

THE EDUCATION POLICY AND THE CURRICULUM REFORM IN ROMANIA

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Abstract:

Post-modern society calls for the educational process modelling imperiously in the direction of objectivizing the results in learning skills. In this regard, education in Romania went through a series of system and process transformation that we find objective in the strategies and measures of the most diverse. We note a lack of consistency in the implementation of educational reform plans that are justified on a complex case (macrosocial and microsocial causes). The analyses carried out at the level of educational policies since the 1990s and so far reveals a lot of changes in legislation which have not led to any specific increase in the quality of education. The present paper is a research on the measures of reform in Romanian education and offers a number of explanations regarding their implications at the level of the educational process.

Keyword: *education, curriculum, educational policy, reform, abilities.*

Introduction

The discussion on the necessity of reforming the educational system in the Romanian landscape were registered immediately after the events of 1989 when, together with changing the political discourse is advancing on the need for change. Specifically, the policies were imperiously designing a new model of actionable systemic and operational paradigm in education. Educational policies have targeted a sets of measures, programs, specialized institutions designed to act in the direction of specific changes in the characteristics of education system and level of educational process, with the aim of increasing the quality of the education. Comments related to education based on the training and skill development occurs in the 60s, especially in the American airspace. Subsequently, the signals related to the change of paradigm in education are identified in Asia and Europe. In Romania the speech is being carried out at a distance close to 40 years, with the reform in the field of European education policy, on a proposal from the European Commission. In this context, we identified numerous projections, some stoning and inconsistent that **not** allowed to obtain some quality indicators in education.

Educational policies in Romania-needs and perspectives

The projections on the reform of education in Romania have considered reforming the system-wide administrative reform – reform - and process-level education – the curricular reform. The stages of reform in the education policy (Tacea, Crișan, 2007) are delineated into four periods: reparative phase (1990-1993), preparatory curriculum-wide stage (1993-1997), own reform of the curriculum stage (1997-2000) and the major changes at the system level and the education process started in 2001 and continues today. At the curriculum level appeared the need for new philosophies of the place and role of the formal education system, its place and role in the level of the receivers of education. The educational policies representatives have drawn attention to the need for refocusing the over-simplified process of education, namely the transition from learning through learning objectives based on competence. The new paradigm of curriculum made its presence felt in the context of the need for harmonization of existing trends to education finalities in the European space (MEC, 2003). We appreciate the fact that, *“the compulsory education purposes are similar for most education systems and vocational training in Europe. They are obtained through compliance with the following principles: the concurrent real equality of opportunity; ensuring basic education for all; the concomitant promotion of stability and social change; preparing children for adult and active life, for leisure, family and society; preparing and motivating children to continue learning for a changing world”*.

Also, the policy on the accession of Romania to the European Union imposed an explicit framework for reform by changing the law on education in Romania. The National Education Law was supposed to meet new prospects of education (education for sustainable development, lifelong education, education for all, education through competence). Reparative phase level of the curriculum had in charge ridding off the elements of symbol and Communist ideology present in abundance in the school textbooks. The curriculum has been focused on a knowledge-based model by rebalancing the balance between knowledge, skills and attitudes. The learning objectives and levels were revised. With regard to the organization of the curriculum, it has waived the social disciplines with strong ideological Communist imprint (Marxist Philosophy, Political Economy) and replaced with new ones (Civic Education, Sociology, Psychology, s.a.). At the level of the curriculum, the number of hours have been reduced, through a reorganization of the time allocated to learning on the week unit. Reforming at the curriculum level requested the setting up of the approach to education at the level of process and system. In the reparative stage, the changes at the curriculum level there were stages, each stage being designed with indicators for qualitative and quantitative measuring. In this regard, the quality of curricula has been analyzed, the quality of the educational process, the measurements were done on indicators of performance in education. Differing diagnoses made at this stage have been proven that there were few curricular experts and the political consensus lacked as regards the directions and the priorities of the reform. In designing the curriculum model was envisaged the consultation with other models of education (the Netherlands, Finland, Canada, France, United Kingdom, United States of America, Australia, New Zealand). The World Bank was the one who expressed support in reforming the Romanian educational system (1991-1993). The reform started in the period 1994-1995, before the new law on education should enter into force (September 1995, subsequently amended in 1997). The first draft of the reform in education began in October 1994, a project that is co-financed by the Government and by the World Bank (Vlăsceanu, 2001). The education reform White Paper (1994),

as well as in the project documents of reformation of pre-university education (Education Reform Project-RO-3742), concluded and ratified through an understanding between the Romanian Government and the World Bank are to be found the main options related to curricular reform of pre-university education (Education Reform Project-RO-3742), concluded and ratified through an understanding between the Romanian Government and the World Bank.” The second great reform program began in 1995 and has received funding from the European Union through the PHARE programs. It has targeted restructuring professional/vocational education (OECD, 2000, p. 11). At the curriculum level, was aimed at designing the instruments for the curriculum. The preparatory stage - amending the curriculum has envisaged the preparation of human resources (training teachers, training trainers), the reorganization of the institutional capacity, the level of preparation for the reform instruments, training tools on specific curricular reform process (curriculum guides, instructions for designing curriculum, conducting sessions with the advisory role between specialists who would support reorganization and curricular design). They elaborated specific legislative documents such as: The Law of Education (1995), The Status of Teachers (1997). During this period, there were numerous concerns to identify and procure the financial resources necessary to education changes. Most have been obtained from the World Bank and the European Union, the resources that were exploited to make prerogatives on the reform in education: process-level and system-level. The process of change was extremely disjointed. Changing politics and the lack of political sustainability of the educational reform projects influenced the negative perspective of revivals in education (each minister felt the need for change, amid inconsistencies reported in the framework of the objectives of the system, but rather from populism). The lack of sustainability of education in the context of social and political transformations in post-modern society of the Romanian educational ideal altered the perspective of the vision concerning the place and role of education in systemic levels (families that no longer valued formal education, detached students in relation to their own school performance, schools with an increased rate of school failures, etc). According to data provided by the National Institute of Statistics (2016), in Romania, the Romanian education system, can be found a number of 3.7 million people, of which a significant percentage of the population belongs to pre-academic schoolchildren (85.5%) and the rest is represented by persons who are registered at academic level. These indicators reveal that in Romania, we identified a relatively low percentage of people of higher education, which puts Romania on a high place in Europe. Sociological surveys have identified a number of causes including: high school drop-out rate, the lack of clear prospects of inset, low professional wealth status, social inequality, family customs, culture, precarious family, etc.

The education policy and the curriculum reform

The curriculum reform itself begins after 1995 (table no.1). Thus, we can discuss about the reorganization of the educational plans and programs, alternative school textbooks (1999) as a sign of normalization at the level of comprehensive curriculum and subsequently commented and criticized (and today) from the perspective of teaching, and poor quality in the structuring of methodology, it was reorganized the methodology of examinations of the baccalaureate and capacity. In 1998 it was approved and implemented the National Curriculum for compulsory education. Directions of reform (Vlăsceanu, 2001, p. 9) within the curriculum in Romania considered the following aspects: *development, evaluation and implementation of new national*

curriculum; improvement of the teaching staff in anticipation of the introduction of the new curriculum and new school textbooks; improvement of the quality and objectivity of examination and evaluation in pre-university education; dissemination of educational programs and plans and creating textbooks; elaboration of occupational standards by targeting and implementing the validity content of technological training disciplines, the ways of testing and evaluation, the training programs in the enterprise; improving the mechanisms for financing and management of education.

The curriculum reform in Romania has acted towards the elaboration of a new national curriculum development and the provision of alternative manuals, the changing process by redirecting education and innovation in the teaching strategies, in accordance with the Mission of the Ministry of Education and Research: *“The systemic reform, effective and coherent, which generates the added value of the educational process in personal and professional development of each student, the future citizen, in the sustainable development of communities, representing the Ministry of Education and Research mission”*.

Table No. 1. Events relating to the reform of education in Romania

Year	Reinvigoration/educational events
1990-1994	Changes to plans and school programs; Reduction of compulsory education from 10 to 8 classes/levels;
1995	The Law of Education, Reorganization of educational plans; Draft reform of pre-university education RO3724
1997	The status of teachers
1998	Approval and implementation of the National Curriculum for Compulsory Education National curriculum - framework reference
1999	Alternative textbooks
2001	Approval of new plans for compulsory education and high school; Reconsideration of the evaluation system of school textbooks;
2002	Dissemination of key powers
2003	Approval of new educational plans and programmes for school class I and class X of the compulsory education; reference element, “competence”; The extension of compulsory education to 10 years.
2004-2005	Development of new educational plans and school programs for other classes of primary education, secondary education, respectively; reference element “competence”
2005-2006	Reviewing and developing into a new form of school programmes on skills for higher secondary education (classes XI-XII); reference element “competence”
2006	Competence is the organizer of the curriculum Competence will be at the basis for the selection of the learning organization and content, the training methods and the assessment procedures. Competence - the common denominator of all school documents and all training courses, from pre-school education to the high school.

2007	Generalization of learning based on competencies for the secondary education
2008	Replacing the reference framework targets/general/competence specific competences
2009	New amendments of educational plans (syllabuses for secondary school (classes V to VIII);
2011	The Law on Education no. 1/2011 Reinforcing the role of the regulatory competences through provisions (article. 4.)
2011-2013	The amendment and approval of new framework plans for upper secondary education
2013	The amendment and approval of new framework plans for primary education
2016	The amendment and approval of framework plans to lower level

In conclusion, it may be noted that, at the level of educational policy there was not a coherent vision of the Ministry of Education regarding the educational ideal. This fact is demonstrated in particular by the many changes at the level of curriculum, in the dynamic plan they are described after a broken line.

The educational ideal of the Romanian school consists in the development of free, full and harmonious human individuality, in training the autonomous personality and in taking a system of values that are necessary for the fulfilment and the personal development, for the development of entrepreneurship, for the citizen participation in society, to social inclusion and employability on the labour market - the law on Education No. 1/2011, article 2 (3).

Changes of educational paradigm

The political change has generated extensive inconsistency with regard to the organization of the educational system and the educational process. In this framework, the intervened approach reported to be made in the context of the constraints put on the market by the European Commission or the power usage (some ministers and politicians from boards of education have felt the need once with the political change, also changes in education to be made (paradigm shifts). Although we discuss about a generalization as regards the reconstruction of the school programmes on levels of competences, we note in the actual practice multiple approaches in terms of teaching design and in terms of competences. We successfully find within the design of the teaching expressions like: “derived competences, “educational objective competences”, with “specific competences” and “operational targets”. Beyond this framework, at the system level we chiefly identify a pedagogical model based mainly on the formation and development of the cognitive competences at the expense of those attitudinal and instrumental applied, which generate suspicion with regard to education, education for a sustainable development. Criticisms are mostly related with the quality of the educational process in the precariousness context at the level of material resources (learning materials) but also at the level of quality and professionalism of the teaching staff (sub-qualification as well as the lack of availability of teaching in the educational process and

educational divides into accord with the new paradigms of competence: constructivist, functionalist, interactionist perspective; also, there were oversized and overfilled the teachers' classes and the teaching school programs.

In a research conducted by the Institute of Education Science (Apostu et al., 2015) it is found that a teacher shall be an average of a number of 19 students/at the primary level, at the secondary level: 10 students/teacher in rural areas and 12 students/teacher in urban areas; at the upper secondary level, 16 students/teacher in urban areas and 15 students/teachers in rural areas. This may constitute an impediment in achieving an instructive-educational process quality based on the formation and development of the competences required by the knowledge society. Education through absorbing competences comes as the issue of functional illiteracy.

Although analyses made in the direction of measuring the cognitive skills and instrumental-applied ones in the social life, to the beneficiaries of education services in the various educational systems in the world, reveal the presence of *functional illiteracy* (UNESCO, 1978) that the researchers classified it as a *socio-educational problem* of postmodern society (Anghel, G. A. 2014, Esi, C, Clipa, O. (coord). The reports made by the Organization for the Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in 2013, on the state of global education in respect of the performance of pupils in maths tests, have positioned Romania on 45 place of 65, between the states of the world [1]. According to the results obtained from these tests, 40.8% of Romanian students have achieved poor results and the only 3.2% very good results. In the case of an assessment of competencies, the score obtained positioned Romania on 50 of 65, and in science to place 49 of 65. The results of Romanian students, not encouraging, have led to the initiation of discussions with respect to predictions regarding the effects of existing precariousness at the system level and the educational process on the development of social development. The plea relating to the consequences of functional illiteracy shall take into account, on the one hand the implications of personal development, and on the other hand the impact on long-term social development. A functionally illiterate person is a person who has no knowledge to instigate activities to ensure the effective operation of the group or the community for the purpose of personal and social development. About this scourge was still spoken early on, after the second World War II when, at the planetary level was accentuated this plea related to basic literacy. Since the 1950s-1960s was brought into question not only the problem of illiteracy as a present problem at social level, but also to functional illiteracy, whose increased prevalence exerts a negative impact on social development.

Conclusions

The curriculum reform in Romania intended to be projected from a desire to answer the needs of society while respecting the principles: consistency with actual developments and trends in social, national and European standards in the field of education, with the decentralization of the curricula - that is, shifting the emphasis from general education to individualized education with equal opportunities, ensuring quality education. The results of education, at the level of specific quantified indicators, in Romania, draw attention to the fact that the Romanian educational success must lead by 2020 in the performance of the following indicators: decreasing the dropout

school at 11.3% and the absorption rate and at the level of tertiary education to rise to 26.7%. It is considered that these indicators can be grasped only in conditions of increasing financial investments system-wide and reconsidering the role of education in the social development.

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