

THE MODEL OF A NEW UKRAINIAN RURAL SCHOOL AS A GUIDING PRINCIPLE FOR THE FUTURE

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Summary

A small rural school has several orders of magnitude and fewer possibilities for meeting educational goals. The remoteness of settlements from scientific centers, the worse level of provision of the educational and material base, and the level of professional training of teachers, which does not always meet the requirements of work, caused this. A small school is not only to give students a sum of knowledge on the basics of science but also to teach them to think creatively, avoiding templates.

The time under martial law in which our children are growing up is difficult. In today's whirlwind, adults can't always withstand enormous stress, so we rarely think about how our children live now. For those, we meet occasionally and for whom we are accountable to their parents and society.

Education in rural schools is a cornerstone for discussion, and not only in our country. The debate continues, but in most cases, the arguments are not in favor of supporting small rural schools with small classes when there is an alternative at a reasonable distance.

Rural schools in Ukraine, despite their high cost, cannot provide quality and affordable education services. The availability of premises and a few students in a class are all advantages of rural education. Success in rural areas significantly lags indicators of success in the city. And the results of the External Independent Evaluation (ZNO), both at the national level and in individual regions, confirm this every year.

According to international experience and research, the most acceptable method of reform is school network optimization and the preservation of small schools only in remote, physically isolated communities, where it is simply impossible to transport students and teachers to school in an acceptable period. Optimization makes it possible to use funds and improves the quality of education in rural areas.

Key words: optimization, rural school, quality of education, model, perspective, pedagogical principles, general educational institutions.

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1. Introduction

Because society has increased expectations for the quality of education, developing a contemporary rural school has come to the attention of researchers and practitioners. The level of education is inferior to that received by students in urban or large, self-sufficient general educational institutions operating in district centers and large settlements.

An increased search for new approaches to learning, innovative forms of organizing the educational process and effective pedagogical and information technologies mark the activity of the education system in the conditions of martial law in Ukraine. That is why the promotion

of the active implementation of innovations in the educational sphere during the war became one of the most important areas of work for the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine and its branches. In rural areas, the level of education cannot withstand competition with urban education; the results of an external independent assessment confirm this. Schools in rural areas, especially at the primary level, have become mostly small, and because of this, the demand for introducing other forms of education, staffing, and the creation of an appropriate educational environment has increased.

The **goal of the work** is to conceptualize, support, and empirically validate the pedagogical and organizational foundations of innovative development models for rural general educational institutions in various operating environments.

The analysis of modern scientific research made it possible to single out the following areas of research on the problems of rural school work: historical and pedagogical aspects of rural school development (M. Barna, N. Belozyorova, L. Berezivska, V. Homonnai, Ya. Mandryk, G. Ivanyuk, O. Penishkevich, I. Petrenko, and H. Shchuka); the improvement of management activities of school education in rural areas (V. Meleshko, I. Osadchii, etc.); ways for improving the educational process in rural schools (O. Kobernyk, N. Kovalenko, O. Pinskyi, N. Prysiazhnyuk, N. Shiyan, etc.); the functioning of different rural primary schools (V. Kuz, N. Manzheliy, V. Meleshko, etc.); preparing students for work in rural school conditions (O. Pobirchenko, L. Prysiazhniuk, etc.). The **relevance of the work** is the productivity of general educational institutions in rural areas can be significantly increased. This is possible thanks to the motivation and implementation in practice of the model of pedagogical system development in the school, developed on the following organizational and pedagogical principles: openness, structure, integration, and cooperation. The main **tasks** are to determine the organizational and pedagogical principles of the development of general educational institutions as an open educational system (the pedagogical system at obtaining a new quality of education in a rural school); to justify theoretical approaches to modeling effective educational systems in rural areas; to develop variable models of the development of general educational institutions, considering the regional features of their functioning; build up a concept for the development of small schools of various types and a model for managing changes in the pedagogical system of a rural school; to determine the criteria and indicators of the development of the educational institution as an open pedagogical system.

2. The condition of education in Ukraine's rural districts

Today, domestic and foreign scientists are working on the development of strategic directions and the search for innovative approaches to the development of education in rural areas, considering modern trends and needs. «In this difficult time, educators themselves have become more active in the search for ways to solve problems in the organization of training and education seekers. Many educational institutions have made their educational materials freely available on the internet» (Rohova, 2022: 93).

In rural areas, 1.2 million Ukrainian students receive secondary education. This is almost a third of students in the country (3.8 million in 2021). 2/3 of all schools in Ukraine (11,668 out of 17,337 schools) are used to educate children in rural areas. They employ almost half of the teachers in Ukraine (209,858 out of 444,089 teachers). On average, in rural areas, the class size does not exceed 11 people, which is half as many as in large cities (24 students).

It is unfortunate, but students' educational achievements in rural areas are disappointing. It is unlikely that anyone will be surprised that the success rate significantly lags behind the

cities. In cities, 56.5% of 9th graders choose education in 10th grade, while in rural areas; only 51.0% of such children choose education. The proportion of rural students who scored high on the final test (over 174 points) in the major disciplines is much lower than the national average in Ukraine. Most of the students here showed an elementary and intermediate level of knowledge of the Ukrainian language (62.7%), the history of Ukraine (77.5%), and mathematics (72.3%). Only 4% of rural students got a high score on the English language exam. The situation is different for students in urban-type villages. Here, 52.1% demonstrated a sufficient and high level of knowledge of the Ukrainian language and literature. To tell the truth, almost 2/3 of the students showed an elementary and intermediate level of knowledge of the history of Ukraine and mathematics. Currently, in cities, graduates of secondary schools show a high level of knowledge. Thus, in cities, 68.3% of students received a high score in the Ukrainian language, 44.9% in the history of Ukraine, and 56.4% in mathematics (*Osvita*, 2020: 33, 82).

V. G. Kremen, the president of the Ukrainian Academy of Pedagogical Sciences, in particular, highlights two key trends in modern education: the first is the development of a person as a personality and individuality, and the second is ensuring the graduate's competitiveness and competitiveness in the new society, his adaptation to the conditions caused by the rapid transition from an industrial society to a knowledge society, where knowledge becomes decisive in any activity (*Kremen*, 2015: 17). This is supported by the fact that many of our graduates – winners of higher-level subject Olympiads – can easily gain admission to foreign universities. Or that, through various mass media, graduates from neighboring territories of Ukraine are invited to study at Polish universities, filling vacancies in their classrooms at the expense of talented and gifted Ukrainian youth.

Therefore, the problem of providing favorable conditions for obtaining quality education both in the city and in the most remote school becomes strategic. How to ensure the implementation of the set tasks and by what means to achieve their successful solution – it is from these positions that new approaches to the model of modern school development should be considered.

A model, as defined by L. Martynets, should be understood as «... such a mental system that, reflecting and reproducing the object of research, can change it so that its study gives us new information about this object. The term «model» means a certain system (sample, example, image, construction) that reflects certain properties and relations to another system (the original) and, in a certain sense, replaces it» (*Martynets*, 2015: 47).

Modern scientists consider the following to be a novelty in the transformation of education. The creation of a comprehensive, organic educational system based on historical heritage; the adaptation of education to market relations; an integrated approach to the development of school education; the creation of a favorable educational environment conducive to the complete development of the personality.

We come across various ideas in the pedagogical literature. In particular, O. Baranovska, developing pedagogical technologies, points to:

- the model to organize the school community's life;
- a model, a sample of experience that reinterprets pedagogical activity and learning experience;
- the model as a type of alternative school education, its architecture, and new forms;
- the model as a systematized form of experimental innovation;
- a model for developing pedagogical and cultural norms as an organizational system (*Baranovska and other*, 2018: 65).

Of course, what should the school model be in order to ensure the best possible results for the educational institution? It should be noted that experienced school leaders, planning and

forecasting the work of their school for a certain period, create and work out a certain system or model of the activity of the teaching staff, considering the specifics of their school (we mean pedagogical conditions, traditions, the qualification level of the teaching staff, the state, and connections with the external environment).

Before detailing the models of the rural school, let's dwell on the definition of such an educational institution. A rural school is a general educational institution located in a rural settlement. The uniqueness of such a school is that, in most schools, student and teaching teams are small, which affects the organization of the educational process (learning is done in combined classes, and individual learning is done if there are up to 5 students in the class) (*Kasiarum and other, 2006: 19*).

It manifested the peculiarity of small rural schools because they are far from district centers and large villages. That 247,000 students live beyond walking distance to the nearest school and need a ride evidences this. Often, small schools have limited access to information sources. Schools in the mountainous regions of Ukraine gain a special status (about 600 schools enjoy this status).

Significant differences in the composition of classes characterize rural schools, the number of students in which does not exceed 5–11 people. The small size of the student body affects the staffing of the school; in such a school, there are no positions for deputies, librarians, clerk-secretaries, etc.

A wide variety of educational facilities characterize rural schools, from adapted ones without heating and water supply to large typical schools with surplus teaching areas and premises with modern equipment. The specified features cannot affect the activity of the institution, the organization of the educational process, and its results. How can you improve the quality of education in low-numbered general education institutions?

First, such a school needs proper state funding, the formation of variable extra-budgetary revenues, the establishment of close relationships with interested legal entities and individuals, and the creation of conditions for the comprehensive development of personality. Second, a small school should take care of the generation and introduction of new pedagogical technologies, the use of effective forms of organization of the educational process, including additional training; and ensure a competent approach to the management of the pedagogical process.

An effective means of improving the quality of education in rural areas is the development of various types of models characterized by a certain structure, content, and forms of activity among the subjects of the pedagogical process.

3. An integrated activity model

The study was conducted based on schools in Ukraine, in particular in the Uman district of the Cherkasy region. Teachers and heads of schools who are developers of their own educational models presented their achievements at conferences and seminars at various levels. We singled out the most characteristic ideas embedded in the presented models of the development of a modern rural school:

- the modern rural school is an open educational system, it must develop in close contact with the external environment;
- the project-related pedagogical activity of the new rural school must be recognized and actively implemented in pedagogical practice;
- the content of the activities of the new rural school, unlike the urban one, a regional component is clearly manifest, reflecting national traditions, ways of managing the economy, the nature of production, etc.

The Yurkiv Lyceum of the Palana Village Council of the Uman District of the Cherkasy Region operates a village school laboratory. Here, for three years, they have been working on the problem of «Organizational and pedagogical principles of the functioning of a new 12-year-old school in a rural area». Among others, the result of our research was the development of a model of integrated activity in a rural school, built on the principles of humanization, democratization, integration, and cooperation.

We consider integration a development process associated with the unification of previously separate parts or elements into a whole (*Bilykh, 2007: 72*). An increase in the intensity of relationships and interactions between elements characterizes integration. Their arrangement and self-organization into a coherent form with the appearance of qualitatively new qualities or properties.

Integration in education is more commonly found as a union of institutions or other pedagogical systems, the content of educational programs of different subjects or subject areas, or the integration of different subjects or subject areas. The main idea of the model of integrated activity is to unite the pedagogical efforts of schools of different levels with the aim of creating conditions for the comprehensive development of the individual.

The model is based on the concept of a close community of neighboring schools working together to achieve a common goal, such as a joint project. In such an interaction, there is an increase in competitiveness among the participants, a deepening of communication ties, an increase in the importance of the subjects of the school component of the basic curriculum, and an increase in the requirements for teachers, students, and parents.

The purpose of building a model of integrated activity is to create conditions for students to master knowledge at a level not lower than state standards and to improve initial competencies through participation in joint projects that consider the peculiarities of the region (flower growing, entrepreneurship, forestry, etc.) and are under the specifics and experiences of the school (environmental projects, sports, and recreation work, nature protection work).

Determining the goals and tasks of joint activities and the distribution and ordering of the functions of school leaders were carried out in stages. An indicator of the positive impact of the joint activities of several schools as evidenced by the level of results achieved in the education and upbringing of students (a comparison of the coefficients of the level of knowledge in the main subjects in all experimental schools was used).

The joint activity of rural schools was based on general didactic principles, principles of integration, and cooperation of resources (territorially close) of general educational institutions of various degrees, and with the participation of socio-cultural institutions or institutions operating in the territory of villages. It aimed the activities of voluntarily united schools at implementing the principle of dominant collective motivation for activity, the satisfaction of educational interests, and support of individual inclinations and creative abilities, under the principle of conformity to nature. The principle of conformity to nature involves considering the child's natural development at various stages of his activity. J. Rousseau, H. Skovoroda, and later K. Ushinsky comprehensively substantiated this in their writings.

The purpose of implementing the model of integrated activities in rural schools was to:

- demonstrate the hypothetical assumption that by introducing new forms of educational and cognitive activity based on the principles of cooperation and integration of pedagogical teams to achieve a common goal, the quality of the pedagogical process in small schools can be significantly improved;

- ensure the joint work of teachers, parents, and public self-government bodies through organized activities of management subjects, and direct their efforts to ensure proper

conditions for improving the quality of the educational process and the overall development of the individual.

An integrated activity model of rural schools is a multi-faceted structure comprising the following mutually determined and functionally interconnected components: technological (formation of conditions for implementing joint projects), personal (studying and considering the qualitative personal characteristics of participants in the pedagogical process), and activity (implementation of target projects according to the developed program). The structure and content of the model are oriented, but its effectiveness depends on many factors.

In this sense, the influence of a certain layer of common human experience inherent in the region in which the school operates is considered. The success of the model's implementation depends on the system of inter-school coordinated work, on the condition of qualified management of the pedagogical process, and on the innovative and bold actions of the heads of these institutions, who:

- are oriented to the new demands of society for the quality of education and to the attitudes and individual characteristics of the subjects of the pedagogical process;
- creates conditions for open public participation in school activities;
- will contribute to the formation of close relationships and relationships among educational process subjects;
- will constantly work on improving professional and functional competence.

The modeling process should be carried out in stages based on the defined goal and set tasks:

I stage – is preparatory;

II stage is the formation of the structure of the model, awareness of the content of joint activities;

III stage is the correction of activity;

IV stage is the efficiency check.

At the first stage of goal formulation, the operating conditions of schools and other types of institutions (clubs, preschools, libraries, studios, museums) of higher-level schools (I-II or I-III) in proximity are considered. They devote the second stage to the creation of the main conceptual provisions for organizing the educational and cognitive activities of students at each school that have agreed to take part in the joint project. In the third stage, the content of joint activities and methodological recommendations for implementing target projects were developed, and material, technical, and personnel resources were discussed to ensure the educational and cognitive process, which is implemented at the expense of hours of the school component (a variable part of the curriculum). In the fourth stage, it distributed management functions among the subjects of this process, considering personal characteristics, criteria for checking the effectiveness of school teams, and indicators of the impact of the integrated activity model on the quality of the educational process.

Specifying the target orientation of the joint activities of several schools, we considered the quantitative and qualitative characteristics of each teaching team, the resource capabilities of the school, and the nature of internal and external relations.

The specification of the system-forming components of the model is mainly related to: the structure of the school (I, II, III grades); justification of the need for the use of the variable component of the basic initial plan and the content of the regional component; formats of organization for educational and cognitive processes; the nature of relationships with the outside world.

4. Conclusions

During the experiment, the effectiveness of the model was proven, and the mechanisms of the positive influence of the methodology on the quality of the educational process were confirmed. The following conclusions were reached based on the study's findings: improving the quality of knowledge of students in rural schools can be accomplished by integrating the efforts of several pedagogical teams aimed at the effective implementation of school component hours; the main principle of integrative activity is the collaboration of efforts from different schools aimed at forming a responsible attitude toward learning in students; the functional-activity approach, which provides stimulation and interest in a specific case, is the guiding principle for organizing the collaborative work of several pedagogical teams; the development of target projects is an appropriate form of implementation of the variable part of the plan in rural schools; the conducted comprehensive studies give reasons to claim that the activity of rural schools based on the model of integrated activity increases the level of creative activity of students, promotes the development of communicative ties and educational interests, and has a positive effect on the development of the personality of a rural schoolboy.

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