



Vera Ž. Radović¹,
Duška Z. Mihajlović de Oliviera,
Teodora A. Todović

University of Belgrade, Teacher Education Faculty, Serbia

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Individualization in Teaching – A Conceptual-Methodological Challenge for the Didactics Theory and Teaching Practice²

Extended summary

The problem of individualization in teaching is at the epicenter of pedagogical and didactic research as a didactic principle (individualization, differentiation) and as a didactic system (individualized teaching). Individualization in teaching as a didactic principle is considered in accordance with the requirement that the school should be “tailored” to all students, i.e., that all students should be provided with optimal development in accordance with their individual abilities. The didactic system of individualized teaching is defined as a type of didactic organization in which the educational work is adjusted to the individual abilities, possibilities and interests of students. To what extent and how pedagogues, didactics experts, and methodologists have contributed to the critical consideration of the problem of individualization in teaching - is the question that motivated the research presented in this paper.

The aim of the research was to critically examine how the problem of individualization in teaching has been treated, and to draw lessons about conceptual and methodological approaches and implications for teaching practice in modern conditions. In researching how much and in what way the problem of individualization was treated in scientific and professional papers (in a selected sample of pedagogical periodicals) the method of theoretical analysis was chosen based on four units of analysis: the number of papers in relation to the total number of papers by the year of publication, the number of papers according to the current

1 vera.radovic@uf.bg.ac.rs

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classification of papers in the Journal, theoretical aspects from which the authors consider the problem of individualization in teaching (general didactic aspect or methodological in a narrower sense), and methodological approach (research methods and techniques). The analysis also includes the definitions of individualization in teaching and the implications that the authors of the papers (from the sample) draw in terms of student development and in terms of professional development of teachers. The sample consisted of scientific (original scientific papers, scientific reviews, and short scientific articles) and professional papers dealing with the problem of individualization in teaching, published in the journal *Teaching Innovations* since 1983, when the first issue of the Journal was published, until the last published issue No. 4 in 2020. The results of the research show that during 33 years of publishing the Journal, 63 papers were published in which the problem of individualization in teaching was treated, that the majority of the papers are professional papers, that analytical approach prevails in the research (literature analysis and the analysis of specific classes). The authors usually start from a general didactic approach, and the methodological aspect is most common in the treatment of individualization in the teaching of Serbian language and literature and mathematics. The authors most often view individualization in teaching as a didactic system of individualized teaching that has different organizational types or forms, and less as a didactic principle. The reason may be that most authors treat the issue of individualization outside the complementary process of socialization.

We have observed that the authors mostly see the greatest contribution of individualization in teaching in stimulating students' motivation for work, and they mainly explain this by the challenge that the tasks above the current level of knowledge represent for students. In addition to motivation, a very important student competence the development of which is supported by the individualization in teaching, there are also the competencies for independent learning (self-learning). There are also teacher competencies important for the application of individualization in teaching, to which the authors drew our attention: identifying individual differences among students, providing a quality individual instruction to students, planning and preparing classes in accordance with students' knowledge and experience, individual characteristics and educational needs of students, taking on the role of mentors, advisors and teaching assistants, as well as organization and implementation of remedial and supplemental classes.

Taking into account certain methodological limitations of this type of research, we concluded that conceptually the challenge for didactics experts, methodologists, and primary school teachers/researchers is to expand the study of individualization to other topics, apart from the application of certain types of individualized teaching, individualized work with gifted students, individualization of teaching using ICT, organization of remedial and supplemental lessons - which are the dominant topics in the analyzed works. In addition, a research challenge was set for didactics experts, methodologists, and teachers to think more about the possibilities of individualization in the teaching of other subjects and to present to a greater extent their research experience and results in scientific journals. That is why action research, lacking in this area, is important (research impulse from the practice of teachers/researchers, as well as cooperation with didactics experts and methodologists, and reflection on one's own practice).

Therefore, a qualitative paradigm is also important in the form of ideographically oriented research, or at least in the form of a quality foundation of the theoretical framework and connection with the methodological approach and interpretation of the research results.

Keywords: individualization, individualized teaching and learning, journal/Teaching Innovations, student, teacher.

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