate people for active participation in integrated Europe, who can quickly adapt to new conditions and benefit by getting new competences and employability. The aim of this kind of European education is mutual understanding and creating new cultural values by different societies. New quality of European culture should refer towards national roots and values.

- "**Education about Europe**" relates to historical, cultural, social, economical and political aspects of Europe and European integration. This kind of education is realized by students mainly by attending different subjects at schools.

- "**Education through Europe**" concerns acquiring individual skills and experiences by mobility for tourist or academic reasons. One of the best examples of this kind of education is Lifelong Learning Programme Erasmus. This programme promotes students' international mobility, which is the main aim of Bologna Process. As benefits of participation in international mobility which are shown in European Commission publications are: professional and personal development, employability at international market, promoting European identity, increasing satisfaction of learning which lasts for whole life and many others.

Chosen functions of European higher education

Generally, term function is used to describe results of exact activities. Educational practice as an intentional process (in formal, informal, non-formal learning) suits to establish exact aims and results. Students who participate in LLP-Erasmus Programme are involved in many activities at school, in the neighborhood, associations, with their peer group, etc. While being active they realizing different functions of European education (consciously or not).

LLP-Erasmus students realize **didactic function** at the university. They extend knowledge and better understanding of the discipline which they are studying. This happen because of the different learning and teaching methods in foreign education system. Exchanged students have an access to different technologies, devices, techniques, other experiences and resources than in their home institution. They also have to communicate all the time in different language. It improves students' international communication skills.

Participation in LLP-Erasmus Programme and living in multicultural society (among strangers) strengthen students' reflections about themselves. They try to understand better the world and their place in it. Also they are becoming more critical towards surrounded reality. In this case **interpretation function** of European education is realized.

Modern European education **function** is to **prepare towards future**. The students, while experiencing European education, do not get ready solutions to the problem, but they are provided with the ability to "know-how" to face difficulties and approach new strategies to overcome obstacles. Mobile students should realize better **function of getting ready to take up a new challenges** because of experiences of living and

learning abroad in permanently variable conditions.

Function of building intercultural identity is extremely important in modern multicultural societies. Zygmunt Bauman claims that people do not think about “having” their identity until they happily belong somewhere, not seeing alternative, different choice (Bauman, 2007). I would add that we do not hesitate about our personal, social or cultural identity until we meet “Other”, “Different” (representative of other religion, culture, nationality etc.) Question “Who are you”? makes only sense when respondent is aware that it is possible to be another that she/he is. Students while mobility period participate in different cultural dimensions (of home and host country and native cultures of their international friends, etc.). They develop abilities to cooperate in multicultural environment and respect and acceptance for somebody’s otherness.

Function of integration is most important because of creating European Superstate (G. Morgan, 2005). The aim of this function is to integrate and show similarities between European citizens in aspect of “unity in diversity”.

Innovative function is connected with the rapid changes in global societies and informative communities, where the knowledge is becoming obsolescent. Mobile students should be better prepared to work effectively in new circumstances. Also, they had an experience of adaptation towards different social and cultural conditions.

Function of emancipation is connected with causing individual and collective changes. Professionally educated European students do not only have to get used to rapid changes but they also should create changes. “Emancipation does not mean decreasing differences, but relieving from stereotypes and oppressive social relations” (Czerepaniak-Walczak, 2006).

Conclusions

Realizing different functions of European education by students, causes special results in their life. Those, who are active participants of education through Europe benefits in private and professional life. It can be ability to react for changes and to manage with new circumstances in variable environment and being able to “learn how”.

To conclude, European education in a form of students’ mobility is a great challenge of getting known other cultures, extending own horizons, becoming more attractive as a potential employee and realizing oneself.

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