Quality of Teaching in Modern School

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Abstract: Implementation of education policy largely depends on the quality of teacher's work in which teaching takes a significant place. It is not simple to teach. All teachers admit it. However, it is especially important in the present modern school because education actually is the driving force that moves the advance of the society and the growth of national economy. Modern school is characterized by high quality of teacher's teaching and pupils' learning. Effective teaching is the foundation for successful, cooperation–oriented and personalized learning process, which in its turn, ensure better trained specialists, more affluent and safer society and the formation of jointly responsible citizens. Learning in modern school takes place beyond the classroom. The teacher initiates discussions in social media, is open to innovations and application of communication technologies in the teaching/learning process. Many researchers indicate that the current understanding of teaching has to be changed in essence. There is a new perspective on the teaching process in modern school. The teacher in it is creative and entrepreneurial and working in the e-teaching/learning environment stimulates the pupils' individuality and talents. The article reflects some of the theoretical aspects of the teaching process in modern school and analyzes the surveyed teachers' views on teaching strategies that are most frequently used in the teaching practice of modern school.

Key words: quality of teaching, modern school, school education.

Introduction

Education is the driving force that advances the development of economy and social progress. Therefore education policy which is based on the development of modern school has to take an important place in the development of the society. Modern school is characterized by high quality of teachers' teaching and pupils' learning.

Effective teaching is the foundation for successful, cooperation–oriented and personalized learning process, which in its turn, ensures better trained specialists, more affluent and safer society and the formation of jointly responsible citizens. Learning in modern school takes place beyond the classroom. It is based on the philosophy of education that encourages including everyday life problems and their solutions in the content of teaching and learning and to use the new paradigms and teaching/learning resources offered by the development of the technologies. The teacher initiates discussions in social media, is open to innovations and application of communication technologies in the teaching/learning process. Many researchers indicate that the current understanding of teaching has to be changed in essence.

B. O. Smith (Smith, 1969) explains that teaching is the system of purposeful actions that is influenced by two factors:

- factors that cannot be changed by the teacher – the number of pupils in the class, pupils' physical features, etc.;
- factors that the teacher can change by asking questions, discussing ideas, etc.

G. Wells (Wells, 1982) has a similar description of the teaching and points out that it is the system of definite actions in which the teacher motivates, explains, concludes, doubts while collecting data about the pupil's academic achievement and progress.

However, J. S. Farrant (Farrant, 1980) concludes that teaching is a process that makes learning easier. The teacher acts as a catalyst promoting the pupils' learning.

There exists a new perspective on the teaching process in modern school. The teacher in it is creative and entrepreneurial and working in the e-teaching/learning environment stimulates the pupils' individuality and talents.

At the same time the school practice presents also another picture. A. Špona and B. Brigmane (Špona, Brigmane, 2011) in their research have observed that teachers really wish to teach their pupils what they still do not know; however, it turns out that actually teachers do not know pupils' needs for information and knowledge. Pupils have already mastered knowledge and skills from other sources of information that are widely available in the present information space. The teacher in the selection of the teaching strategies is not always ready to respond to the real needs of her pupils.

Education Development Guidelines of Latvia 2014 – 2020 (Izglītības attīstības..., 2013) underline that in 2020 general education will be the one promoting creative thinking and problem solving; integrating the digital teaching/learning resources in the educational process; stimulating the individuality and the development of talents; implemented by young teachers who know well the teaching/learning methods of the 21st century.

The aim of the article is to reflect on some of the theoretical aspects of the teaching process in modern school and the findings of the empirical study (teachers' survey) on the experience of using teaching strategies in the teaching practice of the modern school.

Methodology

Quality of teaching

The teaching process in the school practice takes place in a dramatically new informational environment (social networks, digitalization, plenitude) and is aimed at the future which is impossible for us to describe in detail. The quality of the teaching process is one of the factors that ensures sustainable development of education. It is described by the diversity and appropriateness of the applied teaching/learning approaches, purposeful use of the home tasks, the clarity and purposefulness of the learning content, assessment as part of the teaching, the quality of the teacher-pupil dialogue, care about the pupils (the satisfaction of pupils' emotional, physical and social needs).

The quality of teaching is promoted also by a modifiable and diverse use of the methods in which demonstrations alternate with questions and answers, projects, practical assignments, teaching excursions, inquiries and role plays. This allows maintaining pupils' attention more effectively and due to active participation it also promotes motivation. Boring lectures or tiresome uniform tasks hardly increase the quality of teaching and learning.

The education paradigm selected and accepted by the teacher influences quality of teaching. There are two paradigms – the teacher-centred or the old paradigm and the learner-centred or the new paradigm.

The teacher in the old paradigm is the one who teaches giving the instructions and defining the norms. The teacher's knowledge is transferred to passive learners. The absolute, necessary, and sufficient requirement for teachers in this context is complete mastery of the content. The classic classroom is the teacher lecturing and students listening. The students are silent, passive, and in competition with each other.

In the new paradigm teaching is a personal deal between the pupil and the teacher when the pupil in the cooperation process construes his/her knowledge. The teacher's effort is aimed at developing pupils' competencies and talents (Johnson, Johnson…, 1998).

Two teaching/learning approaches are applied here– inquiry-based learning and cooperative learning.

Inquiry-based learning is a teaching method that focuses on student investigation and hands-on learning. In this method, the teacher's primary role is that of a facilitator, providing guidance and support for students through the learning process. Inquiry-based learning falls under the student-centered approach, in that students play an active and participatory role in their own learning process (Grasha, 1996).

Cooperative learning refers to a method of teaching and classroom management that emphasizes group work and a strong sense of community. This model fosters students' academic and social growth and includes teaching techniques such as "Think-Pair-Share" and reciprocal teaching. Cooperative learning falls under the student-centered approach because learners are placed in responsibility of their learning and development. This method focuses on the belief that students learn best when working with and learning from their peers (Grasha, 1996).

In order to ensure qualitative teaching three intrinsic teaching dimensions are used:
- promotion of the pupils' intellectual development;
- ensurance of a qualitative and modern teaching/learning environment;
- development of the pupils' understanding about the importance of their work (Ayres, Dinham…, 1998).

Quality teaching cannot happen in isolation. Engaging the pupil in the classroom and classroom instruction cannot happen unless there is engagement in the larger context. It only happens when all the surrounding pieces of the larger system are in place. The structure of the school, the school leadership and the community are also essential to quality teaching (Gravson, 2009).

Modern school

Modern school practice cares both for the class equipment with new technologies and modern strategies in the management of the teaching and learning process. Pupils are encouraged to observe the outside world, to analyze what is taking place in different spheres of life (economy, entrepreneurship, social life, etc.).

New generation technologies enter the school. "Microsoft Surface" and "SMART Table" are just two examples of how the combination of the board and school desk will look like in the future. The desk is the computer and the table plate is a huge touch-screen. There pupils find the tasks for the day, present their home tasks, draw figures, do mathematical tasks or write their notes as well as they can play educational games with their classmates. All this is used to ensure qualitative leadership of the teaching and learning process.

The rapid development of technologies makes the teachers be creative and follow the digital lifestyle of their pupils, master new skills that fit the environment of a modern school and allow managing the educational process more effectively. Unfortunately, the initiatives directed to increasing the role of ICT in education often confine themselves with setting up equipment and tools in the classrooms without thinking about how they will affect and change the teaching and learning processes.

Pupils in a modern school more and more often become aware of the importance of the effort they have invested and the importance of their work both in gaining immediate success and ensuring the life career and lifelong education. This is promoted by the digitalization of the school and society, the globalization processes in the society and education, the challenges dictated by the necessity to increase the competitiveness and sustainability not only in the national economy but also in the relation to the life career of every person.

Results and discussion
In order to find out teachers' views about the most frequently used teaching strategies in modern school a survey with the participation of 51 teachers of Latvia was carried out (Figure 1).
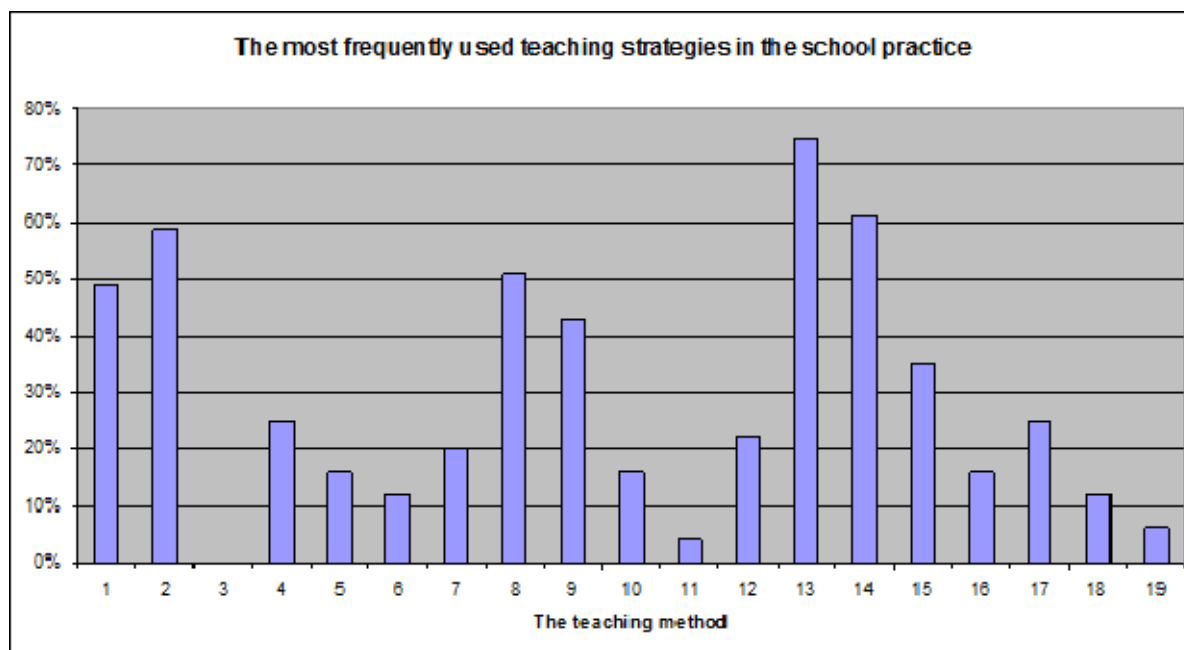
Figure 1. The most frequently used teaching strategies in the school practice, where the teaching methods are:

1. lectures,
2. discussions in the class,
3. discussions in social networks,
4. inquiry as the home task,
5. inquiries in the class,
6. brainstorms,
7. solution of problem,
8. demonstrations,
9. talks in the class,
10. role plays,
11. digital games,
12. active reading,
13. group work,
14. individual independent work,
15. projects,
16. excursions,
17. experiments,
18. dialogue,
19. another answer.

Teachers noted group work (75%), individual independent work (61%) and discussions in the class (59%) as the most frequently used teaching strategies. This proves that the teacher with the help of the teaching methods tries to ensure the cooperation-directed and at the same time personalized teaching process. Pupils interact socially and learn to take the responsibility for their learning and achievement. Group work is a good way how to activate pupils' learning and motivation. Thus also the quality of teaching is higher.

Demonstrations (51%) and lectures (49%) are used a bit less frequently. Demonstrations can be used to provide examples that enhance lectures and to offer effective hands-on, inquiry-based learning opportunities in classes. (Eley, Norton, 2004) However, such frequent use of lectures is alarming. This serves as evidence that there are still teachers who have not fully accepted the new educational paradigm in which the pupil him/herself tries to construe the knowledge, research and conclude. In this case the teacher wants to be the provider of the new knowledge and the pupils have to be the receivers of this knowledge. Yet an interesting lecture can arouse interest and motivate pupils, develop their ability to concentrate and attention, identify and mark the most important information (Hativa, 2000).

At the same time, it is surprising that discussions in the social networks are not used at all and digital games (4%) are used very rarely. Today the new digital generation is attending the school that uses actively the new information technologies   in the everyday life, communicate in different social networks, discuss the problems in Facebook, Twitter and elsewhere, play digital games, search foe diverse information in the internet sites. Many information technology companies have developed excellent digital games that can be applied in the educational process. The teacher although he/she is the „digital immigrant" (Prensky, 2001) has to master urgently the skills to use knowingly and to live in the digital environment, to apply them actively in the teaching/learning process. Thus he/she will be able to

choose those teaching strategies that will be closer to pupils' habits of acquiring information and construing knowledge. This, in its turn, will increase the quality of the teaching process. D. Spanhel (Spanhel, 2006) in his research has observed that teachers is one of those professional groups that despite happenings beyond the school oppose the introduction of the new information technologies in the everyday practice treating the use of these new media as entertainment that is not connected with the educational process.

Teachers mainly apply the new technologies, internet resources in performing administrative duties and not for pedagogical and communicative purposes. The most frequently used internet portals by teachers are the school home page and e-class. The use of these sites is the requirement of the school administration and the teacher's responsibility not the teacher's choice. Teachers do not perceive the internet resources as the educational environment for interactive and modern teaching. This is both a problem and challenge that has to be solved by the modern school because the research has found that only 11% of pupils admit that teachers use information technologies in the educational process (Valdmane, 2014).

Only 35% of teachers marked projects in the survey as a teaching strategy and 25% - inquiries at home while 16% of teachers indicated inquiries in the class. It serves as evidence that these teaching strategies are used rather seldom although projects and inquiries in the class and at home are a successful means for construing pupils' knowledge and motivation, for analyzing the current phenomena and processes of different spheres of life of the surrounding world.

The data of Estonia in TALIS 2013 study can be mentioned for the comparison; they show that they use the constructivism approach in their teaching in which active learning of pupils takes place and they use less such methods as individual independent work and projects (Geske, Grīnfelds…, 2013). Teachers in Latvia, in their turn, use individual independent work as a teaching strategy rather frequently. As regards the use of projects then the situation is similar.

The dialogue as the most frequently teaching strategy is mentioned only by 12% of teachers. This has undeservedly low assessment and thus it is comparatively rarely used in the class practice. One of the reasons may be that a dialogue always has some spontaneity possibility when it can take another direction that the teacher had planned in advance. The teacher in such a case must be flexible. P. Freire (Freire, 1998) acknowledges that a dialogue is one of the key strategies how to construe knowledge. Thus the class and school become the place in which the information is studied and analyzed. Besides the dialogue develops several character features, e.g., the courage to express oneself, the tolerance to different opinions, belief in one's strengths, etc.

Conclusions

Teaching in modern school does not take place entirely in the classroom. It is oriented to the support for promoting the pupil's learning process and goes beyond the classroom using the development of information technologies.

The modern pupil represents the digital generation. Therefore the teaching strategies have to supplemented with those activities that pupils use in their everyday life – discussions in social networks, digital games, etc.

The surveying of teachers allows concluding that such teaching strategies which include pupils' everyday habits to communicate in social networks, to play digital games, to seek information in the internet, etc. in the educational process are used rarely or not at all in the school practice. This needs more extended research on the reasons for such a situation and the possible solutions. One of the reasons could be that teachers do not use internet resources, digital tools as freely as their pupils and therefore they seldom choose teaching strategies connected with their application.

Still the positive feature can be the fact that the most frequently used teaching strategies (group work, discussions in the class) are directed towards the satisfaction of pupils' social needs, the construction of knowledge (including also the individual independent work), consolidation of the cooperation skills, the formation of those pupils' features that will promote sustainable development of the society and the competitiveness of each pupil.

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