

Substantive, Methodological and Organizational Discourse in Oriental History Learning at School and University

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Abstract

Currently, the system of education in Russia is changing radically. One of the factors behind the process of education reorganization, university education in particular, is the process of globalization and computerization. Advanced concepts and the best practices of market-leading educational services (especially in the US and the UK) made it possible to develop the national education model with the aim to solve a number of problems related to the formation of a modern education model, historical education including, such as future demand for specialists, efficiency of the knowledge obtained, and mobility of professional qualifications under present conditions. The article focuses on the issues of training history teachers at universities as well as the issues related to teaching history, especially world history, at schools. The authors discuss relevant issues concerning the ways of improving methodology and technologies in history teachers' school practice, analyze the methods for increasing motivation of history students through implementation of innovative educational technologies, and outline the guidelines for intensifying students' learning activities in preparation for their final exam in history.

Keywords: reforming history education, innovative education technologies, the State Final Attestation and the Unified State Exam in history, world history, history of the East

1. Introduction

For twenty years, the process of reforming history education in Russian schools and universities has been underway. In our opinion, students' interest in the serious study of history has increased dramatically. Foreign experts also point out that history, as a subject in school and a university course, is an important tool for the development of certain intellectual skills and qualities. Nowadays, high school students and undergraduates have to study history in the same way as it is done by professional historians: formulating their own conclusions, judgments and estimates (Ankersmit, 2001).

Competitiveness of current vocational education implies solution for the issues related to material resources, traditions and potential, professionalism of teachers, as well as the rating of the used educational technologies. All these mean orientation towards the spectrum of opportunities for schoolchildren and graduates choosing their future professional activities, the development of professional competence in future professionals, professional development of acting teachers, and the use of effective educational technologies (Cannadine, 2002).

History is one of the most popular subjects selected by high school students for their Final State Attestation (FSA) and the Unified State Examination (USE) (Fayzullina, 2014).

Today, the quality of teaching history to university students is fairly high, the same could be said of methodological preparation of graduates for their future work in schools. Specialized training takes place in university classrooms, the process of training basing on the methods of teaching, which proved to be effective enough to determine a high level of skills in graduates. The given ideas are realized in the course of training perspective history teachers at the Department of History Education at Kazan (Volga Region) Federal University. However, we have to admit that the quality of classroom instruction is lower than it should be. Currently, history teaching, world history including, faces a number of difficulties both of theoretical and practical nature (Mrathuzina, 2012).

The competitiveness of graduates is an integrative indicator of their readiness for future professional activities,

while the competitiveness of acting teachers and experts in general can be defined as an integrative characteristic giving them a higher professional status. To compete in the market of educational services, one needs to continually improve indicators of competitiveness: the quality of training programs (structure and content), the quality of the teaching staff (skills, degree, level of training), the quality of teaching methods and education (teaching techniques and technology), the quality of resources (lecture rooms and laboratories, equipment, supplies), the quality of information and methodological support (textbooks, manuals, recommendations). Consequently, schools and higher education institutions should be able to adapt to the changing conditions of modern educational environment (Chernilevsky, 2008).

2. Methodological Framework

Theoretical and methodological basis: our research is based on the concepts of scientific research on teaching history in schools and universities. A detailed analysis allows us to identify the functions, place and role of teaching history and to present both the diverse empirical material and a summary of some theoretical foundations.

The use of methodology and methods of these studies contributes to the development of scientific practices, diversity of scientific perspectives, methods and techniques of research in the designated area.

One of the important tasks of the methodology is to identify the nature, purpose and distinctive features of methods employed by history teachers at schools and universities. Until recently, the analysis of the logic side, conditions and factors of progression or regression of ideas as well as the key issues of teaching the history of the East has remained on the sidelines of scientific research. In recent decades, historical and scientific studies have expanded and deepened their area of research, demonstrating professionalization of historians themselves.

At present, traditional approaches have been diluted. The new trend in expansion and deepening of research on issues of our interest is connected with interpretations of certain approaches and methods.

The systemic approach enables us to comprehensively examine the correlation system of methods for teaching history in schools and universities. In the theoretical aspect, the systemic approach makes it possible to change the subject of historical and scientific research. It extends the systemic view of differentiation and integration regarding approaches and methods for teaching this discipline.

In national pedagogical science, this promising trend is under-represented. Modern research could contribute to the logical and analytical understanding of this humanities discipline and analyze the origin and development of ideas, problems, and methods related to history. The ratio of the scientific-historical and historiographical research, their synthetic use, creates a perspective for developing a common approach to the analysis of the problems under study.

Moving beyond the existing stereotypes in teaching world history, including the history of the East, will enrich the theoretical level and practical effectiveness of learning and teaching history, which is a multifaceted process.

All these suggest a theoretical interpretation of the vast material that includes a system of various philosophical, logical and other principles, which play a decisive role in the investigation of patterns and objective content of our theme.

The methodology of research methods enables us to highlight the main trends, assess various practices, and examine the structure and level of methodological knowledge of our predecessors and contemporaries.

The comparative-historical method is important for making comparisons and drawing parallels. Of particular importance is the comparison of its theoretical and practical components.

The retrospective method implies a return view from the present to the past. Using the method of retrospection, researchers can make their own judgments about the views on the given problems in the previous stages of study. It should be noted, however, that the value of this or other opinion is estimated depending on the time of the study. Every work of science belongs to a certain era and bears its strengths and weaknesses.

The use of the synchronous method makes it possible to identify general and specific features in the subject matter of the study. The method of actualization allows us to build scientific predictions basing on the identification of its main trends. Prospect-oriented technologies help to determine promising educational trends of teaching history in schools and universities.

To a different extent, such theoretical and methodological approaches are realized by national historians and teachers, when, for example, the methods connected with the change of attitudes and orientations are introduced. We should also mention coverage of research issues and specialization, tendency to generalize, practical effectiveness, attitudes to the past and present, links to other areas of knowledge, world history, and culture as a

whole, organization and links to the territories of study. A wide range of issues is analyzed and verified: assessment of the pre-revolutionary pedagogy, the development and change of scientific concepts and book publishing (Vyazemskij & Strelova, 2003).

Today a lively and fruitful socio-educational discussion is in progress concerning school history and social science education. The focus of this discussion could be: search for effective forms and methods of history teachers' professional development, including teachers of higher and secondary vocational schools; active search for the pattern and structure of education providing the optimal balance of federal, national, regional and local components; the rationale for the content of historical and social science education for different levels; the optimal balance between the native and world history (Vyazemskij, 2000).

3. The Main Part

Thus, the necessity of fundamental training of students in the field of historical knowledge is obvious, especially given the fact that today the FSA and the USE in history include two courses of study: the history of Russia, which is a priority in the curriculum, and world history. For example, exam tasks of category "B" and "C" may test students' knowledge of personal data, mapping and other information from the course of world history. This means that the history of foreign countries plays an increasing role in high school history (Fayzullina, 2014).

The USE in history in 2012 included new types of tasks: writing a historical essay (a portrait of a historical figure) and studying historical sources. These tasks are not only the most complex types of work, but also the best way to test students' knowledge of the subject. Education methods of work with similar types of tasks require considerable time and effort, so this line of exam preparation work is recommended for grades 10-11, as you progress through the course of historical fact in training and control functions. It must also be taken into account that the number of children of migrant workers with poor knowledge or ignorance of the Russian language, with lack of knowledge about the basics of Russian law, culture, history, traditions, and norms of behavior in everyday life has been increasing in our schools and universities (Fayzullina, 2009, 2013).

The examination experience and analysis of psychological and pedagogical practices revealed that good exam results could be obtained if throughout the learning process we focus on the development of students' cognitive activity. It is an essential tool for estimating the level of students' preparation for their history exam. The regular use of this form of work in the classroom and outside the classroom will enable to achieve the objectives and tasks of the modern school history education (Saglam, 2013).

One of the main reasons that students have poor knowledge of history is the low quality of textbooks. Today, obvious difficulties in compilation of modern school history textbooks have been revealed. Despite the development of new technologies, modern students of digital age get most of historical information from books. The school textbook continues to be the main source of knowledge for most learners. It was clearly manifested through teaching world history in schools, for which several textbooks on foreign history were published, and which made an attempt to change the material by replacing "pluses with minuses". However, it was done without the involvement of new material and new theoretical generalizations, without critical evaluation of the events.

Presentation of historical material is a matter of academic debate. Biased selection of facts is often noted. Modern history textbooks, including the ones on world history, are inferior in quality compared with the Soviet textbooks, which were written by professionals, although ideologically biased.

At the moment, we can say that a stable official interpretation of historical facts and events has already been developed, and non-standard interpretations of many modern textbooks have gone. Still, complexity of the material and its irrationality causes confusion, as even senior high school students should be exposed to accessible and understandable material, logical in structure and concise in content.

The text of the history books does not correspond to the psychology of perception in young students, the font being small without formatting important information in bold. Serious attention should be paid to the design of the textbooks, as many of them do not contain illustrative and graphic series. It is difficult to study many pages of foreign history without color images let alone without maps. Experience has shown the importance of including key documents, chronological appendices, teaching materials in the form of concepts, terms, and practical tasks in the textbooks and manuals (Chernilevsky, 2002).

This suggests that to this day we are at a crossroads when we come to compiling adapted textbooks and manuals on foreign history. And as history books are one of the universal factors of political socialization for all Russian high school students to undergo, their content largely determines modern youth political views in Russia and not only. According to foreign researchers, young people form their opinion of a particular era, different countries, and peoples basing on history books; thus, it is desirable that political figures and symbols should be popular

with the youth (Burke, 2005; Gunn, 2006).

Most modern textbooks provide students with a considerable number of facts, but not always with understanding of the logic and patterns inherent in historical processes. Some authors of textbooks on world history, trying to escape from the research and philosophical paradigms of the past, come up with the descriptions of history, which differ, from the previous ones only in the subject under analysis.

Beyond the framework of the analysis are the issues related to the place the developing countries in Asia and Africa occupy in the emerging multipolar world, the issues of globalization and regionalization of the developing world, regional faces of world politics (Asian, Middle East and African), and international political roles some new Eastern “centers of power” play in interstate relations. It is important that this material of Oriental Studies should be adapted to the school-level perception and learning. It should be also noted that one of the most common terms, introduced in the course of foreign history, is the notion of “civilization”. However, the term is used, as a rule, without prior semantic interpretation of its meaning which does not lead to any significant changes either in the subject-matter of the lessons or in their content. Neither have religious and cultural factors of Oriental history, its mental and national-regional components found their true reflection (Mrathuzina, 2002).

A socio-economic analysis ranks first in the studies of factors and causes of various phenomena and events of Oriental history. Many researchers sincerely believe that this is the core of development. However, it is not true with respect to the countries and peoples of the East: this field of study requires a different approach (Mrathuzina, 2009).

Instead of doing independent research into the complex set of issues related to modern and contemporary history and culture of the countries and peoples of the East, students should have a detailed explanation given by the most prepared and motivated teacher. Within a brief review it is impossible to describe the main positions and developments in the East to make the description be relevant to the realities. The historical material, included into the curriculum, should be presented in a systematic, adequate to school-level perception and learning way. And, quite importantly, in compliance with the temporal and analytical study of Russian civilization history, by using a set of comparative characteristics and certain phenomena in the context of East-West-Russia (Mrathuzina, 2009).

However, it is not just a problem of textbooks. Nowadays, modern innovative technologies, that provide endless possibilities for improving teaching methods and developing critical thinking, make it possible to give knowledge, instill interest in world history, including the East, fill knowledge gaps in students. Schools should make greater use of simulations and round tables, modeling historical alternatives, modern learning activities related to texts and videos. Elective courses are considered to be effective if they include presentations on specific narrow topics, competitions, school conferences on foreign history, and competitions of research projects. Today, such interactive teaching methods as case-studies (the method of specific situations, the method of situational analysis), brainstorming sessions, quizzes, the method of Insert (associative essays), etc. are used in school practice. These methods imply a more active learner, able of creative rethinking of received information (Mrathuzina, 2012).

An important factor of high school students’ academic performance and preparation for career choices is their constant contact with the Department of History Education. Traditionally, high school students take part in the annual educational and scientific conferences of Kazan (Volga Region) Federal University students, giving reports and presentations on topical issues of world history.

The innovative idea to encourage high school students to participate in the youth symposiums and forums, such as “Modern East: Society, Politics, Personalities” in gaming competitions devoted to the history of the world culture held on regional and national scale, such as the “Golden Fleece” held by the “Institute of Productive Training” etc., has proved to be fruitful. Recently, the practice of inviting lecturers from the Department of History Education to hold theoretical and practical classes for high school students has been introduced.

Under the agreement on base schools, the Department of History Education provides scientific guidance of the teaching process and profile preparation of students from the ninth to the eleventh grades, develops school elective courses in world history, for example, “The Role of Personality in World History”, “Historical Events in the Memoirs of Contemporaries”, “The Terminology of World History”, “The Issues of Periodization in World History”. The same as university students, doing the course in Oriental Studies, learn about historians working in the field of world history and the works of Russian Orientalists, their life and work, senior high school students should study “The History of Oriental Studies” as an elective or specialized course (Mrathuzina, 2009).

All of this suggests fruitful cooperation between universities and schools in scientific and educational spheres.

These activities enable universities, as foreign authors point out, to implement informational and educational methods of professional orientation for high school students and assist young people, high school graduates, in exercising their professional self-determination (Booth & Hyland, 1996).

Mastering the entire set of theoretical approaches and teaching methods will raise the quality of education at schools and universities. It is important that we should preserve previous effective experiences and adapt the results to the new conditions, finding the best, innovative, and efficient methods, which could enable high school and university students to comprehend the issues of world history, including Oriental area (Ankersmit, 2001; Burke, 2001).

Special mention must be made of the fact that rapid development of international cooperation of the Republic of Tatarstan and Eurasian countries determines the need for highly qualified professionals with expertise in the history and culture of the East. Currently, there is a demand for personnel who know the legal system of the Arab world, people fluent in legislation of Muslim countries, fluent in Arabic.

Over the last decade, a research project on the development of a school curriculum in the history and culture of Islam and training of specialists with in-depth knowledge of Islam history and culture has been underway in Tatarstan. It should be noted that the project is being successfully realized in the Institute of International Relations, History and Oriental Studies of Kazan (Volga Region) Federal University, which has all the facilities for conducting joint research with the world Islamic scientific organizations and other centers. The unique history of tolerance in cultural interaction of peoples from the Volga region enables to conduct novel research into rich experience of social regulation. Activities in this area will make a worthy contribution to the development of the world of education and culture (Fayzullina, 2013).

4. Conclusions

Obviously, global informatisation of modern society has had a significant impact on the education process, the system of higher education, which means a radical revision of teaching methods used. Reorganization of the system of higher education as a starting point suggests transition to teaching methods based on a constructivist, operational approach, instead of the traditional linear approach. And this paradigm shift in the system of higher education, involving the introduction of modern educational technologies, has already taken place. It is clear that under the present conditions of the developing market for educational services and in accordance with the requirements of the era of information technology history teaching should combine both prescriptive, evolved from practice, and modern, innovative, interactive learning models.

Thus, this study will make it possible to determine the extent of learners' involvement in the modern education process at different levels of education—in schools, colleges, universities and other institutions of Tatarstan, with the aim to study its cultural heritage: values, knowledge, and skills. In addition, it will enable to evaluate the possibility of involvement of schools and universities in theoretical and practical areas of specialized education in the context of new and creative universal technologies and educational standards.

We believe, today, Kazan (Volga Region) Federal University should continue the tradition of Kazan Scientific School of Oriental Studies in the educational, historical and cultural sense. Education, primarily historical education, Oriental including, is the key to international competitiveness. This is the way the authors of this study see the role and importance of history education in the twenty-first century perspective.

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