



DEFINING TRANSVERSAL SKILLS: PERSPECTIVES AND DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the present paper is to describe international perspectives concerning terms, definitions, and meanings of transversal skills and related terminology, highlighting the skills of the future. Methods: Has been analysed the available literature and policy documents and has been implemented analysis of various sources of data via qualitative methodology and expertise of researchers. Results: Although the term transversal skills is reaching wide aspect of importance, different classifications which skills are actually considered as transversal skills are observed and vice versa – different classifications includes skills, considered as transversal ones. Conclusions: Considerations has been described in the present study aiming to stimulate reflection of stakeholders and educational experts with diverse background and to start the discussion regarding possible unification of used terminology.

Key words: Transversal skills, Skills development, Soft skills, Core Skills, Key competencies, Basic skills, Workplace know-how, Skills of the future

INTRODUCTION

The aim of the present paper is to describe international perspectives concerning terms, definitions, and meanings of transversal skills and related terminology, highlighting the skills of the future. Analysis and revealing of similarities and differences, as well as processes overview would support the unification of the terminology of what we understand through the term transversal skills as we strongly believe such process would contribute strongly to their structured and planned development. The results of the present paper can be useful to all stakeholders in the field of education and employment. During the present research has been analyzed the reachable literature and scientific researches in the field of transversal skills development, including as well official publications of international organizations such

as European institutions, United Nations, UNESCO, World Economic Forum, ect. The goal of the present paper is to analyze the classifications available so far, the process of connecting education and sport at European level and to gather reachable information regarding transversal skills.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

Development of so-called transversal skills is widely recognized process, empowered by multiple governmental and non-governmental institutions across the World. The need of wide development of such skills is outspread to different policies and during the present biosecurity emergency of COVID-19 pandemic and restructuring of economic environment, those skills are highly valuable for employers in different fields. There are still certain problems that might be preventing their future evolution and in the present paper we will define some of them. “Transversal skills are those typically considered as not specifically related to a particular job, task, academic discipline or area of knowledge but as skills that can be used in a wide

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variety of situations and work settings” (IBE 2013). “These skills are increasingly in high demand for learners to successfully adapt to changes and to lead meaningful and productive lives” (UNESCO UNEVOC) (1).

The main challenge is definitely to understand the exact meaning of transversal skills classification as the transversal skills itself as a term vary in the literature with different labels and classification. One of the proofs of this lack of unification can be found in the ESCOpedia (2) that provides the following definition:

„Transversal knowledge, skills and competences are relevant to a broad range of occupations and economic sectors. They are often referred to as core skills, basic skills or soft skills, the cornerstone for the personal development of a person“. In this quote, we have four different labels of the same category of skills – core skills, basic skills, soft skills and the main term – transversal skills. They are also referred as transferable skills as stated by the European Commission in its publication: *Transferability of Skills across Economic Sectors* (3): *Role and Importance for Employment at European Level*: “It is also possible to find in relevant literature many different terms concerning general skills (core skills, key skills, common skills, essential skills, key competencies, employability skills, generic skills, basic skills, necessary skills, workplace know-how, critical enabling skills, transferable skills, key qualifications, trans-disciplinary goals, process independent qualifications, etc.), representing various clusters of skills rather than an important contribution to their typology.” In the second statement are found 13 other qualifications of the spectrum of transversal skills that is leading to even further confusion in the field of education and employment through challenge of planning proper policies and measures. World Economic Forum is the other wide recognized entity, working in the field of skills development as key employability trigger in the future of our economy. Although in their researches and findings can be found mainly “soft skills” as an umbrella term of the skill set that is needed in the workforce reskilling, different skills are as well added or excluded yearly (4). The Forum estimates that by 2025, 85 million jobs may be

displaced by a shift in the division of labour between humans and machines. For those workers who stay in their roles, the share of core skills that will change by 2025 is 40%, and 50% of all employees will need reskilling (up 4%). Half of the employees will have to reskill in the next five years and the main 10 skills that WEF describes in the end of 2020 as 1.analytical thinking and innovation; 2.active learning and learning strategies; 3.complex problem-solving; 4.critical thinking and analysis; 5.creativity, originality and initiative; 6.leadership and social influence; 7.technology use, monitoring and control; 8.technology design and programming; 9.Resilience, stress tolerance and flexibility; 10.Reasoning, problem-solving and ideation.

The second identified challenge is highlighted when we dive deeper in the mentioned skills, regardless of the concrete name used and following the aim to define which skills are actually included in those definitions. We can consider as starting point of this discussion the statement of the founder of cognitive psychology Ulrich Naiser (5) who concluded that “the cognitive activity of a person is better explained and associated with the process of acquiring of skills” (Naiser, 1976). In 1996, Bernard Ray (6) has made a further step in clarification: “transversal (horizontal) competencies, in which competence copes with a series of situations” (Rey, 1996). He has also defined the existence of four groups of transversal competencies: “autonomy and responsibility, communication competency, organizational and methodological competency, and cognitive competency for processing of information“. Another point of view of the possible classification of transversal skills was implemented by UNESCO researchers that has defined six main categories of transversal skills: critical and innovative thinking, interpersonal skills, intrapersonal skills, global citizenship, media and information literacy and others (the domain ‘others’ was created as a way for researchers to include competencies, such as physical health or religious values, that may not fall into one of the other) (UNESCO UNEVOC). Based on one of the European Commission’s (7) definitions “transversal skills such as the ability to think critically, take initiative, problem solve and work collaboratively will prepare individuals

for today's varied and unpredictable career paths.". Aiming to analyze the national scientific landscape in Bulgaria in the aspect of transversal skills development, one of the first findings in the transversal skills analysis is the analysis of the psychologist Boris Minchev (8) who stated that "actually, the general intellect is transversal, i.e. the capability to form skill, but not the structure of the skill itself". (Minchev, 1991).

Another perspective, taken into account by the author of the present research is the interconnection of transversal skills development and skills that sport can empower and develop through its regular practicing. Sport is part of the European policies, based on art.165 of the Treaty of Lisbon (9) amending the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty establishing the European Community, signed at Lisbon, 13 December 2007. Until its acceptance as integral policy of the European Union, sport had different policy adaptations into the existing legislative initiatives with reachable through the available documents policy since 1971 (10) through documents of the European institutions. Important step forward was taken by the adoption of the White Paper on Sport in 2008 (11) that set the floor for further policy development and concrete actions both on behalf of the Unions institutions and by the Member-states. Following this slow process of policy enlargement and adaptation 2014 was declared as European year of Education through sport (12), providing clear link between those two sectors as stated in one of the main aims of the year "to take advantage of the values conveyed through sport to develop knowledge and skills whereby young people in particular can develop their physical prowess and readiness for personal effort and also social abilities such as teamwork, solidarity, tolerance and fair play in a multicultural framework". In the mentioned, we are finding as well some of the transversal skills, developed further in different aspects as strongly needed for the personal and professional development of individuals nowadays. Although some aspects of the connection of development of transversal skills through sport has been already analyzed by different experts and scientific papers, clear connection between regular practicing of sport activities and measured results

in increase of transversal skills set is still poorly proved.

The perspective of life skills development through sport has its future development has been widely explored by Gould and Carson (13) highlighting the challenges at that point of development, that reflects the scientific interest in the field is increased, but research lags behind applied efforts. This is strongly valid in the present moment as well as clear identification of what skills, how are developed and through what methods used and what are the concrete indicators to measure this process are still limited. In the paper, Gould and Carson revealed the need of terminology clarification and unification, stating that "operationalizing key terms is important because before any phenomena can be scientifically studied it must be clearly defined". Modern sport and educational science still lack concrete answers on those important questions – what skills do we consider as relevant to the nowadays society development, what is the concrete terminology that we use to generalize those skills sets and what exactly do they include as concrete skills. One of the possible understanding of the life skills that Gould and Carson are analyzing can be summarized as "those skills that enable individuals to succeed in the different environments in which they live, such as school, home and their neighborhoods. Life skills can be behavioral (communicating effectively with peers and adults) or cognitive (making effective decisions); interpersonal (being assertive) or intrapersonal (setting goals)" (14). By the classification, provided by Benson et al. in 1998 (15) has been identified 20 internal and another 20 external developmental assets desirable for optimal development of an individual by which the ones that apply relevantly to the present research are the internal ones such as commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies and positive identity.

METHODS

Has been analysed the available literature and policy documents and has been implemented analysis of various sources of data via qualitative methodology and expertise of researchers. Data sources were (a) published texts of primary sources, with emphasis on use of sources from

different policies and researches; (b) paper researcher, important source according to qualitative research methodology (16) that brought diverse background to the study, representing wide experience in the field of sport and education. Through the presented mix has been brought different perspectives to analyse and interpret the information revealed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Although the term transversal skills is reaching wide aspect of importance, different classifications which skills are actually considered as transversal skills are observed and vice versa – different classifications includes skills, considered as transversal ones. Main aspects of the present paper is to highlight the current challenges in a moment of the history when science is more advanced than ever, but at some fields, such as skills development through sport are still with limited resources in terms of scientific proof and processes documentation. Some of the main challenges that we have ahead are the following aspects of the development of transversal skills through sport:

1. Unification of terminology and what does each category of skills consist by – which skills are considered as transversal skills, core skills, basic skills, life skills and other relevant categories with unclear consistence and overlap.
2. Quantitative and qualitative research is still needed to clarify what skills are developed through sport and are transversal skills part of this skills set, what are the indicators for measurement and how they are applied and documented.
3. According to study, implemented by Gould (17) in 2007 the sport coaches do not consider life skills teaching as a separate activity from their general coaching duties. How than we can measure the success – by sport results achieved or through long-term observation of personal and professional development of individuals involved in sport.
4. Planned transversability of skills developed through sport and personal development of individuals, involved in regular sport activities is still poorly explored and needs focused analysis and research to reveal successful models of application.
5. Generally held assumption that skills are developed through sport includes variety of factors and it is not limited only to participation in regular sport activities as development of a concrete skill or set of skills should be carefully planned process with variety of factors and indicators.

CONCLUSIONS

Considerations has been described in the present study aiming to stimulate reflection of stakeholders and educational experts with diverse background and to start the discussion regarding possible unification of used terminology. Future structured and wide research activities are critical for planned and goal-oriented research in the field of transversal skills development through sport and the cross-sectoral exchange between education and sport sectors to ensure that the skills of the future are widely explored following the statement of Plato (18) that “the moral value of exercises and sports far overweight the physical value.”

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