

Textbook: Focus on Students' National Identity

## Textbooks' Role in Secondary Education in Georgia, the Postmodern Era

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### Abstract

The paper presents a study of the role textbooks play in secondary education in Georgia in the postmodern era. A textbook theory which was formed by the middle of the 20th century, its main provisions, served the basis for the study of various representations of school textbooks' functions: informational, transformational, systematizing, motivational, the function of students' orientation towards cognitive activity, the function of developing students' cognitive abilities based on their mastering the skills of cognitive activity and gradually increasing the level of their cognitive independence, integrating, coordinating, developing and educational. An attempt has been made to study the influence of postmodernistic ideas on the development of school education in Georgia, its educational and methodological support, the central component of which is a textbook. The authors reveal a shift in the goal of education under the influence of postmodern thinking from teaching academic knowledge and skills to providing a learning environment where students create their own knowledge. They analyzed tutorial layouts for the 9th grades students of Georgian schools, posted on the official portal of the Center of Textbook Marking and justified the conclusion that the invariant function of the textbook, which includes a book for the student, a book for the teacher, a workbook and a disk with audio recordings, is the function of developing students' independent work in the informational space, search, and encouraging students to independently construct knowledge.

*Keywords:* textbook, postmodernism, secondary education in Georgia.

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### Introduction

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The textbook is the most stable element of the educational process in its functions, a fundamental embodiment of the pedagogical efforts of the society. The textbook reflects the social experience that each generation seeks to pass on to its descendants. Therefore, it is not surprising that school textbooks invariably attract the attention of specialists and the public — both in times of stable development and in times of social change. The history of the textbook dates back several centuries, but systemically in theoretical terms, the study of school textbooks in Russian pedagogy began in the middle of the 20th century and was reflected in the formation of the theory of the school textbook. Within the framework of the theory, the requirements for a school textbook are studied in close correlation with its functions. The functions of the textbook have always aroused the scientists' interest at different stages of the textbook development.

The pedagogical discourse on the problems of the textbook and its leading functions at the present stage of development of national systems of general education is increasingly unfolding in the context of postmodern trends of the post-non-classical period of scientific knowledge. The latter dictates (in contrast to the classical image of the world perception) the priority of not static, but dynamic objects of research, not object-, but subject-centered image of the subject of knowledge. Hence we have the current priorities of the study of socio-humanitarian processes, namely:

- 1) the study of "human-dimensional" objects – a person as a self-developing system in his interaction with nature, with the world of industrial and economic relations;
- 2) the focus on the value-semantic categories of research and hence the priority of such concepts as "self-creation", "self-discovery", "self-identification", "self-development", correlated with the leading motives of modern people;
- 3) the subjective and at the same time "faceless" nature of knowledge, difficult to establish the truth and requiring the activation of logic, experience, interpretation, modeling, design, construction;
- 4) strengthening the role of knowledge communication, "communicative a priori»;
- 5) instability, non-linearity of the objects under study, researched and described to a greater extent in the projective (assumed, hypothetical) perspective;
- 6) emphasis on processes of high socio-practical orientation, which are more associated with cooperative (including inter-national, global in their nature) practices;

7) determining the degree of scientific / non-scientific specifics in accordance with the real life practice, rather than with the theory;

8) ubiquitous and extremely broad integrativity and interdisciplinarity, the creation of extraordinary and sometimes very exotic "alliances" of scientific fields of knowledge that give a multidimensional and polychrome character to the processes of the new formation (Research Prospects..., 2017).

Against the background of the above, the question of the textbook's role in the context of postmodernistic ideas, which have a significant impact on the modernization of national general education systems, including Georgia, is updated.

### **Purpose and objectives of the study**

The purpose of this study is to identify the functions of the school textbook in the postmodern era in the modernization of the national system of general education in Georgia. The main task of the study is to analyze the goals of modernization of the general education system, including its educational and methodological support, in the center of which there is a school textbook and its new functions that meet the requirements of modernity.

### **Literature review**

A textbook is the most stable element of the educational process in its functions, a fundamental embodiment of social pedagogical efforts. Textbooks reflect the social experience that each generation seeks to pass on to its descendants. Therefore, it is not surprising that school textbooks invariably attract the attention of specialists and the public — both in times of stable development and in times of social change.

By the beginning of the 21st century, the theory of the textbook has been formed in pedagogical science. Its main provisions are set out in the yearbook "Problems of the school textbook", which was being published for 20 years, until the end of the 20th century, and became a discussion space for the problems of improving school textbooks. The theory of the school textbook characterizes such functions of the school textbook as informational, transformational, systematizing, motivational, the function of students' orientation towards cognitive activity, the function of developing students' cognitive abilities based on their mastering the skills of cognitive activity and gradually increasing the level of their cognitive independence, integrating, coordinating, developing and educating ones. Numerous studies pay considerable attention to the implementation of certain leading functions of the textbook:

- organizational and procedural, focused on the organization of educational and cognitive activity;
- organization of self-education, which demonstrates the ways of organizing self-education to the student by means of educational texts;
- the function of managing educational and cognitive activity;
- the educational function, which contributes to the active formation of the most important features of a harmoniously developed personality, cognitive activity (Psychodidactics of a modern textbook ..., 2019).

One of the textbook's leading functions is the function of individualization, which requires a change in the very design of the textbook, which should take the form of a conversation with an increase in the proportion of problematic (search) methods of organizing a text. E. G. Tareva focuses on the personal-developing functions of the new generation of textbooks, noting that the construction of the textbook should be carried out not from the point of view of the logic and consistency of the subject learnt, but from the point of view of the students' personality development, their subjective inner world (Tareva, Schepilova, Tarev, 2017). According to Ya. V. Danielyan, despite the different approaches to the study of the textbook's role in the modern educational space, we can state the unity of scientists and teachers' views that the main purpose of a modern textbook is to teach how to acquire knowledge (to teach students to learn). A modern textbook must necessarily be accompanied by additional manuals — anthologies, laboratory workshops, problem books, and multimedia resources (Danielyan, 2009). G. G. Granik considers the structure of a school textbook as a subject of scientific research, develops and describes the structure of textbooks of a new type, based on the systematization and generalization of psychodidactic knowledge, fundamental and private research conducted by textbook authors, and examines the textbook's structural components (theoretical linguistic texts, theoretical psychological and didactic texts, artistic and cognitive texts of tasks). Those components are aimed at forming the psychological mechanisms of competent oral and written speech in schoolchildren, the development of their techniques for understanding a literary text, awakening emotions when it is perceived (Granik, 2017).

The discourse on the problems of the modern school textbook and its functions in the educational process is currently expanding in the context of large-scale reforms of national general education systems, in which the ideas of postmodernism are actively manifested. The paper examines the influence of postmodernism as the "spirit of the time" on the development of school education, its educational and methodological support, the central component of which is the textbook (Bokova, 2017). Postmodern trends, which are strengthened under the influence of the informational paradigm dominance — the leading

feature of the modern global world — have given rise to the culture of the information society. (U. Eco, J. Baudrillard, M. Castells, etc.). There is a conventional system, where the main problem is related to changing the way information is transmitted and consists in the need for subjects to preserve the ability to critically perceive information and to develop immunity to its persuasive power. This concept can serve as a basis for the improvement of school textbooks and educational - methodical complexes, and confirms the importance of such a function of the school textbook as the function of developing students' independent cognitive activity in the information space (Bokova, Malakhova, Tareva, 2020).

### **Methodology**

Determining the role of educational literature in the postmodern era for secondary education in Georgia is carried out in the study through a systematic approach that corresponds to the systematic nature of the object of study, which was the main methodological approach of our study. At the present stage of the pedagogical science development, the textbook is considered an integral system that is part of a more complex system of teaching. Many researchers of the problems connected with educational books have repeatedly pointed out the need for a deep functional analysis of the educational literature, designed to scientifically determine the purpose of each structural element as the primary condition for a truly scientific approach to the construction of its model. The didactic functions of an educational book are its purposefully formed properties (features) typical of a carrier of the content of education and the main learning tool that most fully meets the intended purpose of the educational book in the process of implementing the content of education. As an integral part of the system of teaching tools, a training book or an educational and methodological complex plays a special role in it. The tutorial is more complete and consistent than other components of the system, and implements its main functions. A textbook is a part of a more complex whole and a relatively independent system, where each element performs certain functions. The theoretical and methodological basis of the study is:

- philosophical studies devoted to postmodernism ideas' influence on national systems of general education, including the explication of philosophical ideas in the theory and practice of school textbooks (T. N. Bokova, G. D. Dmitriev, Elkina, S. V. Ivanova, M. A. Rozov, Marinosyan, etc.);
- the theory of the school textbook (V.G. Beilinson, S.M. Bondarenko, G. G. Granik, I. K. Zhuravlev, D. D. Zuev, N. F. Talyzina, S. G. Shapovalenko, etc.);
- modern conceptions of the school textbook (A. I. Arkhipova, E. G. Gelfman, I. D. Bregeda, E. N. Zhuzhza, I. N. Ponomareva, A. P. Tryapizyna, O. V. Kholodnaya).

Research methods: theoretical analysis of scientific literature; analysis of the results of previously performed research; analysis of Georgian school textbooks; content analysis of key research concepts; interviews; expert assessment.

## Results

The study of the textbook's role in the postmodern era for secondary education in Georgia required an appeal to the understanding of "content of education" category by representatives of this philosophical trend, which acts as a kind of "mainstream", the spirit of the time, a new cultural environment. The term "postmodernism" entered the scientific thesaurus at the end of the 20th century and now refers to the way of describing and understanding the modern world of western cultural life. The concept of postmodernism is actively developing as a growing motif of a trans-disciplinary perspective and a new form of interdisciplinary hermeneutics, giving rise to a new vocabulary, a new attitude to thought and meanings, a new method of world comprehension and a new attitude to it. Consequently, it gave rise to a new perception of the world on the grounds different from those in the situation of modernity (Ivanova, Bokova, 2020).

So what is the content of education for postmodernists? If we appeal to the original meaning of the word "curriculum" in its ancient Greek meaning (*currere* – direction), then the content of education should guide the student. The American researcher W. Pinnar suggests that this term can be considered as a synonym for the curriculum, which is the result of rethinking the educational experience, so it can often be changed: "We can say that "currere" is an ongoing project of self-understanding, in which a person as an intellectual becomes an active co-author of pedagogical action" (Pinnar, 2004, p. 4). At the same time, the curriculum should always reflect life experience, using ideas from the past, present and future to create a living and a changing, and therefore adapted to various innovations, educational environment.

According to W. Rowlands (2001), the content of education should focus on the student's personal experience, and not on external learning goals. Goals can appear during the learning process. At the same time, it's the student and not the teacher who has the right to put them forward. The teacher only offers his/her options for joint consideration during dialogue and negotiations. For J. Kincheloe, a postmodern vision of education is based on what he calls "post-formal thinking", the main feature of which is "the production of one's own knowledge" (Kincheloe, 1999).

So, educators are biased facilitators and co-"constructors" of knowledge (McCallum, 2020). As K. Thompson rightly observes, teachers are expected to use a variety of teaching approaches in their delivery of a lesson, to take account of the variety of students' 'learning styles', and, where possible, to 'facilitate'

lessons so that they are learner-centered. Tutors also spend time working out ‘learners’ pathways’ with students, so that their educational path is tailored to suit their future career aims (Thompson, 2019).

Moreover, postmodernism invites teachers to reject the developed "conditioned reflex on the content of education" (in P. Slattery’s terminology (2013)) as a set of general and specific goals, lesson plans and learning outcomes and to look at it as something vague, aesthetic, autobiographical, intuitive, eclectic and mystical. Postmodern education has no pre-defined general goals and standards, nor behaviorist specific goals or expected learning outcomes. The content of education for them is constantly (up to each lesson) an updated, nascent, emerging and changing phenomenon.

Following a postmodern mindset, the goal of education shifts from teaching academic knowledge and skills to providing a learning environment where learners create their own knowledge. The postmodern worldview is reflected in the National Education Standards of Georgia and the National Curriculum (2018-2024) (National Curriculum). Since gaining independence in 1991, Georgia now, in the context of globalization, is focused on western models of education for the younger generation, including the modernist educational project implemented in the United States.

The national curriculum of Georgia is based on a document of fundamental importance for the general education system — "National Goals of General Education" (2016), which specifies the education of which generations should be promoted by the general education system of Georgia. The main objective of the National Curriculum is to create the educational environment and resources necessary to achieve the national plans. In accordance with the goal, the focus is on an educational concept focused on personal development. At the center of the personality-oriented educational process is the student, the process of his development and the results achieved by him/her. Being result-oriented means not only memorizing information, but turning that information into solid, dynamic, and functional knowledge. Article 9 of Chapter II of the National Curriculum lists the types of educational resources that ensure the achievement of its main goals: a) labeled school textbooks; b) auxiliary literature; c) educational electronic resources; d) various visualizations (maps, posters, models, etc.); e) library, theater, museum, historical monuments, natural environment, etc. Administration of the process of awarding the mark/label to school textbooks is carried out by a specially created Center. Marking is the first stage of creating textbooks, during which their quality is evaluated by experts of the state commission. They determine which books meet the requirements of the National Curriculum and which do not. Since 2016, a consistent, systematic publication of textbooks for secondary school students in Georgia has begun.

Currently, the last stage, the grading of textbooks for the 9th grades, has started. The grading/markings takes

place in an electronic format on the platform of the education management information system. This makes it possible to involve Georgian specialists living abroad in the process of evaluating textbooks. In order for absolutely all interested parties, including schoolchildren's parents, to take part in it, textbooks' drafts are placed on the electronic portal for marking until a fixed date. It should be noted that the mandatory condition for placing a textbook on the portal is the presence of the following components: there is a book for students, a book for the teacher, a workbook and a disk with audio recordings. The book for teachers must contain the concept of the textbook, reflecting its main functions.

As an example, let's address a Russian language textbook for 9th grade (Russian language textbook) students of a Georgian school, who are at the basic level of education (the fifth year of learning Russian as a second foreign language). This textbook is currently available on the marking portal. The concept of the textbook, published in the book for teachers, notes that it follows the thematic and lexical-grammatical continuity with the textbooks of previous classes. This will ensure the students' consistent and logical transition to the stage of more detailed and in-depth study of the Russian language, taking into account the latest methodological developments and the requirements of the latest state standard. The textbook is presented in a set with a workbook for students, a book for the teacher and a disc with audio recording. The textbook consists of five thematic blocks. The first section includes seven lessons, and the remaining sections – 5 lessons each. The first block is designed presumably for 14-16 academic hours, the remaining blocks — for 10-12 hours. The textbook elaborates the educational topics in detail, the selection of those topics was guided by the recommendations of the State Standard, as well as the age interests, psychological characteristics and language capabilities of Georgian students. The goals of the textbook are formulated as the development of students' communicative competence, the formation of their skills for the functional use of the proposed amount of knowledge that will be necessary for the implementation of subsequent effective communication, the achievement of certain communicative goals. It serves to further develop students' specific competencies — first, listening and reading skills (level A2.3), as well as speaking and writing skills (level A2.2), it expands their vocabulary and develops cross-cutting competencies — communication, thinking and logical skills. The material contained in the textbook is structured according to the directions of listening/reading and understanding texts, as well as speaking and writing. Listening and reading the texts of the textbook implies that the students would apply those strategies that are aimed at understanding Russian-language texts, taking into account the specifics of the socio-cultural context, lexical and grammatical structural elements. The pre-text and post-text activities offered in the textbook are designed in such a way as to help the students to consistently construct the content of the text, which, ultimately, will allow them to relate this content to their own experience and knowledge, to form their own attitude to the text. At the same time, students are given the opportunity to analyze the difficulties themselves and plan ways to overcome them, which is very important from the point of view of developing



the skill of managing the learning process (metacognitive strategy). The implementation of the various activities contained in the textbook involves the use of strategies aimed at the implementation of oral and written communication. These activities will allow you to mobilize the students' previous knowledge and gradually produce speech. In this regard, the importance of the life-based dialogues offered in the textbook is noted: it allows playing out various situations from everyday life, which will undoubtedly increase the students' motivation to learn Russian. The ultimate and main goal of the textbook is to develop students' ability to carry out various activities in social contexts, which fully corresponds to the new paradigm of language didactics – the action-oriented approach.

In order to introduce Georgian students to the cultural context and to form a positive attitude towards Russian culture, the textbook includes adapted Russian literature pieces as well as video films, which promote intercultural dialogue, understanding of the shared and distinctive socio-cultural features of the two different countries, as well as the further development of students' communication skills. In addition, the textbook offers thematic dialogues, monologues, informational and pragmatic texts, and correspondence. Mastering such a diverse form and content of the material allows students to effectively carry out elementary oral and written communication in Russian in certain life situations, to use the acquired skills of reading, listening, speaking and writing. As already mentioned, the needs and interests of students belonging to the adolescent age category primarily determine the subject of the textbook. When compiling the textbook, the priorities that follow from today's global topics were taken into account.

The topics of the textbook are presented as follows:

Section 1: Let's travel!

Section 2: Life is great!

Section 3: The world we live in.

Section 4: Let's talk about professions.

Section 5: A little about Russian culture.

Each lesson of the section presents final tasks that have a purely practical focus and are aimed at students' creating a particular product (a project, a stand, a booklet, a video, a wall newspaper, a program, a questionnaire, a motivational letter, etc.). In addition, each block contains two complex tasks related in their content to specific life situations. Completing these tasks will require students to use their knowledge in an integrated way in functional contexts. At the end of the textbook, a Russian-Georgian dictionary is

given, in which new words from the textbook lessons are collected in alphabetical order. The organization of the grammar material of the textbook is based on the principle of following from simple to difficult, it is systematic and consistent. Students are introduced to the topic of the lesson or to a specific text of the lesson through illustrations and specially designed questions and tasks that stimulate students' ability to predict, allow them to guess the topic themselves and increase students' motivation to read the text. Such questions / tasks correspond to the strategies of "brainstorming", "I know, I want to know, I learned", "competing with the writer", etc. In other words, students receive knowledge not in a ready-made form, but by searching and finding, i.e. by the method of comprehension, which is consonant with the ideas of postmodernists. The speech and syntactic constructions given in the textbook are more complex, compared to speech models and syntactic constructions in the textbooks of grades 7 and 8, and are associated with those functional speech actions that correspond to the topics of the textbook. Grammatical models are constructed in the communicative speech situations presented in the textbook under the heading "Speaking". Multi-level interactive tasks and visual illustrative material of the textbook are designed to increase the level of students' independence in the perception and memorization of educational material, the development of their auditory and visual perception, the ability for creative thinking. When creating a textbook, the principle of a personality-oriented approach to learning is also used: taking into account the students' individual socio-psychological characteristics, their possible heterogeneity in terms of language training, and the presence of different (auditory and visual) types of perception. The proposed activities have a different degree of complexity, which meets the requirements of a differentiated approach to learning. These activities are intended for both individual, pair and group work, which helps to increase students' individual productivity and interest, develop their communication skills, tolerance, self-assessment and mutual evaluation skills.

### **Discussions**

The topics contained in the textbook assume that students have prior knowledge of other subjects. The workbook contains a variety of tasks intended for both classroom activities and independent homework. The purpose of these tasks is to consolidate the content and lexical material studied at the lesson, develop writing skills, and master practical grammar. The book for teachers contains a map of goals and results, general recommendations for using the textbook, lesson scenarios, final test tasks and keys to them. Note that the scenarios for the lessons also offer additional activities that allow the teacher to effectively work with a teenage audience that is heterogeneous in its cognitive and psychological characteristics. A disc, on which texts and dialogues intended for listening are recorded, accompanies the textbook.

We'd like to add a few words about the mechanism of assessment. As already mentioned, each section of

the textbook contains two complex tasks that allow students to focus on the key points of the lessons learned and implement their knowledge in functional contexts. The teacher is given the opportunity to evaluate students in accordance with pre-developed criteria. In addition, the textbook offers test tasks in all five sections, which are recommended to be done after revising the studied lexical and grammatical material. At the end of the workbook, reflexive self-assessment tables are given for students, which contribute to the development of their self-control and self-regulation skills, the ability to critically evaluate their educational activities.

It should be noted that we identified similar conceptual constructs when studying a number of other textbooks (textbooks of English, French, German as a second language for students of the 9th grade of the Georgian school). In total, 12 project versions of second-language textbooks were studied, which are currently being put up for evaluation on the Marking Center portal.

## **Conclusion**

The accumulated analytical material allowed us to state that the development of ideas about the role of the textbook in the reform of the national system of general education in Georgia in the late 20th – early 21st centuries takes place in the context of postmodern trends, strengthened under the influence of the information paradigm dominance – the leading feature of the modern global world. The function of developing students' independent cognitive activity in the information space comes to the fore. The postmodern era, along with the era of a postindustrial society development, makes its own demands on education. They consist not only in ensuring high quality teaching, but also in rejecting universal theories and the knowledge paradigm; moving to multiplicity and constant updating of content; suggesting each teacher an option to develop their own approaches, not to give "ready-made" knowledge, but to reflect in a dialogue with the student, generating the content of education directly in communication, relying not on the plan and summary of the lesson, but on the student's personal experience. Based on the ideas of postmodernism, a radical reform of the old education system (in our case in Georgia) is based on the understanding that there is no single method or style of teaching/management for all students and teachers. Proponents of postmodernism emphasize the uniqueness of each student who needs special forms of education and individual curricula, as well as of each educational institution employee who brings their own talents and skills to their work. Moreover, the Person himself, his/her moral position, his/her culture, education, and professional competence proclaim the basis for the development of a particular country and of all humankind.

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