

MULTIDIMENSIONAL AND MULTIFUNCTIONAL CONTENT OF NATIONAL DEFENCE TRAINING IN LATVIAN SCHOOLS

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Abstract

Continuous changes in the world's political and geographical space are highlighting our national interests in security issues, when thinking about the sustainability of our society and country. Both civic preparedness to act in crisis situations and civic participation in strengthening national security are important. This is a duty of every citizen of our country. Therefore, following the introduction of a comprehensive National defence system in Latvia, the acquisition of the subject of National Defence Training in secondary education programs will be compulsory in Grades 10 and 11 of secondary schools starting from the academic year 2024/2025, but by 31 August 2024, National Defence Training in secondary education will be implemented within the framework of a pilot project. The aim of the research is to analyse the content of the curriculum of the subject National Defence Training from the point of view of curricular didactics, civic education and patriotic upbringing. The research results show that the content of National Defence Training is highly multidimensional and important in the context of the promotion of comprehensive national defence and versatile development of young people as well as in supporting their career development. The concept of comprehensive national defence has four dimensions: military, informational, psychological and civilian. All four of these basic dimensions have been taken into consideration when developing the content of National Defence Training. This has been ensured by integrating the content of military education, civic education and career education into the unified curriculum National Defence Training. The content of military education, civic education and career education has a scientific basis, formed by the results of theoretical and empirical research obtained from the research activities of both Latvian and foreign scientists.

Key words: career education, civic education, curriculum, military education, National Defence Training, patriotic upbringing.

Introduction

Our society lives in a constantly changing environment, which refers also to geopolitical environment. The geopolitical situation in the world is changing and these changes affect Latvia both directly and indirectly. Although we live in a democratic country, Latvian society is well aware of the harsh history of our nation; it follows and is able to critically assess international events near the borders of our country as well as in some more distant areas, and is able to assess the political situation within the country. In order to prepare our society for more or less predictable changes to be faced by the world and also the Baltic countries in the geopolitical space, each individual of our society, including young people, should be prepared for life and action in crisis situations.

On September 24, 2020, the Saeima of the Republic of Latvia approved the National Defence Concept (Valsts aizsardzības koncepcija, 2020), which envisages comprehensive public involvement in the defence of the country in crisis situations.

According to I. Bērziņa and U. Zupa (Bērziņa & Zupa, 2020), the population needs to have a clear vision and understanding of what their role and tasks in national defence are. Considering the survey data, in order to ensure public involvement in the defence of the country, the most important thing is to provide a sufficient level of information and access to specific theoretical and practical knowledge on how everyone

can participate in the national defence, and how to encourage the citizens to participate in the national defence. This means that the goal of comprehensive national defence will be achievable if the Latvian society is ready to defend their country in every way. It is important that the readiness to defend our country is equally explicit to different social groups in society and would not be significantly affected by the language we speak on daily basis although language largely indicates our belonging to a certain culture, gender, age, social affiliation, level of well-being and other important factors.

Until the beginning of 2000, Europe was considered to be a peaceful region, a lot of countries abolished compulsory military service and reduced their military budgets. Following Russia's military action, a number of countries began to look for ways to deal with various crises, thinking about the readiness of the population to defend their country. Compulsory military service in Latvia was abolished in 2006 because there was a position in Europe that the military service was unnecessary. Now a much more modern way would be not to restore compulsory service, but to provide knowledge in a more modern way, involving the public in formal, non-formal military and civic education, with a special focus on patriotic upbringing (Valsts aizsardzības koncepcija, 2020; Valsts aizsardzības mācība skolās ..., 2021). As one of the solutions Latvia has chosen the introduction of National Defence Training in schools.

Several sources (Bērziņa *et al.*, 2020; Informatīvais ziņojums 'Par valsts aizsardzības ...', 2019; Valsts aizsardzības mācība, 2020) show that the formal curriculum for National Defence Training has already been developed, and starting from 2024/2025 it will be implemented in all schools in Latvia. The acquisition of this curriculum will be compulsory in Grades 10 and 11 of secondary education institutions, as well as in the 2nd and 3rd year of studies at vocational secondary education institutions. The curriculum developed so far will be experimentally tested as a part of the pilot project. The introduction of the curriculum National Defence Training in Latvian secondary school education is topical from the point of view of curricular didactics, civic education and patriotic upbringing. The new curriculum has been included in the following areas of study: Health, Safety and Physical Activity, and Social and Civic Learning. The Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Latvia anticipates that during the first year, when this subject will become compulsory, approximately 34,000 young people will participate in the training. Individual approaches are envisaged in order to respect the students and their families' world beliefs, such as religious affiliation and values, beliefs, attitudes, norms of conduct and behaviour resulting from that. The training will take place both at school and in practical training camps; therefore, a mandatory presence in the process of acquiring National Defence Training course will be required. However, distance and correspondence course students will be offered the opportunity to acquire only blocks or modules of theoretical study content, thus gaining the necessary knowledge, skills and competencies (Kuzmina, 2020).

In 2018, 13 Latvian schools applied for the participation in the project, which offered students from Grade 10 of general secondary education institutions and 2nd year students of vocational secondary schools the possibility to master National Defence Training as an optional subject. The schools had to face organizational problems, namely, how to better organize lessons for students who chose this subject and in parallel for those students who did not do that. In June 2019, the first camp was held within the framework of the subject National Defence Training, 67 students from 13 Latvian schools, were involved in the pilot project, took part in the training. The camp took place at the National Armed Forces firing ground 'Lāčusils' in Alūksne county. During this training session the young people practically applied the theoretical knowledge they had acquired in National Defence Training and also improved their field combat and shooting skills (Valsts aizsardzības mācības pilotprojekts ..., 2019). Currently, within the framework of the pilot project, the subject National Defence Training is being experimentally tested by

69 educational institutions throughout Latvia. These are secondary schools, gymnasiums and vocational schools. Such optional study course is also offered in colleges (Valsts aizsardzības mācība skolās ..., 2021).

As there is insufficient number of the conducted research, where researchers focus on the promotion of participation of young people in national defence, and involving them both in formal and non-formal military and civic education already during school years by paying special attention to patriotic upbringing, the aim of the research of the authors of the article was to justify the introduction of National Defence Training in Latvian schools as a topicality of modern education.

Materials and Methods

In 2020, the research on the introduction of National Defence Training in Latvian schools as a topical issue of modern education was launched at Latvia University of Life Sciences and Technologies. In order to be able to carry out empirical research, it is necessary to develop a theoretical basis for the research. Therefore, this article presents the results of the authors' theoretical research, justifying the multidimensional and multifunctional content of National Defence Training from the point of view of curricular didactics, civic education and patriotic upbringing.

In order to justify the introduction of National Defence Training in Latvian schools as a topicality of modern education, theoretical research method was applied: study, analysis and evaluation of scientific literature and normative documents.

Results and Discussion

In the 21st century, the concept – comprehensive or total national defence has been raised, which is related to collective defence, all-encompassing resilience with an emphasis on civil security aspects at the national level. This was decided at the 2016 NATO Warsaw Summit. Based on the results of studies conducted in several countries (Finland, Israel, Singapore, Switzerland), four basic dimensions of the concept of comprehensive national defence have been defined: military, informational, psychological and civilian (Berzina, 2020).

All these dimensions have been included in the content of National Defence Training.

The military dimension is also present in National Defence Training (Bērziņa *et al.*, 2020), which includes *the content of military education*, for example, such topics as: 1) Military topography and orientation; 2) Field combat skills; 3) Formation skills; 4) Safe handling of weapons and shooting with pneumatics, and others.

The inclusion of the content of military education in National Defence Training will also provide a

career education function, which will probably ensure the recruitment of young people in the National Armed Forces of the Republic of Latvia (NAF) and the National Guard, which is one of the national defence issues. Researchers from several countries have published their researches on the involvement of young people in national defence and related issues. For example, in the USA, studies have been conducted (Spoehr & Handy, 2018), and the results show that over time (in the future perspective) there might be a problem of employment in the armed forces, namely, it might be difficult to attract professional labour. There are several reasons for this, such as the restrictions set in various types of regulatory documents, which allow only 29% of young people to get involved in professional national defence, etc. This threatens succession and generational change in the army. In addition, the motivation of young people is important.

The content of military education not only promotes the acquisition of new knowledge and skills in military training, but it also has another task which is to facilitate physical development of young people, including physical endurance. The informative report *On the Implementation of National Defence Training and the Development of the Youth Guard in 2019–2027* (Informatīvais ziņojums 'Par valsts aizsardzības ...', 2019) indicates that with the introduction of new competency-based training content it is necessary to review and update the way how children and young people at all stages of education develop and strengthen the sense of statehood and a sense of belonging to Latvia, how they learn to take responsibility for themselves, their family, community and country, as well as develop not only intellectual but also physical abilities (emphasis added by the author).

Currently **the informative dimension** and **the psychological dimension** (Berzina, 2020), which are justified by changes in the global balance of power structure, as well as by the rapid development of information and communication technologies, are especially relevant. In the 21st century, there is a widespread understanding of the growing importance of information and psychological operations as elements of war. Nowadays, the concept of psychological or information operation is brought forward in matters of national security (Mattis & Hofman, 2005), in the 21st century wars of ideas take place, and our ideas have to compete with the ideas of the enemy (Annis, 2020). Russian military experts define information as a separate dimension of war: the growing importance of non-military instruments in modern warfare has increased (Berzina, 2020). The term hybrid warfare enters both scientific and everyday terminology and vocabulary to describe the specifics of modern security problems. The synthesis

and methods of different tools, both military and non-military, are a key principle in characterizing 'hybrid warfare' and 'hybrid warfare threats' (Mattis & Hoffman, 2005). The list of hybrid tools substantiated by scientists (Treverton *et al.*, 2018, 4) that can be used by enemies in hybrid warfare is relatively extensive: propaganda; fake news; strategic leaks; funding organizations; political parties; organized protest movements; cyber tools (espionage, attacks and manipulation); economic leverage; proxies and unacknowledged war; and paramilitary organizations.

The list is not exhaustive, and all of the above tools can also be used in combination with conventional warfare. In this regard, the Republic of Latvia has developed the Cyber Security Strategy of Latvia 2019–2022 (Latvijas kiberdrošības stratēģija ..., 2019). The aforementioned is the justification for the fact that National Defence Training curriculum (Bērziņa *et al.*, 2020) also includes the topics of communication procedures and cyber security. Innovations in the content of the Youth Guard non-formal education are also expected, new Youth Guard curriculums will be implemented. For example, as a novelty, Cyber Youth Guard classes are planned, which would be offered in parallel with the 2nd level curriculum of youth guard interest education (for students from Grades 7 and 8). These students could later choose to obtain the relevant secondary vocational education (Saldus Technical School already offers a curriculum for cyber security specialists) or higher education in the field of information technology with a specialization in cyber security (Informatīvais ziņojums 'Par valsts aizsardzības ...', 2019). This means opening up new perspectives for young people's career choices and development.

The civilian dimension is expressed in the content of civic education, which is included in the content of National Defence Training, where the focus is on civic activity and participation in the context of national defence. The civic dimension appears both in the goal of National Defence Training and in the content itself. The main goal of this subject is to promote civic awareness and patriotism, as well as to provide an opportunity to acquire basic military skills and abilities, shaping citizens who would be civilly responsible and loyal to Latvia, which is vital for the comprehensive national defence (Valsts aizsardzības mācība, 2020).

Researchers from other countries have concluded that in order to promote the involvement of young people in national defence, it is necessary to be aware of the importance of civic education and offer a well-thought-out content (Kalagbor & Harry, 2018).

The content of civic education is an important tool that helps to develop and strengthen democratic values in society, cultivate civic traditions in society

and promote each individual's sense of belonging to their country, develop a responsible attitude towards society and the state as a whole (Cekste, 2014).

The results of studies carried out in Latvia show that: 1) the civic participation rate in Latvia is 9, which is a low result compared to Sweden (44), Finland (36), Germany (30) and Ireland (22); 2) the involvement of the population in traditional forms of civic participation is decreasing, with a persistently low proportion of the population (17%) believing that they are able to influence the decision-making processes in Latvia is constantly low; 3) young people lack civic participation skills. Around 25% of young people claim to participate regularly (at least 12 times a year) in some social, community or interest activities, incl. only 6% – in public and social activities (participation in non-governmental organizations, charity events, volunteer work, environmental cleaning, etc.). Youth involvement in political activities (participation in party work, political discussions, etc.) is the lowest – only 2% are regularly involved. (Informatīvais ziņojums 'Par Nacionālās identitātes ...', 2019; Spārīte, 2014).

The inclusion of the civic education content into National Defence Training curriculum is a way for the education system to respond to the demand for young people to be engaged in activities relevant to national security that improve each young person's prospects, offer new opportunities and contribute to the sustainable development of society and the country as a whole.

Civic education is not just about national policy and / or international geopolitics. It aims to develop democratic, social, personal and interpersonal competences. The report *Citizenship Education at European Schools (Pilsoniskā izglītība Eiropas skolās, 2017)* provides answers to these and other questions, as well as it includes a comparative overview of the implementation of civic education in Europe. The report covers 28 Member States of the European Union, as well as Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Republic of Macedonia (the former Yugoslavia), Iceland, Liechtenstein, Montenegro, Norway, Serbia, Switzerland and Turkey.

In the United Kingdom, citizenship education aims to provide pupils with the knowledge and skills necessary for active participation for the benefit of society, to acquire knowledge of democracy, the electoral justice system, human rights and responsibilities by teaching to respect different national and religious identities, ethnic groups, promoting critical thinking and developing collaboration skills (Feyfant, 2010). Consequently, the principles and values of Citizenship education prevailing in the United Kingdom are based on the development of abilities, social skills, self-inquiry and personality.

The inclusion of the content of citizenship education into National Defence Training content is a way for the education system to respond to the demand for young people to engage in activities relevant to national security, which improves the prospects of each young person, offers new opportunities and contributes to the sustainable development of society and the country.

The research shows (Cortes, Gomez, & Valle, 2016) that a number of thematic directions can be identified in the content of citizenship education: 1) citizenship education based on the transfer of knowledge to students about the history, geography and policy of the state; 2) citizenship education, which encourages and motivates practical participation in school and public activities; 3) unified citizenship education, which contains the two previous directions, with the aim of providing all opportunities for students to develop their competencies, to form attitudes based on values, by actively fulfilling the duties of an individual and citizen both while studying at school and in the future as an adult. It has been ascertained in the research (Navarro-Medina & Alba-Fernandez, 2015) that this third guideline or direction would be desirable for the implementation of citizenship education in the broadest sense of the concept.

Within the project 'School 2030' a vision (Namsone, 2018; Vērtības un tikumi, 2021), on what educational outcomes should be, has been defined. As a result of the acquisition of competence-based education the benefits of an educated personality in the form of morals, habits and values have been identified, which highlights the importance of the new educational content in schools.

- Virtues: justice, solidarity, compassion, honesty, composure, kindness, courage, moderation, tolerance, wisdom, responsibility, diligence.
- Habits: a) a responsible member of society who goes into details, participates and collaborates to build the society we all want to live; b) a self-confident person who respects and cares for himself and others; c) a creative innovator who introduces innovation, d) an expert in growth, for whom constant and enthusiastic learning has become a habit.
- Values: life, human dignity, freedom, family, marriage, work ethic, nature, culture, Latvian language, Latvian state.

These desirable educational results can also be directly ascribed to the acquisition of the content of the National Defence curriculum.

The role of teachers in citizenship education is emphasized in several publications. There are few studies on the contribution of educators to citizenship education at schools, teaching practices, and experiences that encourage learners to become critical,

creative, patriotic citizens (Sim, Chua, & Krishnasamy, 2017). The implementation of citizenship education requires a set of essential knowledge (although formed from different disciplines), a set of skills (including the ability to gather evidence, recognize types of influence, put forward arguments, take part in debates and speak publicly) and a highly qualified provision of professionals capable of providing creative learning content based on cross-curricular approach (Davies *et al.*, 2014; Wood *et al.*, 2018). Active and open discussions, debates, discussion of problems in an open dialogue on contentious issues contribute to ongoing and future involvement (Flanagan *et al.*, 2010; Hess & McAvoy, 2014; Kahne & Sporte, 2008). Teachers play an important role in enabling pupils / students to express their views in the process of acquiring citizenship education, as well as to allow for individual reflection and cyclical or recursive learning (Biesta, 2011; Parker, Valencia, & Lo, 2017). The role of a teacher is not only relevant in the context of citizenship education, but also in the context of military education and career education, because the content of all these three fields of education is integrated into a joint curriculum – National Defence Training.

The results of theoretical research lead to the conclusion that the content of National Defence Training is distinctly multidimensional and important in the context of comprehensive national defence, promotion of comprehensive development of young people and career development support.

The process of acquiring the content of National Defence Training will have a distinct **educational function**.

In the view of didactics (learning theories), the learning process has several functions, one of them is educational function (Žogla, 2001). In turn, from the point of view of upbringing theories, the study content serves as a means of upbringing in the process of promoting the formation of value and attitude systems, which by its nature is the process interaction between a teacher and a student (Špona, 2001).

One of the most important tasks of National Defence Training is **patriotic upbringing** of young people (Valsts aizsardzības mācība, 2020).

There are several explanations of the concept of patriotism in scientific literature.

Patriotism is an essential individual trait of a personality. Patriotism as a social phenomenon is the basis of the existence and development of any nation and statehood (Takeuchi, 2016).

Patriotism is the moral basis of the country's viability and serves as an important mobilization resource for the development of society, the individual's active civic position and readiness to serve Latvia (Indriksons, 2019).

The results of the researches show (Bērziņa, 2016) that overall the Latvian society has a high level of national pride and patriotism – 74% are proud, 75% are proud that Latvia is an independent country, 71% are patriots of the Latvian State and 86% are patriots of Latvia as it is their place of residence. As many as 70% respondents have expressed readiness to defend the country. However, in case of a military attack, 34% are ready to defend Latvia with weapons; these respondents are ready to sacrifice their lives for the independence of Latvia's statehood.

Several publications (Fedorenko, 2019; Mardonov *et al.*, 2020; Mikriukov, 2009) prove that patriotic and military-patriotic upbringing of younger generations is also relevant in other countries.

Recent events in the world and the geopolitical situation suggest that more attention needs to be paid to the educational environment, which is one of the most important places for the formation of patriotism (Indriksons, 2019). This means that the ecological approach is important in providing an appropriate educational environment.

The implementation of National Defence Training will combine theoretical training with practical training in the field conditions; therefore, on the basis of **the ecological approach**, particular attention will have to be paid to indoor and outdoor environmental contexts.

Conclusions

To ensure that the society is ready for more or less predictable changes in the world's geopolitical space, every individual of the society should be prepared for life and action in crisis situations. One of the most important things is the readiness of the whole society and each of its individuals to protect their country, and its independence. For the comprehensive protection of the country, a legal basis has been developed in Latvia. Several normative documents emphasize that the participation of young people in national defence should be promoted by introducing a new subject – National Defence Training in schools, as well as work with the Youth Guard should be continued, which could be a new shift for the National Guards and professional soldiers in the National Armed Forces of the Republic of Latvia.

The formal content of education for National Defence Training has already been developed and is currently being experimentally tested in several Latvian schools. This subject will be implemented in all Latvian schools starting from the academic year 2024/2025. The acquisition of this curriculum will be compulsory in Grades 10 and 11 of secondary education, as well as in the 2nd and 3rd year of vocational secondary education institutions. The new curriculum includes the following areas of study: Health, Safety

and Physical Activity, and Social and Civic Learning.

The content of National Defence Training is distinctly multidimensional and important in the context of comprehensive national defence, promotion of the comprehensive development of young people and supporting their career development. The concept of comprehensive national defence has four dimensions: military, informational, psychological and civilian. All four of these basic dimensions have been taken into consideration when developing the content of National Defence Training. This has been ensured by integrating the content of military education, civic education and career education into the unified curriculum National Defence Training. The content of military education, civic education

and career education has a scientific basis, formed by the results of theoretical and empirical research obtained from the research activities of both Latvian and foreign scientists. A significant role in the process of acquiring National Defence Training will be given to a teacher, incl. his methodological competence.

The process of mastering the content of National Defence Training will have a distinctly educational function, as one of the tasks of mastering the new subject is to provide patriotic education.

The implementation of National Defence Training shall also be based on an ecological approach when providing an appropriate educational environment, by paying attention to the contexts of indoor and outdoor environments.

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