

VALENCES OF PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT OF CURRICULUM

Angela POTÂNG,

Moldova State University

The given article addresses the importance of psychological evaluation of the curriculum for ensuring a balanced, relevant and effective education. The analysis showed that curriculum balance is a central element in preventing cognitive and emotional overload of school pupils. The balanced curriculum between theory and practical activities supports the harmonious development of pupils, allowing a diversification of competences and an increased interest in learning. In terms of relevance, curriculum that includes up-to-date content and adapted to contemporary social and economic realities has proven to increase students' motivation and better prepare them for integration into society. In terms of potential, the study shows that a curriculum focused on essential skills such as critical thinking, creativity and adaptability has a positive long-term impact on students' personal and professional success. Curriculum focused on these skills supports pupils not only in academic performance, but also in developing essential social and emotional competences. Finally, the analysis of impact on teaching practice and on the relationship with the community revealed that a flexible and relevant curriculum contributes to an effective collaboration between teachers, pupils and parents. Thus, the psychological evaluation of the curriculum becomes essential to adapt the contents and teaching methods to the real needs of pupils and to strengthen the relationships between school, family and community, promoting an integrated and effective education.

Keywords: *psychological assessment of curriculum, balance of curriculum, relevance of curriculum, potential of curriculum, impact of curriculum.*

VALENȚELE EVALUĂRII PSIHOLOGICE ALE CURRICULUMULUI

Articolul dat abordează importanța evaluării psihologice a curriculumului în asigurarea unei educații echilibrate, relevante și eficiente. Analiza a arătat că echilibrul curriculumului este un element central în prevenirea supraîncărcării cognitive și emoționale a elevilor. Curriculumul echilibrat între teorie și activități practice susține dezvoltarea armonioasă a elevilor, permițând o diversificare a competențelor și un interes crescut pentru învățare. În privința relevanței, curriculumul care include conținuturi actualizate și adaptate realităților sociale și economice contemporane a demonstrat că sporește motivația elevilor și îi pregătește mai bine pentru integrarea în societate. În ceea ce privește potențialul, studiul arată că un curriculum centrat pe abilități esențiale, cum ar fi gândirea critică, creativitatea și adaptabilitatea, are un impact pozitiv pe termen lung asupra succesului personal și profesional al elevilor. Curriculumul axat pe aceste abilități îi sprijină pe elevi nu doar în performanța academică, ci și în dezvoltarea unor competențe sociale și emoționale esențiale. În final, analiza impactului asupra practicii didactice și asupra relației cu comunitatea a relevat că un curriculum flexibil și relevant contribuie la o colaborare eficientă între profesori, elevi și părinți. Astfel, evaluarea psihologică a curriculumului devine esențială pentru a adapta conținuturile și metodele de predare la nevoile reale ale elevilor și pentru a întări relațiile dintre școală, familie și comunitate, promovând o educație integrată și eficientă.

Cuvinte-cheie: *evaluarea psihologică a curriculumului, echilibrul curriculumului, relevanța curriculumului, potențialul curriculumului, impactul curriculumului.*

Introduction

The school curriculum plays an essential role in the mental development of pupils, influencing different aspects of their cognitive, emotional, personality and behavior spheres. Thus, a well-structured curriculum develops critical thinking, creativity and problem-solving ability. The curriculum for school subjects is oriented towards the following aspects: formative valence, informative valence, social valence, cultural valence, applicative valence, innovative valence, etc. Thus, Math, Science, and the Humanities provide pupils with opportunities to develop their intellectual skills and learn how to think logically and analytically. Subjects that emphasize personal development and emotional education can help pupils understand and manage their emotions. Disciplines such as Civic Education or school counseling classes contribute to

developing empathy, managing stress and improving interpersonal relationships. The curriculum can also impart moral, ethical and social values that contribute to the formation of a strong character. History and literature classes can help to understand the concepts of interculturality, responsibility, civic sense, moral sense and respect for diversity.

Through group activities, joint projects and other ways of organizing lessons stipulated in the curriculum, pupils develop essential social skills such as cooperation, communication and team spirit, which are fundamental for their integration into society. Also, a curriculum that encourages personalized learning and the development of each student's unique abilities can increase self-confidence and motivation to learn, but a rigid curriculum based only on memorization and grades can lead to frustration, anxiety and low self-esteem, especially in pupils who do not fit this learning style. It is necessary that the curriculum is not overloaded or does not put too much emphasis on performance and assessment as it will increase the stress and anxiety level of pupils. Conversely, a balanced curriculum that includes time for recreation and personal development contributes to better mental health. Curriculum can valorize pupils' potential if it is built on multiple levels of understanding and competences, allowing pupils to progress from simple knowledge to analysis and evaluation.

Based on these considerations, and from the fact that the curriculum reflects the school's educational offer, we set out the purpose to analyze the valences of psychological assessment of the curriculum from the perspective of the balance, relevance, potential and impact of curriculum.

In educational practice in our country, according to the curriculum design and development methodology stipulated in the "National Curriculum Reference Framework", at a certain period of time, the curriculum, like any other regulatory document, becomes the object of pedagogical evaluation. [1, 2, 3] The question arises: to what extent is the psychological component of the curriculum assessment relevant for the elaboration of a final appreciation regarding the effectiveness of the curriculum? The answer still comes from the complicated process of curriculum design, which is significantly influenced by the laws of cognitive psychology, age psychology, learning psychology, etc. The authors take into account psychological considerations in developing the curriculum to ensure that learning is as effective as possible for each pupil. It is necessary to understand how the brain processes information. And the curriculum in school subjects should present the information in a way that it can be learned and understood more easily. Psychology provides information on how a curriculum can be organized to achieve pupils learning at an optimal level and how much information pupils can absorb in learning different curriculum content. [4]

Theoretical Analysis of Curriculum Assessment Criteria from Psychological Perspective

We will analyze in this text sequence the following curriculum assessment criteria: balance, relevance, potential and impact of the curriculum.

The balance of curriculum constitutes the structure and order of the component elements: the purposes, the objectives, the contents, the teaching methods, the description of assessment system, the planning of activities. The subject of balance in the curriculum has been addressed over time by several theorists and researchers in psychology and education, being an essential element for the development of a curriculum that meets the varied needs of pupils and society. Thus, John Dewey, a pioneer in progressive education, argued in his work „Democracy and Education” (1938) the need for a balanced curriculum that integrates both the interests of pupils and the demands of society. Dewey emphasized the importance of balancing theory and practice in order for learning to be relevant and functional. Ralph Tyler developed the curriculum model known as the „Tyler Rationale” in „Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction” (1949). He emphasized the balance between educational objectives, learning experiences and assessment methods to ensure a coherent and effective curriculum. Author Jerome Bruner in „Process of Education” (1960) promoted the idea of a spiral curriculum that introduces fundamental concepts in a balanced way and develops them progressively. This type of curriculum involves returning to central themes as pupils progress, thus balancing the depth and complexity of learning. Another important researcher, Elliot Eisner wrote about curriculum balance in the „Educational Imagination” (1979). He advocated a comprehensive curriculum that combined cognitive, emotional and aesthetic aspects, emphasizing the importance of including the arts

and creativity in education. Howard Gardner, known for the theory of multiple intelligences, promoted in „Frames of Mind” (1983) the idea that a balanced curriculum should take into account the different types of intelligence of pupils, giving them the opportunity to develop their specific abilities. Philip Jackson in „Life in Classrooms” (1968), explored how classroom activities can contribute to a balance between academic goals and the social and emotional needs of pupils, emphasizing the importance of social interactions and the school environment in curriculum.

So, the researches and theories of these authors highlight the need to build a balanced curriculum, which takes into account both academic and social, emotional and practical aspects, preparing pupils for an active and informed participation in society.

Currently, the authors of school curriculum try to maintain the balance in terms of aspects: innovation *versus* tradition, pupil-centered activities *versus* subject-centered activities, individual learning methods *versus* group learning methods, audio techniques *versus* visual techniques, needs of society *versus* individual needs of the pupil who learns, defining cognition *versus* emotional or behavioral objectives; breadth *versus* depth of curriculum, etc. [5] The aspect of balance must be considered both in the design and development process and in the curriculum assessment process.

The relevance of curriculum reflects the degree of applicability of curriculum content to pupils needs and societal demands. [6] The issue of curriculum relevance has been explored in studies in psychology and pedagogy, with an emphasis on how education can respond to the needs and interests of pupils, preparing them for real life. Thus, Jean Piaget in his studies on cognitive development, emphasized the importance of relevance of the curriculum in relation to the stages of cognitive development of pupils. He argued that the curriculum must be adapted to the children’s level of understanding to stimulate active learning and discovery. His works have had a major influence on conceptions of a curriculum relevant to the age of pupils.

The theory of proximal development zone of (PDZ) of Lev Vygotsky highlighted the importance of relevance in the curriculum by adapting the content to level of individual development of each pupil. Vygotsky argued that learning must be contextualized and facilitate the development of pupils’ potential, thus having practical and personal relevance. David Ausubel in his work „Educational Psychology: A Cognitive View” (1968), developed the theory of learning through advanced organizers, emphasizing that the relevance of curriculum can be increased by logically structuring information and connecting new knowledge with already existing knowledge. Thus, pupils can perceive the usefulness and practical applicability of the information learned.

Benjamin Bloom in his studies on the taxonomy of educational objectives, pointed out that the relevance of curriculum can be maximized by clear educational objectives that allow pupils to understand the usefulness of each acquired competence. Through his taxonomy, he proposed a framework through which knowledge and competences can be structured so that they have practical applicability. Also, the author Paulo Freire in the work „Pedagogy of the Oppressed” (1968), proposed a relevant curriculum that addresses the social and cultural aspects of pupils’ lives, to help them understand and criticize the social structures around them. He argued that education must be relevant and emancipatory, not just a set of standardized knowledge.

These studies and theories have emphasized the importance of a curriculum that is relevant to pupils, both cognitively and practically.

The potential of curriculum reflects its ability to achieve the educational goals, to achieve the expected effects regarding the cognitive results, the attitude and behavior changes of the pupils in the process of learning, training. [6] The topic of potential of the curriculum – in the sense of its ability to support the holistic development of pupils – has been addressed in several studies in psychology. In the work „Origins of Intelligence in Children” (1952), J. Piaget emphasized the importance of a curriculum adapted to the level of development of pupils in order to maximize their intellectual potential. In „Experiential Learning: Experience as Source of Learning and Development” (1984), David Kolb approached the potential of curriculum through the lens of experiential learning, emphasizing that pupils develop their full potential when they are actively involved in experiential learning processes. This model suggests that through hands-on methods and interactive activities, the curriculum can facilitate the overall development of pupils.

The author Elliot Eisner in his work „Educational Imagination” (1979) presented the importance of the potential of curriculum to support the cognitive and aesthetic development of pupils, arguing that the inclusion of arts and creative activities can stimulate imagination and innovative thinking. This type of curriculum can maximize pupils’ potential by diversifying learning experiences.

These works and researches have contributed to the understanding of how the curriculum can support the full development of pupils in the context of the Romanian and Moldovan educational system, encouraging an adaptive, competence-based and pupil-centered approach.

The impact of curriculum. This dimension in the evaluation of curriculum refers to the impact of curriculum on teaching practice, on administrative and managerial methods, on the relationship of community and parents with the school, on the social behavior of pupils. In the analysis of this aspect, the impact of curriculum on all elements of the educational system is considered. We will further analyze psychological aspects regarding the impact of curriculum on teaching practice. The curriculum plays an essential role in shaping teaching practice, directly influencing the methods and strategies used by teachers in the teaching process. Through its structure and content, the curriculum defines the learning objectives and essential competences, providing teachers with a guide in the development of educational activities and materials. When the curriculum is well constructed, it can stimulate teaching creativity, giving teachers the freedom to adapt lessons to meet the diverse needs of pupils. On the other hand, a rigid curriculum can limit teachers’ flexibility, reducing opportunities to use innovative methods or personalize learning. At the same time, the curriculum is a determining factor in the choice of teaching resources, from textbooks and worksheets to projects and extracurricular activities, which support the deepening of concepts taught. Each curriculum change brings with it challenges for teachers, requiring them to update their knowledge and incorporate new teaching techniques. Adapting to new curricular demands can be difficult, but it offers teachers opportunities for professional development, encouraging them to become more reflective and improve their methods. Furthermore, curricula also influence the way teachers assess pupils progress, introducing new criteria and assessment standards. In this way, curricula not only outline classroom activities, but also create coherence between educational goals, teaching methods, and assessment. Therefore, the school curriculum is not just a plan of study, but a shaping force that profoundly impacts teaching practice, the professional development of teachers, and ultimately the learning experience of pupils.

The subject of impact of the curriculum on teaching practice has been addressed in numerous studies in psychology and pedagogy, exploring how curriculum influences teaching methods, teacher-pupil relationships and assessment strategies. Thus, Jerome Bruner argued that curriculum structure directly affects teaching methods. Through the „spiral curriculum” model, he suggested that progressively returning to key concepts allows teachers to gradually deepen content, better adapting to pupils’ level of understanding. David Ausubel, points out that the structure and organization of the curriculum influences the way teachers present information. Ausubel argued that a well-structured curriculum facilitates effective teaching and meaningful learning. Maria Montessori in her works argues that a flexible and child-centered curriculum positively influences teaching practice, allowing teachers to support self-directed learning. Through its structure, the Montessori curriculum helps to create an environment where pupils learn at their own pace, guided by personal interest. Elliot Eisner explored how curriculum shapes teaching practice, arguing that a varied and creative curriculum allows teachers to adopt diverse teaching strategies, including activities that stimulate creativity and critical thinking.

These studies have had a profound impact on how curriculum is perceived to influence teaching methods and teachers’ professional development, demonstrating the importance of an adaptive and pupil-centered curriculum in promoting effective and meaningful teaching practice.

The impact of curriculum on the relationship between the community, parents and educational institutions can be identified by analyzing the perceptions and the level of their involvement in the children’s education. A curriculum that encourages collaboration between school and family, through projects or extracurricular activities, increases the involvement of parents in their children’s education. They feel themselves more motivated to participate in educational activities, talk with teachers and contribute to the learning process. Also, curriculum that includes elements of civic education and the development of social compe-

tences can strengthen the links between school and community, promoting shared values such as respect, responsibility and civic engagement. Curriculum that includes themes and projects adapted to the cultural and social specifics of the community can encourage community participation in school activities, and parents and other people in the community can become active partners in the educational process. A clear and transparent curriculum allows parents and the community to understand educational goals and assessment methods. This facilitates communication between teachers and parents, creating a partnership based on transparency and collaboration. The curriculum that includes social and emotional education programs helps to develop a positive environment around pupils, encouraging parents and community members to support the school and contribute to the formation of a safe and friendly environment for children. When the curriculum is designed to meet the needs of modern society, parents and the community are more likely to valorize education. This increases the prestige of school in the community and encourages the support and funding of educational initiatives.

Thus, the curriculum can play an essential role in strengthening the link between school, parents and community, supporting a strong educational environment based on collaboration, support and shared values.

Conclusions

Psychological evaluation of the curriculum is essential to ensure that it effectively meets the needs of pupils and fulfills its educational goals. The balance of curriculum is a key first aspect, as it must provide a harmonious combination of theoretical knowledge and practical skills. If certain areas are overloaded, pupils may become overwhelmed and interest in learning may decrease, negatively affecting their emotional state as well. The relevance of curriculum is another important dimension, which implies that the contents must be updated and aligned with the demands of society and the labor market. An irrelevant curriculum can decrease pupils' motivation and increase the risk of dropping out, being perceived as useless in the context of current realities. The potential of curriculum, in this sense, refers to its ability to develop in pupils not only academic knowledge, but also essential socio-emotional skills. The curriculum should support the development of critical thinking, creativity and adaptability, elements that contribute to pupils' personal and professional success.

Also, the impact of curriculum on teaching practice must be evaluated from the perspective of flexibility and teaching methods. Teachers need a curriculum that allows them to adapt their methods to meet the individual differences of pupils, which contributes to a more effective and satisfying educational process. In addition, the curriculum influences the relationship between the school and the community, and psychological assessment can help identify how it encourages parental and community involvement. When the curriculum is relevant and adaptable, parents tend to be more actively supportive of the educational process, feeling that it supports their children in real ways. Psychological assessment thus allows the continuous adjustment of the curriculum, taking into account the emotional, cognitive and social needs of pupils, as well as the demands of a constantly changing society.

The need to periodically evaluate the curriculum has always existed, to adapt it to socio-economic changes and the needs of pupils, thus ensuring its relevance and effectiveness in education. Psychological evaluation of the curriculum is necessary for several reasons: because it ensures that the educational program meets the cognitive, emotional and social needs of pupils.

First, it will be determined whether the curriculum is adapted to the pupils' developmental stages, thus avoiding overloading or under-stimulating them. Also, psychological assessment can identify whether the curriculum is able to capture the interest and stimulate the curiosity of pupils, reflect the diversity of learning styles, develop emotional intelligence, communication skills, conflict resolution and other socio-emotional competences essential for long-term success.

References:

1. GUȚU, VI. (coord.), BÎRNAZ, N., DANDARA, O., GORAȘ-POSTICĂ, V., HANDRABURA, L., MURARU, E., PALADI, F., ȘEVCIUC, M., VELIȘCO, N. *Cadrul de referință al Curriculumului Universitar*. Chișinău: Centrul Editorial-Poligrafic al USM, 2015, 128 p. ISBN 978-9975-71-689-5.3.

2. GUȚU, VI. *Curriculum educațional. Cercetare. Dezvoltare. Optimizare*. Chișinău: CEP USM, 2014, 230 p. ISBN 978-9975-71-526-3.
3. CRISTEA, S. *Argumente în cercetarea curriculumului*. În: *Tribuna Învățământului*, Nr. 8-9, Serie nouă, August - Septembrie 2020, pp. 98-105.
4. HEWITT, T. W. *Understanding and shaping curriculum: What we teach and why*. 2006, Thousand Oaks: Sage publications.
5. TACEA, A-F. *Evaluarea curriculumului. Metode și instrumente*. București: Editura Universității din București, 2017, ISBN 978-606-16-0886-7
6. COJOCARIU V. M., *Fundamente pedagogice. Teoria și metodologia curriculumului*, București: V&I Integral, 2008, p. 119. ISBN: 973-1883-01-4.

* *This article is made within the project „Theory and Methodology of Continuous and Cyclical Monitoring and Development of School Curriculum”*

Authors information:

Angela POTÂNG, PhD in Psychology, Associate Professor, Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences, Sociology and Social Work, Moldova State University.

ORCID: 0000-0001-9849-8457

E-mail: angela.potang@usm.md

Presented on 28.09.2024