

Legal Basis for The Organization of School Education in Ukraine

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Abstract

The article analyzes the conceptual and categorical apparatus and systemic characteristics of the definition of "general secondary education" in the context of the modern educational space. It is substantiated that the legal interpretation of the achievement of educational results within general secondary education is of great conceptual importance but needs to be expanded in the field of applied regulation at the level of educational institutions. The issues of information and psychological security and its relationship with indicators of psychological stability of respondents are considered. The expediency of introducing an integrated approach to ensuring internal educational equality at the institutional level is established, which, in turn, requires harmonization of the implementation of legislative requirements in general secondary education institutions. The author proposes a mechanism for overcoming regulatory and practical differences by developing a package of recommendations from educational policy actors aimed at improving the gender and social component of the educational process. Such recommendations can be adapted and implemented by educational institutions, considering the specifics of their functioning.

Keywords: educational equality; educational policy; inclusion; legal regulation; pedagogical management.

1. Introduction

Understanding the conceptual nature and categorical content of the concept of "general secondary education" is of both theoretical and applied importance. This is important for the formation of a modern scientific basis for research in the field of educational policy and provides a basis for the further development of effective tools for analyzing educational processes.

The purpose of the article is to define the main conceptual approaches to the interpretation of the concept of "general secondary education", as well as to formulate the author's vision of ways to improve the conceptual apparatus of this educational field, considering current scientific trends.

2. Literature Review

Review of scientific sources. For a comprehensive analysis of the concept of "general secondary education", it is advisable to distinguish two key areas of research: international practices and scientific theoretical approaches that cover related categories – "educational program", "inclusiveness of education", "availability of educational resources", "management of the educational process", "pedagogical skills" and "legal regulation".

In the International Standard Classification of Education (further – ISCED), general secondary education is defined as the educational level that precedes higher education and consists of lower and upper secondary schools [1]. A similar interpretation is presented by Brown, who considers secondary school as the final stage of formal education, which provides academic preparation of students aged 14-18 for further education [2].

Middeldorp in his study emphasizes the importance of general secondary education as a factor that facilitates the transition of young people from education to employment or vocational education [3; 4].

The main tasks of the teacher in secondary education include organizing the educational process, designing the educational environment, supporting the psychological comfort of students and ensuring their involvement in educational interaction [5; 6].

In addition, research confirms the importance of creating a flexible learning space in which there is active cooperation between teachers and students, which contributes to quality learning [7; 8].

Particular attention is paid to the assessment of knowledge and the development of integrative skills of students in the educational process [9; 10].

Integrative approaches that consider inclusiveness and equality of opportunities occupy an important place in modern educational policies. According to the OECD's conceptual vision, inclusive education ensures the participation of all students in the learning process on the basis of equality [11].

Regarding the legal aspect, it should be noted that in countries where general secondary education is compulsory, strict mechanisms of control, financing and standardization have been established [12].

Researcher Stills provides an example of the United States, where general secondary education is formed as the cultural and educational basis of society [13]. In countries where this level of education is optional, the state exercises less active supervision, and schools have greater authority in developing programs [14].

European studies emphasize the need for an interdisciplinary approach to the analysis of educational systems that combine educational, social, legal and managerial components [15].

3. Materials and Methods

During the study, general scientific methods were used:

- analysis of scientific literature to determine the content of the concept of general secondary education.
- systematization – to classify the main scientific approaches to the analysis of current challenges in this area.
- generalization – to formulate comprehensive conclusions about the impact of general secondary education on the educational and social trajectory of students.

To study the current state of secondary education, a survey was conducted among 25 schoolteachers in Ukraine among teachers in Cherkasy, Kyiv, Chernihiv, Lviv, and Odesa regions. The criteria for selection were that the survey was conducted among teachers working in general secondary education institutions for 1 to 5 years, and that the respondents were aged between 25 and 40, in order to evaluate the responses of teachers who have been working for a relatively short period of time. At the same time, a 100-point scale was applied evenly to each aspect of the quality of educational services.

Respondents rated key educational parameters on a scale of 100 points. The main limitation of the study is the relatively small sample and regional concentration – mainly within the central regions of Ukraine. However, such a sample is primarily due to security issues, which is why it is important to further expand the study. As a result, limitations in the sample may affect the reliability of the results obtained or mean that such results are not sufficiently representative. Accordingly, there is a need to expand the sample in future studies.

The data obtained were analyzed using the calculations of weighted averages, coefficients of variation, consistency and relevance indices. This made it possible to identify effective elements in the functioning of general secondary education, as well as to point out problem areas that need to be improved.

4. Results

4.1 Further development of theoretical positions

The generalization of the main conceptual and substantive characteristics of general secondary education as an object of legal regulation and socio-ideological phenomenon in the context of a foreign scientific approach was carried out by such researchers as Antonyuk and Pushkar [16], Kushnir [17], Lokshyna [3], Shlikhta and Shlikhta [8] and others.

In this study, it is proposed to focus on these theoretical approaches that provide a spatial understanding of the key parameters of the functioning of general secondary education.

The scholar Lokshyna notes that the issue of defining the concept of “general secondary education” is quite controversial now. She primarily attributes this to the fact that the regulatory framework relating to general secondary education in Ukraine is outdated. In particular, the laws of Ukraine relating to education and educational activities define the implementation of educational and training functions by general secondary education institutions in a traditional format. That is, it does not consider the fact that education can be distance learning and have other alternative forms [3].

Nevertheless, it should be recognized that this interpretation of general secondary education is not yet fully reflected in the current regulatory framework, where education is mostly positioned as a means of academic development. There are few exceptions to the combination of educational and cultural functions in the legal framework.

In this regard, it is advisable to discuss the need to improve the legislative framework to consolidate education as a process of personality formation focused on the development of civic engagement, national values and social integration, starting from the level of general secondary education.

According to researchers such as D. Casanova, R. Di Napoli, and M. Leijon, the shift in higher education from traditional, location-dependent settings such as campus classrooms, lecture halls, and laboratories to increasing digital methods has been accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic [4]. Analyzing the functionality and significance of the European Education Area as a factor of influence on social, intellectual and economic development, the researcher emphasizes that the level of general secondary education is a key stage in guiding students to make a conscious choice of further educational trajectory. As part of this process, the student independently determines the area of his/her own scientific interest, which determines the further direction of his/her educational activity [17].

The author emphasizes the importance of the network structure of general secondary education, which consists of separate stages and allows systematic and purposeful implementation of the functions of adaptation, development and preparation for the next stage – higher education. The key characteristic of general secondary education as an educational process is the achievement of the relevant result, which is enshrined in national legislation

At the same time, this approach is not without methodological differences. In particular, regulatory and legal support is often of a framework nature, formulating general goals without specifying mechanisms for achieving results. Because of this, the interpretation of educational outcomes only in terms of legislation is limited, as educational practice requires an expanded vision, taking into account the specifics of the learning environment.

In this context, the analysis of Viarengo's research on gender equality in the education system is also worthy of attention. The author, in her report for the European Expert Network on the Economics of Education, emphasizes that general secondary education should not only transmit academic knowledge, but also form social awareness and civic responsibility of students [18].

According to the researcher, the legal understanding of general secondary education involves its consideration as a tool for long-term investment in personal development. This approach provides society with socially prepared citizens and the state with educated human resources. The benefits, or "educational dividends", are realized both at the level of the individual and within the socio-economic system. Despite legislative contradictions in domestic legislation caused by systemic educational reforms, it can be said that there is generally consistent coordination between educational regulations and innovations introduced by the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine. We can also talk about problems in the functioning of education during the war, the significant percentage of emigration among school-age children, the impact of the war on the psychological state of children, and the insufficient level of salaries for teachers.

4.2 Problems of implementing the principles of educational equality in general secondary education

The generalized scientific positions outlined in previous studies combine both positive and contradictory aspects, which are manifested in the peculiarities of their conceptual content.

The undoubted advantages include the attempt to build a general education environment on the basis of gender and personal equality. These provisions have a meaningful connection to such concepts as educational inclusion and accessibility of education in the social context. This perspective highlights the potential for expanding existing mechanisms and developing new approaches aimed at ensuring equal access to educational opportunities.

At the same time, the analyzed scientific base also reveals contradictions related to the implementation of the declared norms. Authors are talking about a situation where state legislation proclaims the principles of equality but does not provide sufficiently clear guidelines for their practical implementation in the educational environment. As a result, general secondary education institutions are forced to interpret the relevant provisions on their own and adapt them to their own context, which complicates the unified implementation of the national education policy.

In our opinion, such differences can be overcome by developing legislative recommendations that would contain detailed algorithms for integrating the principles of gender and social equality into the internal documents of educational institutions. Such recommendations should consider the specifics of each educational institution and promote harmonization between the national legislative framework and practical educational processes on the ground.

In the process of studying scientific literature, the key criteria for assessing the current state of general secondary education were identified: compliance of curricula with modern educational standards; provision of the material and technical base of educational institutions; level of professional training of teaching staff; effectiveness of regulatory and legal regulation; accessibility and inclusiveness of educational services for different social groups.

To formulate the generalized conclusions, an expert survey was conducted among 34 teachers of secondary schools who rated these criteria on a scale from 0 to 100 points.

The results were interpreted by calculating the weighted average (WA) using the following formula:

Calculation of the weighted average (WA):

$$W = (\sum (w_i \times X_i)) / (\sum w_i) \quad (1)$$

where:

- W is the weighted average value of the criterion,
- w_i is the weight of the i-th criterion,
- X_i is the score for the i-th criterion,
- n is the total number of criteria.

The coefficient of variation (CV) was used to assess the variability of the data obtained:

Coefficient of variation (CV):

$$CV = \sigma / \mu \quad (2)$$

where:

- CV – coefficient of variation,
- σ is the standard deviation,
- μ is the mean value.

Authors also calculated the Consistency Index (CI), which indicates the level of consistency of expert opinions:

Consistence Index (CI):

$$CI = (\lambda_{\max} - n) / (n - 1) \quad (3)$$

where:

- CI is the consistency index,
- λ_{\max} is the largest eigenvalue of the pairwise comparison matrix,
- n is the number of criteria.

At the final stage, the relevance index (RI) of each criterion was calculated:

Relevance index (RI):

$$IR = w / (\sum w_i) \quad (4)$$

where:

- IR is the relevance index for the i-th criterion,
- w_i is the weight of the criterion.

Generalized data on the criterion analysis of the current state of general secondary education are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Criterion analysis of the current state of general secondary education

Criterion	WA	CV	CI	IR
Compliance of programs with modern educational standards	81,76	12,87	15,74	0,03
Material and technical base of educational institutions	73,68	20,18	27,38	0,03
Qualification level of teachers	77,03	15,13	19,65	0,03
Clarity and efficiency of regulatory and legal support for education	65,68	20,17	30,72	0,03
Inclusiveness and accessibility of education for different social groups	62,82	19,04	30,31	0,03

Source: compiled by the author

It should be noted that the consistency index is an indicator that reflects how close other indicators are to the ideal. At the same time, the relevance index shows how much the result obtained (in %) corresponds to the actual data. Accordingly, the relevance index reflects more accurate and reliable results, while the consistency index is what we strive for. Visualization of the study results is presented in Figure 1.



Fig. 1: Weighted average values (WA) of the evaluation criteria in relation to the highest scores

Source: compiled by the author

The data obtained show a high level of compliance of educational programs with current standards (WA = 81.76), which is a positive indicator. At the same time, there is ambiguity in the perception of such indicators as material and technical support (CI = 27.38), accessibility of education (CI = 30.31) and regulatory support (CI = 30.72). This indicates the need to pay more attention to these aspects when modernizing the general secondary education system.

5. Discussion

Researchers Shlikhta and Shlikhta draw attention to the interpretation of the concept of “general secondary education”. In their understanding, this phenomenon is “the provision of basic educational services to individuals to consolidate basic knowledge”. General secondary education is obtained by students during their studies in grades 5-11, after which graduates receive a certificate of general secondary education. The provision of such services is focused on providing students with knowledge of the Ukrainian language, mathematics, and history. At the same time, most educational institutions in Ukraine are focused on general secondary education, while primary and complete education is not provided by all institutions.

Scientists argue that general secondary education institutions in Ukraine have an extensive network, in particular, many of them are located in cities and settlements of district significance. However, in villages and towns, not all institutions provide basic general education services, often only primary school or education up to the 8th grade. This indicates a problematic situation in domestic education [8].

Researchers Antonyuk and Pushkar point out that general secondary education in Ukraine is developing according to the European model. In particular, it is focused on lifelong learning, the development of competency-based learning, the formation of a system of quality educational services, the development of education as an element of civic engagement, and the formation of an innovative approach to learning. At the same time, they believe that general secondary education in our country should be more focused on developing students' entrepreneurial competence, as students should know what they want from life and how to form an individual approach to doing business from their teenage years.

Scientists emphasize the need to introduce compulsory discipline such as financial literacy, as the acquisition of such knowledge takes place mostly in higher education. However, even when acquiring basic knowledge, students should already have knowledge of how to properly manage their own money, how to invest, and how to save money. Such knowledge is important because our country is aimed at the European direction of education, so it is necessary to form a thorough knowledge of students about economic aspects [16].

Scholar Kushnir supports the opinion of previous researchers that the state adheres to the European approach to general secondary education. She explains this by saying that general secondary education is a socio-cultural tool that forms the basis of future social structures and plays the role of social capital accumulated through educational experience. She believes that the main factors of the effectiveness of this level of education are the level of pedagogical training of teachers and the ability of social institutions to maintain favorable conditions for the personal development of students.

This concept, considered by the researcher, includes students and other educational actors who function together within a regulated legal space and have mutual obligations in the process of realizing educational goals.

The researcher argues that in Ukraine, the percentage of children who do not graduate from general secondary education institutions is approximately 15-20% each year, while in Europe this figure is less than 10%. Accordingly, a significant number of children do not have the opportunity to enter vocational education and higher education institutions [17].

Other scholars note that the current problems of general secondary education are directly related to the legal regulation of this area. This allows us to consider the educational process as the interaction of equal subjects – students and teachers – who, however, are in legally asymmetric relations, which provide for the mandatory fulfillment of program requirements by the student.

The synthesized view allows us to form our own vision of general secondary education as a multilevel phenomenon. In particular, it is reasonable to understand secondary education as a space for the formation of an individual worldview that combines educational, social and cultural vectors of influence.

It should be noted that it is possible to change the current legislation by introducing innovations related to alternative forms of education, since the current security situation does not allow everyone who wishes to attend educational institutions; simplifying access to educational services; and improving the qualifications of teachers. In addition, the introduction of digital innovations would significantly improve the functioning of education, attract new specialists, and encourage those interested in obtaining high-quality educational products. It is also an opportunity to involve business in the creation of new information services and products in the field of education.

Therefore, it is important to implement systemic changes in education. Language diversity, war, and cultural globalization are aspects that influence modern Ukrainian education. The digitization of education and the creation of alternative forms of learning are necessary aspects. Accordingly, it is advisable in the next study to identify the key factors influencing education, modern approaches to learning, and the organization of an inclusive educational space in rural areas.

6. Conclusion

The study made it possible to identify both the strengths of the general secondary education system and problem areas that require further attention and improvement. According to the results of the calculation of weighted average indicators, the highest score was given to the criterion of compliance of curricula with modern educational standards, which confirms the focus of educational institutions on updating the content of school education and supports the findings of previous studies [16; 19; 20].

At the same time, significant fluctuations in the coefficients of variation for logistics and regulatory and legal regulation indicate differences in expert perceptions of these aspects. This indicates an uneven distribution of resources and ambiguity in the implementation of legislative norms at the local level. This conclusion correlates with the positions of researchers [2; 22; 23; 24; 25], who emphasize the limited funding of school infrastructure and the slow implementation of digital innovations.

It should also be noted that the relevance index showed the equal importance of each of the studied criteria, which emphasizes the integrity of their impact on the quality of general secondary education. At the same time, the results of the analysis confirm the existence of unequal access to education for socially vulnerable groups, as well as insufficient regulatory detailing of the interaction of participants in the educational process. This creates the basis for further developments in the field of legislative support for equity and quality in education, considering the needs of all students regardless of their social status.

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