Training Future Primary School Teachers for Purposes of the New Ukrainian School in the Postmodern Era

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Abstract: The crisis of the outdated education system in Ukraine has led to radical changes at all levels. The New Ukrainian School reform introduced by the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine was one of such vital changes in 2016. It relies on critical theories of the postmodern philosophy of education. Tolerance and respect for differences, rejection of stereotypes and child-centeredness; transformation of teacher's authority and roles; individualization of the educational process are the main ideas. It is important that the New Ukrainian School reform has been launched in primary school as a fundamental part of the whole education system. In this regard, it is crucial to train primary school teachers of the new generation who will be able to implement the ideas of the New Ukrainian School. Consequently, it is extremely essential to update the system of corresponding training in higher education institutions in Ukraine. Therefore, the article aims to justify how future primary school teachers are trained for purposes of the New Ukrainian School in the postmodern era.

Keywords: *Degree in primary school teaching, competencies and roles of primary school teachers, educational process.*

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Introduction

Since the 1980s-90s, postmodern theories have been central to the sociology and philosophy of education, inevitably making adjustments to already established educational traditions. Nowadays many studies are devoted to the impact of postmodernism on the educational process. For example, in-depth research by Edwards & Usher (2002) reveals the impact of postmodern thinking on contemporary theory and practice of education, highlighting how key ideas of postmodernism change outdated concepts, structure and hierarchies in educational systems. The manifestations of postmodern philosophy in education are presented in the works of Brown & Jones (2001), who note the correlation of educational research methods and postmodern ideas. In addition, these researchers broadly highlight the specifics of critical pedagogy, which, in their opinion, arose on the basis of postmodern postulates. Educational research methods in the postmodernist direction are also presented in the works of Zeeman, Poggenpoel, Myburgh & Linde (2002) and Constas (1998). Peculiarities of teaching and learning in the postmodern era are highlighted in the works of Borovkova and Zachinyaeva (2018), Vakhovsky (2015), and Mosquera, Stobäus & Huertas (2002). Despite the widespread coverage of the impact of postmodernism on education in the scientific literature, there is no consensus on the significance of this impact. Thus, Ekanem & Esikot (2013) note the negative impact of postmodernism on the educational process, because in their opinion, postmodernism destroys not only stereotypes but also establishes moral values, which negatively affects development of the society as a whole. The opposite is the view of Jacobs & Kritsonis (2006), who see that postmodern thinking in the education system is the key to a successful future, because such a system takes into account and emphasizes uniqueness of each child and school employee. According to Esi & Posteuca (2014), postmodern philosophy does not have a negative impact on education, it simply necessitates a reassessment of educational systems, the content of educational programs, as well as tools and methods of teaching. We believe that the leading ideas of postmodernism have not only positive but also progressive significance for the formation of the education system. It follows that the ideas of postmodernism have become the basis for developing multicultural, inclusive and feminist education (Borovkova & Zachinyaeva, 2018; Nerubasska et al., 2020; Nerubasska & Maksymchuk, 2020; Vakhovsky, 2015). Postmodernists managed to change the centuries-old classical educational relations (teacher's active and student's passive role

in the educational process), prioritized education of the child's individuality, rather than capabilities, and promoted respect for differences (Edwards & Usher, 2002). It would seem that today, in a civilized and tolerant world, these ideas have long been non-innovative. At the same time, Ukrainian school education has long stayed under Soviet approaches to both teacher's and child's role in the educational process that ignore the self-worth of individuality. In 2016 Ukraine launched the New Ukrainian School reform which is based on innovative approaches to learning, attitudes towards children and school as a whole (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, 2016). This reform aims to create a school attractive to all the actors in the educational process that secures effective cooperation between teachers, children and parents based on mutual trust and respect, rather than fear; develops children's abilities and skills to achieve success in adult life. Following the ideas of postmodernism, the new Ukrainian school seeks to adapt education to every child's needs and create conditions favourable to the full development of each individual. The change of school education concept has resulted in updating teaching methods and approaches, as well as teacher's attitude towards children (Demchenko et al., 2021; Prots et al., 2021; Kosholap et al., 2021; Melnyk et al., 2021; Komogorova et al., 2021). So, the problem of training future primary school teachers for purposes of the New Ukrainian School is indeed relevant.

Theoretical analysis

The researchers Esi & Posteuca (2014) noted that postmodern scientific paradigms need a rethinking of educational concepts. The Ukrainian education system has also faced this problem. A detailed analysis of postmodern educational models (Constas, 1998; Pierre, 2000; Pillow, 2000), strategies for implementing postmodern ideas in teacher training (Jacobs & Kritsonis, 2006) and postmodern perspectives (Leicester, 2000) shows that the New Ukrainian School has accumulated critical ideas of the postmodern philosophy of education and subsequently generated new principles of primary education in Ukraine. They are the following:

- rejection of authoritarianism in terms of student's worldview (schools should seek to prepare students for successful realization of personal potential in real life, rather than provide them with a body of knowledge);

- strengthening of autonomy (school, teacher, child autonomy);

- transformation of teacher's authority (teachers are no longer seen as the embodiment of truth and knowledge; they should strive to create conditions for "educational dialogue" to help students succeed in an ever-changing world);

- implementation of multicultural education (postmodernism promotes multicultural education, intercultural dialogue, as well as the full equality of women);

- pluralism of lifestyles and subcultures in the school community (rejection of rigid intellectualism, encyclopedism and traditional forms of education allows students to gain valuable life experience; in turn, teachers must be open to the values and lifestyles introduced by students);

- tolerance towards any differences and characteristics of students; provision of equal access to education for all;

- abandonment of forced socialization; adjustment to "the ideal identity" (Nychkalo, 2017; Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, 2016; Zeeman et al., 2002).

The key idea of the New Ukrainian School lies in introducing a fundamentally different approach to schooling that follows the principles of partnership pedagogy and child-centeredness. It completely correlates with postmodernist views of the New Ukrainian School in relation to teacher's role in the educational process. Thus, the postmodern philosophy of education makes teachers facilitators, methodologists, consultants and moderators (Lyotard, 1984; Mosquera et al., 2015). Therefore, it is crucial to reconsider and enhance teacher's readiness for professional activities and justify new views on human personality (Borovkova & Zachinaeva, 2018; Kosholap et al., 2021; Matviienko, 2014; Nerubasska et al., 2020).

According to the Concept of the New Ukrainian School (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, 2016), the focus on the child as an equal participant in the educational process implies the emergence of new requirements for teacher's roles. Special emphasis should be placed on the following:

- a teacher as a mentor who is willing to share his/her experience with the child;

- a teacher as an innovator who uses new technologies and approaches to organize the educational process;

- a teacher as a facilitator who ensures group communication in the classroom;

- a teacher as a tutor who forms students' personalities (intellect, volition, emotions, physical and spiritual development) and help them cope with life difficulties (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, 2016).

It follows that the very system of teacher training, especially concerning primary school, requires fundamental changes in the teacher's roles and functions. It means that traditional key competencies and personal qualities of primary school teachers should be reconsidered for purposes of the New Ukrainian School in the context of the postmodern era. In this regard, higher education institutions should aim to shift from teachers as sources of knowledge to teachers as facilitators of learning and promoters of full and harmonious development of children. However, it is possible provided that professional teacher training relies on the following principles:

- student-centeredness, respect for individuality and difference;
- academic freedom and responsibility;
- use of innovative teaching methods (as long as university teachers regularly improve their teaching through advanced training programmes) and facilitation techniques.

The principles of student-centeredness and respect for individuality and difference optimize the educational environment, create conditions for self-expression and self-fulfillment. In turn, it teaches future professionals to tolerate difference, differentiate and follow students' needs and interests, motivate them to express their individuality and accept their peculiarities. Student-centeredness implies the abandonment of authoritarianism and creates communication on equal terms which, consequently, motivates future primary school teachers to build democratic relations with students and their parents.

Academic freedom and responsibility promote academic integrity. In turn, future professionals become able to develop and implement new forms and methods of teaching and learning, demonstrate flexible thinking and initiative.

Innovative teaching methods prepare future primary school teachers for innovative activity, develop their creative skills and encourage them towards personal and professional development. At the same time, facilitation techniques allow future teachers to try themselves as innovators, mentors and facilitators of the educational process.

Methodology

The article aims to describe and justify how future primary school teachers are trained for purposes of the New Ukrainian School in the postmodern era. Below are the corresponding objectives:

- to clarify whether professional training of future primary school teachers relies on the principles of student-centredness and respect for individuality;

- to prove whether degree programmes on primary education promote academic freedom and responsibility;

- to show whether innovative methods of teaching and facilitation techniques reinforce such training in higher education institutions.

The field research was conducted at the premises of National Pedagogical Dragomanov University (Kyiv) and Donbas State Pedagogical University (Sloviansk) during the 2020-2021 academic year. The sampling involved 302 individuals, namely, 198 students aged between 19 and 23 majoring in primary education (Years 2-4) and 104 university teachers aged between 31 and 64 (including 6 Doctors of Science in Pedagogy, 98 PhDs in Pedagogy; 7 of them with 5-year work experience, 68 – with work experience from 5 to 10 years, 29 – with more than 10-year experience; 79 females, 35 males). It was decided not to take into account gender and age differences, as well as students' levels of educational attainment.

The main method was Google forms surveys. Students were offered two different Google forms with related questions which were sent to their e-mails. Both forms included the following categories of questions:

- general questions (*for students*: a year and mode of study; *for university teachers* – age, gender, work experience, academic title);

- questions aimed to discover whether professional training of future primary school teachers complies with student-centredness and respect for individuality (*questions common to both surveys*: "How do you understand the concept of student-centeredness?", "How do you communicate with the teacher/student? Are you satisfied with the amount of communication?", "How do you receive feedback from teachers/ students?", "The educational process in your higher education institution is organized from the position of a) a student, b) a teacher, c) other; *student survey questions*: "Do teachers consider your preferences for teaching methods?", "Do teachers acknowledge your needs and individual capabilities?", "Do teachers show respect for individuality?", "What is the attitude of teachers towards students who differ from others (in terms of behaviour, lifestyle, appearance)?"; *teacher survey questions*: "How do you choose teaching methods?", "How often do you update lecture materials? Do you change lecture materials based on the level of students' progress, inclinations or interests?", "Do you encourage students to be creative?", "What is your reaction when students perform tasks in a way different from suggested by you?", "Do you use motivation techniques? If so, specify which ones");

- questions about how university teachers and students understand academic freedom and responsibility (*questions common to both surveys*: "Are you familiar with the term "academic freedom"?", "What is the extent of your academic freedom?", "Is it possible for you to exercise your academic freedom fully?", "Can you form and freely express your scientific opinion, including through public debates, conferences, symposia and scientific papers?", "What is academic responsibility?", "Which types of academic responsibility apply in the event of a violation of academic integrity in your higher education institution?", "What is the most common reason behind academic integrity violation by students/teachers?", "Have you ever encountered any manifestations of academic dishonesty? What did you do?"; *student survey questions*: "Can you choose topics of term papers, individual assignments?", "What is the procedure for choosing optional courses?", "Can you choose a scientific supervisor for your term paper?"; *teacher survey questions*: "What do you do when the lesson is not going as planned?", "Do you use teaching improvisation techniques? Which ones?", "Does the university administration influence the choice of teaching methods you use?", "Can you freely plan your lessons together with students");

- questions designed to show whether university teachers use innovative teaching methods and facilitation techniques (*student survey questions*: "Which teaching methods did you like the most?", "Are you satisfied with the teaching methods used by your teachers?"; *teacher survey questions*: "Which teaching methods do you use most often?", "Which innovative teaching methods do you use?", "What is the attitude of your students towards innovative teaching methods?", "Do you use facilitation techniques? Which ones?", "Which teaching methods, in your opinion, are the most effective in preparing future primary school teachers?").

The obtained results were processed using MS Excel. The surveying process complied with the principles of anonymity and voluntary participation.

Results and Discussion

The obtained results show that 84.8% of the respondents consider student-centredness to be certain interaction between the teacher and the student as equal actors in the educational process. Out of 15.2% of the respondents, student-centredness is one's ability to defend one's rights for 6.3% (19 students); an opportunity to create favourable learning conditions for 6.9% (21 students). At the same time, 2% of the respondents (6 university teachers) assume that student-centeredness can be implemented only formally since students not always understand "how it is to organize the

educational process properly". These respondents are teachers over 50 who have more than 20 years of work experience. The results of the survey on the educational process organization are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. The educational process organization by positions (The table is compiled by the authors of the article)

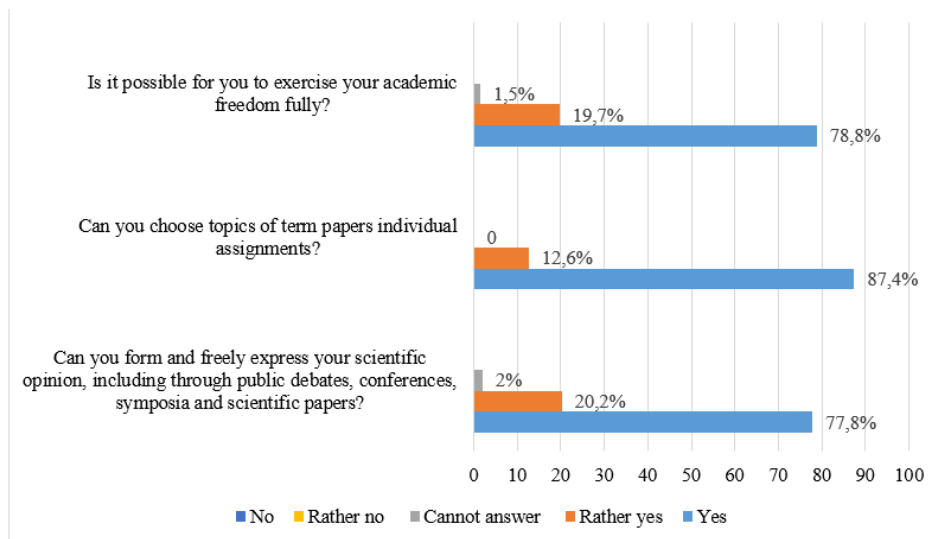| Respondents	The educational process is organized from the position of		
	students	teachers	other
Students (% out of 198 surveyed students)	81.8	18.2	-
Teachers (% out of 104 surveyed university teachers)	93.3	2.9	3.8

Source: Authors' own conception

As can be seen from Table 1, most of the surveyed teachers and students confirm that the educational process is organized from the position of students. At the same time, 6.7% of the surveyed teachers indicate that the process much relies on the teachers themselves and the university administration (2.9% and 3.8% accordingly). Meanwhile, the percentage of students who believe that the educational process relies on the teacher's position is much higher than that of the surveyed teachers with a similar opinion. The difference in the answers of both teachers and students to other questions of this category is insignificant. In particular, 88.7% of the respondents (including 89 teachers and 179 students) note that they are fully satisfied with existing communication between teachers and students and consider it sufficient to assure the quality of the educational process. When answering such questions as "How do you communicate with the teacher?", "Do teachers acknowledge your needs and individual capabilities?", "Do teachers show respect for individuality?", "What is the attitude of teachers towards students who differ from others (in terms of behaviour, lifestyle, appearance)?", this category of students mentions teachers' tolerant attitude towards difference and willingness to meet students' needs and interests. Besides, students are welcomed to consult with their teachers about personal issues or provide suggestions on modes and methods of teaching. At the same time, 11.2% of the respondents are not satisfied with the existing communication between teachers and students. Out of this percentage, 9 students and 7 teachers believe it necessary to increase communication between students and teachers, including through informal communication.

At the same time, 10 students and 8 teachers claim that there is too much such communication, which seems rather obsessive and exceeds the educational process. Most common answers are the following: "in my opinion, we, teachers, "overprotect" our students which leads to over-familiarity; therefore, it is essential to clearly limit teacher and student communication"; "I always consult students at their request, but now, I feel like I have no personal boundaries, they call me all the time, I do not like so much communication"; "existing communication is enough for me; some teachers are even annoying" etc.).

It turns out that 92.3% out of 104 university teachers state that they change lecture materials based on the level of students' progress, inclinations or interests. In particular, they update their lectures, forms and types of assignments for each student group. At the same time, 75% of them use motivation techniques to enhance students' creativity.

Thus, one can conclude that professional training of future primary school teachers relies on the principles of student-centeredness and respect for individuality.

A detailed analysis of questions about academic freedom shows that all the respondents (100%) are well familiar with the terms "academic freedom" and "academic responsibility" (see Fig. 1).
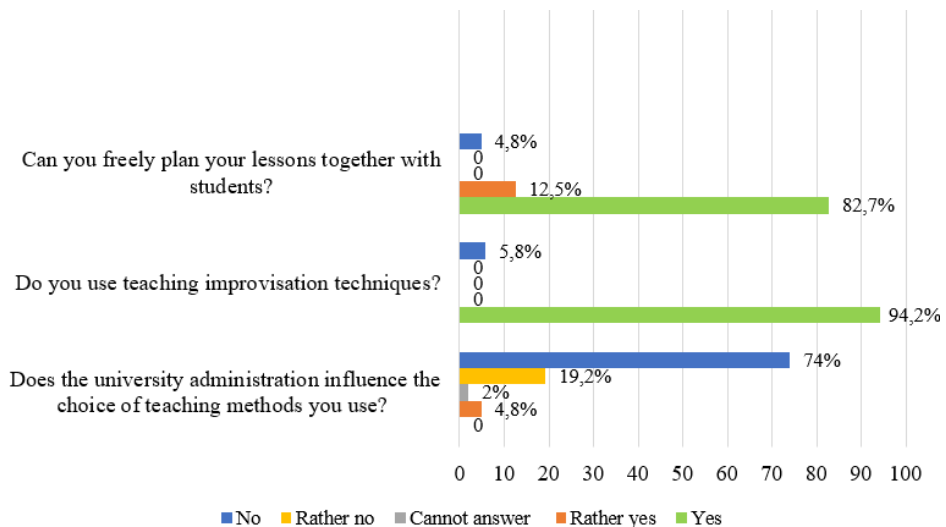

Source:The table is compiled by the authors of the article

Fig. 1. Academic freedom students in terms of research activity

As shown by Fig. 1, 87.4% out of 198 students exercise their right to choose topics of term papers and scientific supervisors in accordance with their scientific interests; 78.85% of them indicate that they exercise their academic freedom fully. All these students are well aware of the algorithm and procedure for choosing optional courses and have the opportunity to design their own educational path. At the same time, 1.5% of the surveyed students cannot assess the conditions for exercising academic freedom in their institutions and 2% of them – for expressing their scientific views in public.

Corresponding teachers' answers are presented in Fig. 2.

Source:The table is compiled by the authors of the article

Fig. 2. Academic freedom of research and teaching staff

Figure 2 shows that 95.2% of the 104 surveyed teachers adhere to the principle of academic freedom. It means that they can freely plan and design lessons together with students, choose forms and methods of work independently, build the content of the course. Almost the same number of teachers (93.2%) indicate that they do not feel pressure from the university administration about the educational process organization. Most surveyed teachers (94.2%) regularly use teaching improvisation techniques, as can be seen from their detailed answers to related questions, such as "What do you do when the lesson is not going as planned?" ("When students are interested in a particular topic, I can easily deviate from my own lecture plan and "follow" as it's very important to maintain their motivation"; "I'm not afraid

to deviate from the plan as I know I'll achieve all the lesson goals anyway; however, I always try to meet students' needs promptly"; "I can't imagine teaching without improvisation; sometimes it gives much better results than pre-planned activities").

Meanwhile, 5.8% of the surveyed teachers are particularly reluctant towards improvisation techniques. They insist on the need to follow and implement the lesson plan. Besides, 4.8% of teachers believe that they cannot freely build lesson plans (because, in their opinion, lessons should always be accorded with current requirements and orders of the university administration). It must be noted, however, the respondents included in this percentage are over 50 years old.

There is a significant difference in the answers of teachers and students concerning teaching methods used. In particular, all the surveyed teachers (100%) state that they regularly use innovative teaching methods. However, only 65.5% of students are satisfied with teaching methods and suggest using more interactive methods and forms of independent work. As shown by the answers to related questions ("Which innovative teaching methods do you use?", "What is the attitude of your students towards innovative teaching methods?", "Which teaching methods are, in your opinion, the most effective in preparing future primary school teachers?"), only 57.7% of the surveyed teachers indeed introduce such methods in the educational process (online quests, interactive online games, training exercises, individual and group projects, case studies).

It is important that 61.5% of the surveyed teachers use facilitation techniques in their teaching. The most common ones are the following: "World Coffee House", "Open Space", "Disney Method" and others.

Research limitations

The research sample only includes students and teachers from two Ukrainian universities. Accordingly, results may be different after involving other higher education intuitions (both leading and peripheral). Educational attainment levels, which can influence students' attitude towards teachers and teaching, were not considered when analysing the answers. In this regard, this factor should be taken into account in further studies. Besides, the answers demonstrate a subjective opinion of the respondents, and the obtained information was not verified by other ways (e.g., by observing teacher's activity in practice). Nevertheless, student and teacher surveys contain a wide range of clarifying and cross-sectional questions, which has made it possible to analyse the obtained data more objectively.

This research does not show temporal changes in professional training of future primary school teachers and only shows respondents' opinions at the time of the survey.

Conclusions

Studies by Vakhovsky (2015), Edwards & Usher (2002), Jacobs & Kritsonis (2006), Esi & Posteuca (2014) highlight fundamental postulates of the postmodern philosophy in education, which consists in teaching and educating a free personality capable of self-creation, change and improvement; preserving its integrity while ensuring its right to autonomy; recognition of individual personal values as priority areas of the educational process. Teaching of a free personality should take place without coercion, and, accordingly, postmodern ideas leading to the search for qualitatively new methods of teaching and education, reassessing the impact of ethical norms of educational institutions on formation of personality; analysis and rethinking of ethical relationships between participants in the pedagogical process; formation of a new value base of education, which, as a whole, led to a change in the essence of the pedagogical process. A detailed analysis of relevant legal documents shows that the New Ukrainian School reform closely correlates with the postmodern philosophy of education. Radical changes in the roles and functions of primary school teachers, communication with education stakeholders, principles and methods of teaching and learning have prompted a reconsideration of the teacher training system. It is surely obvious that the New Ukrainian school teachers should be able to implement fundamental ideas of postmodernism in practice in addition to traditional configuration of knowledge, skills and abilities. In this regard, higher education institutions should follow student-centredness, respect difference and individuality, promote academic freedom and responsibility, introduce innovate teaching methods and facilitation techniques into the educational process.

This research shows that teacher training for purposes of the New Ukrainian Schools, especially in the context of primary school, relies on the following postulates:

- students should be seen as equal actors in the educational process; the educational process should adhere to such principles as student-centeredness and respect for individuality;

- it is vital to provide students with the opportunity to exercise academic freedom;

- university teachers should be willing to apply innovative methods of teaching and learning, as well as facilitation practices.

Below are the prerequisites for the success of the New Ukrainian School: emphasis on student's personality; promotion of student autonomy and academic freedom; motivation towards self-expression and responsibility for one's own actions; respect for difference. Besides, university teachers should strive for personal and professional development to facilitate the educational process. Thus, it is indeed crucial to enhance teacher training in order to achieve strategic goals of the New Ukrainian School reform in the context of the postmodern era. It is possible through creating an effective system of advanced training for primary school teachers and thus preparing "the leaders of change".

Acknowledgement

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