EDUCATION SYSTEM
IN THE BALTIC SEA COUNTRIES

—————————— ❧ ——————————

Alexey Vorobyov

Viktor Voronov

Inta Ostrowska

THE EFFECTIVENESS
OF LATVIAN EDUCATION
SYSTEM ASSESSED
BY THE POPULATION

❧

The article assesses the efficiency of the state's system of education through a wide variety of objective factors (the state and availability of infrastructure, budget, training and retraining, etc.) and subjective (psychosocial) assessments and visions of the education system (satisfaction with one's own level of education, field of education and the attitude to it).

Key words: life scenario, real and the ideal schedule of life, satisfaction with the chosen specialization and level of education, education system, quality of education.

The organization of the effective education system is an important task for any competitive modern state aimed at innovation. The system of education is a dynamic social phenomenon. That is why it requires permanent reform in the social, economic, scientific, technical and cultural development of society. The development of Latvia as a EU member state necessitates studying the content, structure, forms and factors affecting the efficiency of the education system and points to the restructuring of educational programs in accordance with the requirements of the Bologna Declaration.

The purpose of this study is to determine specific life scenarios while assessing the effectiveness of Latvian education system.

The theoretical background of our research is the provisions and principles of the constructivist phenomenological, subjective phenomenological and cognitive constructivist approaches. While studying the process of cognitive development in adolescence and emerging adulthood (20—40 years old), some authors [5] defined critical and systemic (dialectical) thinking as its key point. According to this opinion, dialectical thinking provides the integration of the "ideal" and "real" in the individual mental schemes. One of the most important forms in the mental sphere is the age-related biological clock that refers to the subjective mental representation of the individual schedule of life. The key points of the individual schedule of life are educational attainment and specialization, marriage, childbirth, social status etc.

The incongruity of mental and real representations leads to a cognitive dissonance. This process may act as a motivation factor or the so-called effect of missed schedule of life.

According to the phenomenological constructivist approach [6], there is a mental expertise unique for each individual which contains everything

happening outside the body that can eventually be realized. In this case, *the ideal-self* and *the real-self* levels of the self-concept are formed. *The real-self* is inside the mental expertise. It includes self-image based on the life experience, current and possible future events. *The ideal-self* as a part of the *self*-concept determines what the individual wishes to have the most, that is, the mental image that somebody would like to meet. When the *real-self* and the *ideal-self* are different, the individual feels mental discomfort and dissatisfaction. On the one hand, it may hinder personal development; on the other hand, it may latently boost it. K. Levin's *Topological* and *Vector Psychology* is a graphic example of this point. It illustrates the existence of coherent holistic approach to the analysis of individual behavior, determined by quasi-needs, psychological valence, living space, time perspective and level of aspiration. Living space and related life scenario are the key concepts in Levin's theory [8]. Living space includes all real and virtual current, past and future events that are in the individual mental space.

The content of the living space includes expectations, events, goals, images, barriers, etc. The living space consists of different sectors, regions, so it is determined by a variety of events and facts reflected in the current individual life scenario. All events of the living space are diachronous. They are posted chronologically — past, present and future, but despite this, a person experiences them subjectively as simultaneous, so they determine individual behavior equally. K Levin's approach determines our experimental research method, that is to assess the features of education in the respondents' life scenario through a targeted survey. Moreover, in cases of incongruity of the subjective life scenario content and its real implementation the education motivates eventual individual behavior. In Latvia much current research in this area focuses on forms, contents and principles of the organization of the education system based on external factors affecting the motivation in education (see, e. g. [1, 17—32, 2, 121—142, 4, 241—263, 7, 263—292]).

— We suppose that there is an important personal factor, which determines how the schedule of life meets its real implementation, particularly in the educational sphere. For this reason our empirical research addresses the following issues:

— Is there any relationship between the real and the ideal schedules of respondents' life?

— To what extent are the respondents satisfied with the level of education?

— To what extent are the respondents satisfied with their field of education?

— How do the respondents assess the quality of education in Latvia?

— Where would the respondents like to continue their education?

The empirical foundation of our research was a sociological survey of young people (18—29 years) and young adults (30—40 years) in Latvia. It was conducted by the Institute for Social Research (Daugavpils University, Latvia) in June 2008. 1 380 respondents aged 18—40 from all five regions of Latvia took part in the survey. The quota sampling was used. The selection of graduate respondents accurately represents research object since the distribution of respondents corresponds to the structure of statistical data provided by the Ministry of Education and Science of Latvia. (Gender distribution of respondents: 72 %-females, 28 %-males; age distribution: 72 %-

21—24 years old, 16 %- 25—27 years old, 12 %- 30—40 years old; distribution of respondents with respect to the field of education: social and humanitarian sciences-67.8 %, engineering and technical sciences- 18 %; educational and agricultural sciences- 14.2 %) [3]. To obtain the experimental results and to check the assumptions a questionnaire consisting of eight series of questions had been worked out. It provides an opportunity to study mental representations of the respondents in relation to the Latvian education system issues. The questionnaire was focused on the assessment of personal educational achievements of the respondents as well as their desirable accomplishments. The findings were processed through SPSS (15th version) and Excel programs.

Data analysis and the interpretation of findings were conducted, general conclusions were drawn. According to the research findings, a vast majority of respondents (82.9 %) from the 18—40 age group prefers to receive post-secondary and higher education at the age of 18—25. In their turn, 15.4 % of respondents regards the age of 26—35 to be the most favorable period for receiving education. And the last 1.7 % of respondents believes the age of 36—40 to be the most acceptable period for graduation. The research findings met our expectations.

The findings showing significant differences in the ideal schedule of life and its real implementation were analyzed more thoroughly. 244 (18.1 % of the total number) respondents attested to the effect of missed life scenario in education. Among them, 6 % of respondents aged 18—25 would like to receive education at the age of 26—40; 9.4 % of respondents aged 26—35 would like to have received education at the age of 18 -25 and 36—40; 2.6 % of respondents aged 36—40 would like to have received education at the age of 18—35.

The research aimed at testing the hypothesis whether there is a relationship between the ideal vision of the most favorable life period for graduation and its real implementation. The Pearson's correlation coefficient $\chi 2$ ($\chi 2 = 334.5$; $p > 0.03$) showed statistically significant differences between them. It confirms that the respondents attested to the effect of missed life scenario in education. This effect appears to be the phenomenon of hidden motivation in education and should be taken into account in the practical organization or reorganization of the state educational system. The key factors affecting graduation are the visions of a life period acceptable for marriage, childbirth and social maturity. Let us analyze the research findings in this aspect. They showed that the preferred age for marriage was 26—35. It was indicated by 61.2 % of respondents; for 33.3 % the best age to be married is 18—25. When compared, the ideal vision of preferred age for marriage and its real implementation also reflect the effect of missed life scenario. The Pearson's correlation coefficient $\chi 2$ ($\chi 2 = 334.5$; $p > 0.03$) shows statistically significant differences.

The preferred age for childbirth is also connected with the opportunities for receiving higher and post-secondary education. According to the survey findings on compared preferred and real age of childbirth, 26—35 is the preferred age for 61 % of respondents. The differences between mental vision and its real implementation are mostly observed in the 18—25 age group; 49 % of respondents of this age group would like to have children at the age

of 26—35. At the same time, 51 % of respondents had children at the age of 18—25; 69.3 % of respondents aged 26—35 have congruent real age of childbirth and its mental vision.

— Comparative analysis of the differences between the mental vision of preferred age period for childbirth and its real implementation showed statistically significant differences. The Pearson's correlation coefficient $\chi2$ ($\chi2$ = 403, p> 0.01) was used. In this case, the effect of missed life scenario was reflected.

— Social status is an important mediating factor affecting the educational attainment and quality. Social maturity includes financial independence, housing availability, employment, etc. The research in this aspect revealed the trends as follows:

— First, according to the mental assessment of the respondents, the preferred age for social maturity is 18—25 (47.6 %); another 44.9 % of respondents indicated 26—35 as preferred age.

— Second, 51.8 % of respondents reached social maturity at the age of 18—25; 39.4 % — at the age of 26—35.

— Third, 69.7 % of respondents at the age of18- 25 have a congruent mental vision of reaching social maturity and its real implementation. 65.2 % of respondents aged 25—35 and 39 % of respondents aged 36—40 does the same.

— Forth, comparative analysis of the differences between the mental vision of preferred age for reaching social maturity and its real implementation showed statistically significant differences. The Pearson's correlation coefficient $\chi2$ ($\chi2$ = 405, p> 0,01) was used. Thus, the effect of partly-implemented life scenario was reflected.

The research findings require general comparative analysis of interrelation of mental schedule of life and its real implementation in different aspects of life, including education (see Figure 1).
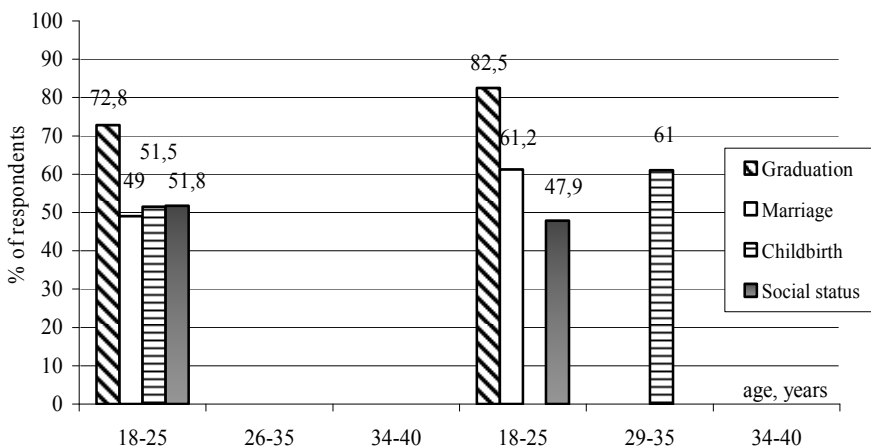

Figure 1. Comparative analysis of ideal schedule of life
and its real implementation in different aspects of life

Source: copyright material

The key point here is that a vast majority of respondents (72.8 %) received an education at the age of 18—25, while 82.5 % of respondents consider this age to be preferred for graduation.

Serious hidden potential for the organization and reorganization of the educational system is an education satisfaction rate of young people and emerging adults. All the respondents have an education of any given level (see Table 1).

Table1

The distribution of respondents with respect to graduation (N=1380),% (N)

Basic education (9 grades)	Secondary education (12 grades)	Post-secondary education	Higher education	Bachelors	Masters
3 (43)	20,8 (287)	29,7 (410)	28,4 (392)	13,6 (187)	4,5 (61)

Source: copyright material

The education satisfaction rate (see Figure 2) reflects its increase depending on the level of education in general, provided that the respondents with various educational attainments (from Basic to Master's level) to a certain extent are not satisfied with the level of their education. Only 72.2 % of Master's degree respondents are satisfied with their educational attainment.
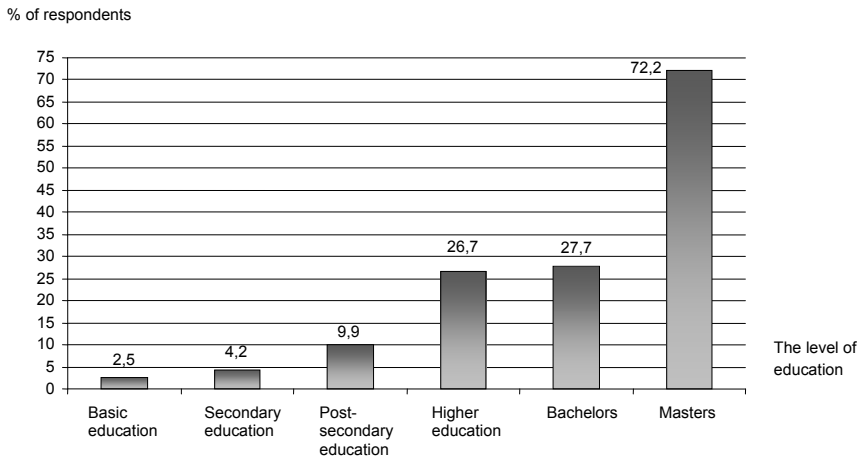

Figure 2. The education satisfaction rate (N=1380)

Source: copyright material

The comparative analysis of the differences between the mental vision of preferred level of education and its real implementation showed statistically significant differences. The Pearson's correlation coefficient ($\chi2 = 526, 435$, p> 0,01) was used.

The satisfaction with the field of education is an important part of individual education satisfaction content and a hidden subjective motive for receiving and changing a degree. This thesis determines such analysis trends as studying the respondents' real field of education and their preferred specialization, which could be obtained. Within the framework of the survey, respondents mentioned their real field of education and, in case of dissatisfaction, their preferred one. The highest dissatisfaction rate shows in the political (100 %), agricultural (92.7 %) and arts (85.2 %) education areas, and also in low/ medium skilled occupations (80.6 %). The number of respondents satisfied with their specialization is significantly different from those dissatisfied. The Pearson's correlation coefficient χ2 (χ^2 =512, p>0,001) was used.

For the residents of Latvia the most important motivation in education is their subjective assessment of the quality of education at all levels. The graph below represents all the results of Latvian education system including the respondents' subjective assessment of the quality of education at all levels (see Figure 3).
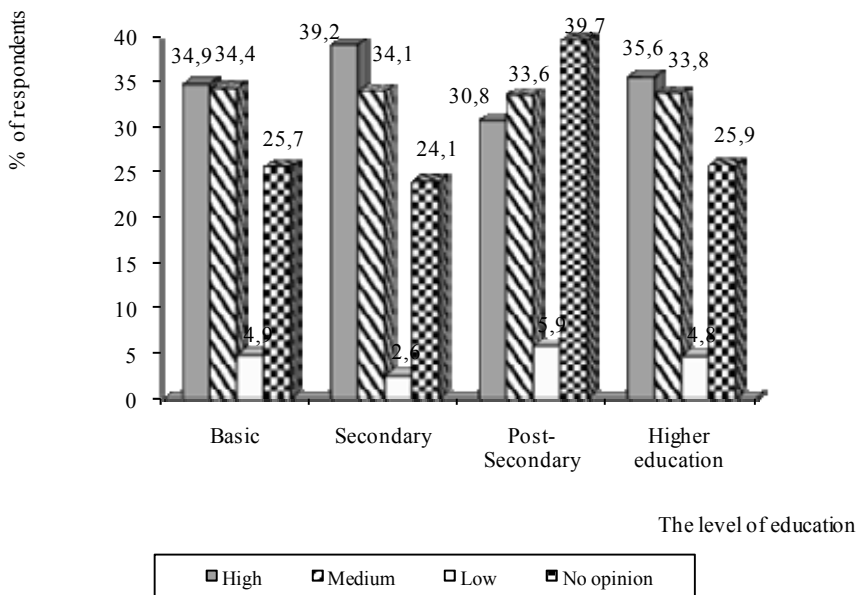

Figure 3. The respondents' (N=1380) subjective assessment
of quality of Latvian education at all levels

Source: copyright material

The respondents satisfactorily assess the Latvian system of education which makes it possible to suggest Latvian citizens are positively motivated regarding education. Between 2.5 % and 6 % of respondents assess Latvian education system negatively. It is alarming that 25 to 30 % of respondents do not have any subjective evaluation of quality of Latvian education system.

To test the above mentioned hypothesis of the presence of positive motivation in education in Latvia, the respondents were asked about real and preferred country for graduation (Latvia, the European Union member states, Russia, etc).

The results show that a vast majority of respondents (96.2 %) received their education of various levels in Latvia. As for preferred country for graduation, the results are represented in Table 2.

Table 2

The respondents' (N=1246) preferred country for graduation,% (N)

Latvia	Other EU countries	Russia	Other countries
40,3 (503)	32,9 (410)	14,1 (176)	12,7 (157)

Source: copyright material

As was expected, more than 40 % of respondents are positively motivated to continue their education in Latvia. But it is alarming that 60 % of respondents would prefer to continue to their vocational training and higher education outside the country.

The following ***conclusions*** can be drawn from the present study:

1. Despite the effect of a missed life scenario, a vast majority of respondents (82.5 %) actually receive post-secondary and higher education at the age of 18—25, and regard it to be a preferred one. Thus, most teenagers and young adults in Latvia have a hidden motivation in education at the age of 18—25.

2. The research findings show that a fairly large number of respondents (95.5 %) attested to the effect of a missed level of education. Notably, the respondents with various educational attainments (from Basic to Master's level) were variably (from 2.5 to 27.7 %) dissatisfied with their degrees, while only 72.2 % of Master's degree respondents were happy with their educational attainment, with 27.8 % of them expressing desire to obtain a Doctor's degree.

3. The research findings reflected the sustained effect of missed specialization and revealed 57 % of respondents dissatisfied with their field of education (mainly agricultural (92.7 %) and art (85.2 %) education and low/medium skilled occupations (80.6 %).

4. A vast majority of respondents attested to the effect of a missed level of education and the effect of missed specialization that proves the availability of hidden motivation for continuing education and retraining. It is alarming for Latvian monolingual education system that many young people and emerging adults in Latvia tend to continue their education outside the country (e. g. almost 15 % in Russia).

References

1. *Golubeva, M.* 2007. Izglītība Latvijā 21.gs. sākumā: izaicinājumi, jaunās paradigmas un perspektīvas", Izglītība zināšanu sabiedrības attīstībai Latvijā. Rakstu krājums. Rīga, pp. 17—32.

2. *Koķe, T., Muraškovska, I.* 2007. Latvija ceļā uz zināšanu sabiedrību: izpratne un izaicinājumi, Izglītība zināšanu sabiedrības attītībai Latvijā. Rakstu krājums. Rīga, pp. 121—142.

3. *Melnis, A., Abizāre, V.* Pārskats par Latvijas augstāko izglītību 2009.gadā (skaitļi, fakti, tendences), Izglītības un zinātnes ministrija, Augstākās izglītības un zinātnes departaments. Rīga. [online]. Available at: <http://izm. izm. gov. lv/registri-statistika/statistika-augstaka/parskats-2009.html/> [Accessed 06 Juni 2010]

4. *Pipere, A.* 2007. Education and Sustainable Development: First Steps Toward Change, vol. 2. Daugavpils, pp. 241—263.

5. *Riegel, K. F.* 1975. Adult life crises: A dialectical interpretation of development. New York.

6. *Rogers, C. R.* 1959. A theory of therapy, personality and interpersonal relationshipe, as developed in the client-centred tramework. In: Koch, S. Psychology the study of a science. New York.

7. *Salīte I. et al.* 2007. Education and Sustainable Development: First Steps Toward Change, vol. 1. Daugavpils, pp. 263—292.

8. *Levin, K.* 2001. Dinamicheskaja psihologija. Moscow.