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Modern Trends in Religious Studies Education

Abstract. Religious education plays an important role in preparing students for adult life, employment and training throughout life. This allows pupils to develop respect and sensitivity towards others, especially to those whose beliefs and convictions differ from their own, helping to recognize and overcome prejudice, hatred and aggression.

Potential of Religious Studies education in our country allow us to hope that, if we revise a number of existing courses on social, political, humanitarian sciences, fill them with elements and approaches that meet the needs of the time, modify the views and assessment, to introduce a wider range of sources, developing critical thinking, ways of working, to prepare a creative-minded teachers, modern educational and methodical base, then we can gradually move closer to the goal, which is forming a new generation of high school graduates that are widely knowledgeable and creative in the field of religious discourse.

Key words: education, religious studies, society, model, diversity.

Introduction

Issues of religious education and religious studies are relevant in many countries, in those where it has existed for many years, decades and even centuries, and where it is, as in Kazakhstan, only beginning to be realized as needed. Causes of pulses in the development of new forms and new curriculum content related to religion, are numerous, and they differ in every society. On the one hand, this is due to the general rise of the religious consciousness, that wins his position after the era of the domination of the scientific rational consciousness, and this phenomenon is noted everywhere, both in the West and in the East. On the other hand, even before uncompromising atheist societies, such as the CIS countries come to realize that religions have a right to exist, moreover, that they are part of national identity and cultural heritage.

Specific features of religious education are influenced by historical implications of various social processes.

Religious education to a certain extent, as well as education in general is one of the sources and regulators of morality in society. It is impossible to equate religion with only purely external, ritual

manifestations. Preparation of socio-humanitarian training programs for secondary and higher education of Kazakhstan, containing deep promises and thoughtful concepts can help in achieving the goal of Religious Studies Education with extremely effective way.

Methods

We use such research methods as causal analysis, comparative method (comparative-historical research), typological method (method of classification), the hermeneutic method of structural-functional analysis, scientific methods of theoretical knowledge – analysis and synthesis.

Main body

A comparative analysis of the various educational systems can identify a wide variety of options related to the implementation of religious education, in terms of both its planning and practical ways of ensuring it in teaching. There is, however, a number of common trends and issues:

1. Religious education is an important dimension of most foreign educational systems. European education policy recognizes the need to provide re-

religious education in public schools as a means of enrichment of knowledge, comparison of experience and promotion of dialogue and respect for differences, giving the space of religion, the state does not lose its secular character [1].

2. In the last few years, the focus in many countries changed from one religion training at the national level (as a rule, the religion of majority) to the teaching of several religions (usually religions recognized by the law), along with openness to ecumenism and inter-religiosity.

3. Mostly confessional approach to religious education that is specific to the majority of European countries, includes more and more elements of a common religious culture, analyzed from a secular point of view: the knowledge of the great religions, the history of religions, church history, different religious traditions, applied ethics.

4. There is a high demand for non-denominational approach to religion in all European countries. This approach is not necessarily seen as a replacement for confessional religious education, but as an alternative and a complement to this kind of education [2].

5. There is no single European model of religious education, but the identification of common values in this respect is one of the main concerns of all European countries.

6. The role of government is to ensure the rights of various groups (parents, religious communities) in the field of religious education, in support of this type of education in public schools, as well as guaranteeing the rights of the child to this type of education, preventing at the same time, indoctrination, and violations of freedom thoughts.

7. A class can become a space of language, cultural and religious diversity, and the school must also show understanding and acceptance of the fact that the values of many of life's concepts do not necessarily derive from religion.

8. Teaching religious and secular values in the open educational environment of the school should ensure that all students, regardless of race, religion, disability, language, gender or class, feel welcome participants of the educational process, emotionally balanced, and estimated at its true worth [3].

9. Religion is an important, though not the only source of moral values. Moral values are not the monopoly of religion, much less the exclusive property of any one religion. However, when religious education gets its rightful place in the education system, the importance of the education of moral values may be strengthened through training and studying religious and other value systems.

10. The teaching of religious subjects in schools should be appropriately conducted by trained professional teachers [4].

Any teacher, regardless of his or her personal religious orientation, aims to teach in a school pluralistic society, in which students are expected to belong to different religions.

Teacher provides training in the following areas:

- Reflect on ethical issues in religion, politics, human rights and the environment.
- Knowledge of the principles and practices of the world's major religions, customs, values and beliefs of the major cultures, constitutions and laws.
- Knowledge of ethical discussions in religions, politics, economics, human rights and the environment.
- Understanding the impact of class, race, gender and other identity forming forces in training.
- The expression of respect for people of different values, beliefs, practices and culture.
- The ability to respond to current social and educational issues, with special emphasis on the issues of violence, drug abuse, poverty, violence against children and women, AIDS and environmental degradation.

Public education should not turn the school into an appendage to any church or system of beliefs or lack of beliefs. Without a credible discussion of the distinctive role of education, solutions are more likely to be directed by the state to exercise political power, rather than to the educational needs of students, the subject demands, and informed opinion of teachers. Education figures traditionally believe that good education should avoid manipulating the beliefs of pupils and their zombification.

If the traditional religious instruction was directed mainly on the contents of which students had to master (knowledge of dogma), today's school curriculum advocate for an approach based on the student's personality, highlighting the implementation of its identity, the attitude towards differences, participation in social life, self-esteem, with a focus on values, taking responsibility for their own decisions. From this point of view, religious education contributes to the spiritual, moral, cultural and psychological development of the individual in school and society as a whole, is preparing him / her for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life. [5]

The development of religious education after gaining independence in Kazakhstan can be divided into three important main stages, each of which is characterized by a set of distinctive features.

The first stage – from 1991 to the beginning of the two thousandth – is associated with an acute awareness of the need to open the door to religion and religious knowledge, given the long period of isolation of the country from the religious world, and attempts to define its new identity. This sharp rise in religiosity has received considerable support of state leadership deliberate policy, which has set the task of strengthening national identity and a new image of the country. At this stage, educational institutions, which claimed responsibility for the mission to spread religious education, appeared without any system, each of them carried out the learning process on their own, according to their programs, plans, visions and possibilities.

The desire of the public to receive basic religious knowledge has caused quite a free penetration of Islamic missionaries in the space of Kazakhstan in the early nineties. Missionary activity, especially in the Southern Kazakhstan, initially conducted through mosques, Islamic centers of learning depended on external sources of financing. In an attempt to get a quality religious knowledge, many students went to study in Arab countries. This group of students came under the attention of the state, and in 2000, after the events in neighboring Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan there was a need to return the students who have been abroad. This fact indicates attempt of the state to control religious education and at the same time so far the lack of a clear mechanism for the settlement of this issue in the state and religious structures of the period.

The second stage in the development of religious education – since the early 2000s up to 2011 – was a time of revision of attitude towards the missionary activities of foreign centers and bringing the learning process in line with the state standards in existing religious institutions, with the closure of those that do not meet these standards. Religious education in foreign Islamic centers is gradually losing its relevance since the need to adhere to local Islam and its regional specifics is increasingly emphasized in order to avoid the spread of foreign Islamic ideology. Official information says that the number of illegal religious groups that have a reputation as a «totalitarian sects» increased. They have been accused of targeting its members for violation of the laws of the country, evasion of military service and other civic norms of behavior.

Young people, that are more active than other social groups, were involved in radical organizations. That is why the policy of the state bodies and official clergy concerning the education of young people and improving religious literacy, increased

significantly. According to the presidential decree «On Measures to prevent and combat terrorism and extremism» from 10.02.2000, since 2004 a special course «Foundations of Religious Studies» was introduced in secondary schools. However, the lack of education of the clergy, as well as a small number of civil servants with professional theological knowledge, considerably slowed down the solution of this problem.

Faculty of Islamic Sciences of the Kazakh – Egyptian University Nur-Mubarak had to fill this gap. Its curriculum combines secular and religious subjects.

In addition, five universities in the country have begun preparation of bachelors and masters in religious studies. For parishioners courses were opened in almost all mosques in the country in order to improve religious literacy. Gradually, in the sphere of religious education public policy outlines began to appear.

Oct. 11, 2011, the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan «On religious activity and religious associations» marked the beginning of a new, third stage, which was a period of determining the state strategic lines in the area of religion in the new geopolitical conditions, characterized by the intensification of actions of radical religious groups in Kazakhstan, where the outbreak of violence and terrorism first appeared.

It was carried out re-registration of all religious organizations and associations of Kazakhstan. Some new structures have been created: the Agency for Religious Affairs, one of whose functions is the study and analysis of the spiritual (religious) educational organizations, NGO «Congress of Religions» for participation of experts in religious matters of training and retraining of civil servants and teachers. Informational – educational Internet portal «E-Islam» has been created to meet the cognitive, spiritual and religious needs of Muslims and all those who are interested in Islam

According to plans of SAMK, 500 imams of large mosques (regional, city and district levels) must have two diplomas – religious and secular, to be developed, politically literate, able to work with people.

November 24, 2015 the “Concept of development of religious education of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kazakhstan till 2020” was adopted. It is expected that the concept will serve as a basic strategic document defining the future direction of the Islamic education system [6].

Religious education puts stimulating questions about the highest sense and the purpose of life, the

idea of God, the nature of reality, issues of law, and what it means – to be human. It develops students' knowledge and understanding of the major religions, religious traditions and other visions of the world, that offer answers to questions of this kind.

This opens up new opportunities for personal reflection and spiritual development. It reinforces the awareness of students and understanding of religion and beliefs, doctrines, practices and forms of expression, as well as the influence of religion on individuals, families, communities and cultures.

Religious education encourages students to learn from different religions, beliefs, learn values and traditions, issues of Truth, Faith, Ethics, as well as to analyze, interpret and evaluate their own beliefs and formulate their own answers, and, ultimately, to develop their critical thinking.

Conclusion

What is extremely important for the society of the transition period – religious education encourages students to form a sense of identity and belong-

ing. This allows them to be realized as individuals in their own communities and as citizens in a pluralistic society and the global community.

Religious education plays an important role in preparing students for adult life, employment and training throughout life. This allows pupils to develop respect and sensitivity towards others, especially to those whose beliefs and convictions differ from their own, helping to recognize and overcome prejudice, hatred and aggression.

The potential of Religions education in our country allow us to hope that, if we revise a number of existing courses on social, political, humanitarian sciences, fill them with elements and approaches that meet the needs of the time, modify the views and assessment, to introduce a wider range of sources, developing critical thinking, ways of working, to prepare a creative-minded teachers, modern educational and methodical base, then we can gradually move closer to the goal, which is forming a new generation of high school graduates, that are widely knowledgeable and creative in the field of religious discourse.

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