

EDUCATION – IMPORTANT COMPONENT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Rezumat. *Lucrarea abordează aspecte privind educația, sistemul educației, instituția educației și prezintă în mod critic starea de sănătate a învățământului superior din România în contextul internațional actual și face propuneri concrete privind îmbunătățirea calității educației în scopul asigurării condițiilor favorabile dezvoltării durabile a acesteia.*

Abstract. *The present paper tackles certain issues regarding education, the educational system, the institution of education and it aims to provide a critical perspective on the Romanian higher education wellbeing in the contemporary international context. The outcome of the paper is to set forth specific recommendations regarding the improvement of education quality in order to ensure proper conditions for its sustainable development.*

Keywords: Education, sustainable development, Romanian higher education, contemporary international context.

1. Education, Education System, the Institution of Education

NODEX (2002) defines education as a set of measures systematically applied and designed to train and develop the intellectual, moral and physical characteristics of people.

Education has become a social phenomenon evolving throughout history according to the spiritual and material circumstances of society. The statement of Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746-1827) that “the individual becomes human only by means of education” as well as the fact that the development of society can only be attained by means of genuine people will fully testify to the significance of education in society.

The mission of education is to train people with fundamental cognitive, social and affective competencies enabling them to accomplish real professional performance, as well as with creative ones in a working environment marked by rapid changes. Education should teach us how to live, acquire knowledge, perform

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and live together in harmony. In keeping with the principles of sustainable development education should meet the needs of the present without compromising any opportunities for future generations in addition to meeting its own needs and societal ones on a long-term basis.

The entire educational process is organized and integrated within an educational system which includes the whole set of institutions of any given society (so-called educational institutions) related and dedicated to the education of individuals at a particularly given time. The educational system represents a sub-system of the global social system closely connected with the healthcare sub-system.

Here is a representation of the educational system in Figure 1.



Fig. 1. The institution of education.

A relevant representation of education is given in Figure 2.



Fig. 2. The institution of education.

2. Critical Analysis of the Higher Education System in Romania

The paper focuses on a critical analysis of the higher education system in Romania setting forth specific recommendations for the quality improvement of Romanian higher education meant to provide its sustainable development.

An analysis of the results of Romanian higher education system leads to the following conclusions:

- There is a great gap between theory and fact, meaning that education is a national priority stipulated by law and reality
 - Allocation of insufficient resources to education from the state budget
 - Lack of a coherent system reform, shared by presidency, academy and ministry subsequent to ample debate with all stakeholders
 - Romanian society is a reactive one prone to passivity
 - Lack of genuine educators
 - Lack of motivation and incentives for teaching staff
 - Lack of necessary infrastructure with a view to attaining quality results
 - Lack of balance between theory and practice in the academic curriculum (professional recognition)
- Minimum focus on student-centred education
- Poor connection between higher education and the business community

- Inappropriate understanding of democracy in the higher education system
- Insufficient application of modern technology in the teaching-learning process
- Lack of public responsibility of stakeholders in the educational process
- Poor academic management
- Low trust in the higher education system
- Politically-dependent organizations in the area of higher education quality assessment
- Adaptation of study programs to the needs of society
- Inappropriate strategy towards school-student interaction
- Lack of organizational culture highlighting the responsibility of each stakeholder

3. International Context

All these take place in a contemporary international context:

- Continuing economic and social crisis;
- Critical level of unemployment;
- Increasing youth marginalization;
- Demographic changes;
- New migration patterns;
- Increasing conflicts within and among states;
- Increasing extremism and radicalization.

4. Proposals to Improve the Quality of Education

As stated in the presentation of the key aspects of Romanian higher education, for an appropriate reform to be possible and in order to focus our efforts on measures capable of ensuring sustainable development, we should always keep in mind what Peter Drucker used to say: “Education feeds the economy and shapes the society, and learning is a lifelong process.” In the same vein, Benjamin Britten (1913-1976) pointed out that “learning is like a paddling against the current: as soon as you stop, you are pushed back.”

Earmarking necessary resources is a vital requirement for the whole process of education. That is why even the 6% of GDP to be earmarked for education is an elusive value that does not take into account what we and the society desire,

namely the sustainable development of education. The need for a steady system reform and not a mere curricular reform will create the prerequisites for an efficient education. Genuine reform must ensure the protection and well-being of the individual, in the circumstances of ensuring democratic freedom in close connection with responsibility. “Genuine reform is backed up by legislative stability,” said Spiru Haret, the founder of the modern Romanian school, who, as early as the nineteenth-century, referred to what we now call the sustainability of the educational system. We do not have to conduct experiments in education as the educational system is an inertial system, and what we are sowing now we may never reap. I believe that in the educational system, any intervention must meet one of Philip Crosby’s basic principles, the principle of “Zero defects,” by which we should do our job right the first time - DRIFT (Do It Right the First Time).

We need to turn our society into a proactive one, in other words, we need to act preventively, to develop much more cost-effective prevention strategies. Specialists in the field emphasize that the development of education itself is a preventive strategy.

Another vital strategy for ensuring the sustainable development of education and the building of a quality education system is the role model teacher whose attributes are the following:

- moral integrity;
- fairness;
- dignity;
- honesty;
- prestige;
- motivation.

The role model teacher has proved to be the most effective and efficient agent of education and learning.

Constantin Noica used to say: “You learn a lot from everybody, but the teacher is only the one who can teach you how to learn.” The more role model teachers a school has, the more notable characters they will be able to mould. One of the great nineteenth-century educators, Grégoire Girard, a contemporary of another great educator, Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, used to say: “A teacher has to learn a lot to teach another a little.”

The teaching profession is complex and involves the following:

- very good command of the mother tongue;
 - good professional training based on significant internship;
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- teaching skills;
- psychology-related skills;
- the skills of an actor, a role teachers play throughout their lives.

In order for teachers to be able to gain these skills, their place in the society should be reconsidered, and this implies, first and foremost, motivating them.

Unless we invest in role model teachers, we will be faced with the worst crisis in education. One needs a new approach to modernizing infrastructure to lend support to education and quality learning with suitable specialised laboratories, that is virtual, scientific research and business laboratories.

An improvement is also needed in terms of the balance between theory and practice in the curriculum. The lack of such balance is a risk in education or in the profession. Education should be student-focused, it should concentrate on what they can actually do, and not on their theoretical knowledge.

Quality education is the result of the synergic activities of the teacher, student, school, and society as a whole, and must be supported by a broad platform of legally-driven partnerships. Democracy is an asset gained in Romania, but it is difficult to understand and apply. The former U.S. President Abraham Lincoln defined genuine democracy as “government of the people, by the people, for the people.” In contemporary Romania, Petre Tutea defined democracy as “the triumph of quantity over quality, the approval of the masses.” This process of an accurate understanding of what democracy really means is a necessity in Romania.

Another prerequisite for improving the quality of education is the emphasis on the quality and relevance of the learning and teaching process by promoting:

- innovative teaching and learning methods;
- the use of digital techniques;
- specialized virtual laboratory facilities;
- the enhancement of creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship.

Life has shown that the university product is the result of the joint effort of university actors and external stakeholders, of the representatives of the entire society. For the higher education management, public responsibility for the quality of the university product is major [2]. The quality of senior university managers is thus vital, and this implies finding the best systems and procedures of selecting quality managers, that can boost confidence in the quality of the higher education system [3, 6, 12].

Evaluation processes for the authorization and accreditation of academic programs by accredited assessment agencies that are subservient to political parties distort the quality of the higher education system.

Therefore, these agencies must be neutral, and assessment experts should be bound by no contract of employment with any university in the Romanian higher education system [5, 7].

A reassessment of accredited study programmes in relation to labour market demand and new scientific and scientific and technological breakthroughs is needed.

We have found a completely wrong national strategy as to setting up and closing down schools according to the principle of economic efficiency, which sheds light on the most important asset of a society, namely the human capital.

In this case, a paradigm shift in the school-student relationship is needed, so that “the student follows the school” should turn into “the school follows the student.”

A vital element in involving all actors in the educational process is building up on everyone’s responsibility for their mission and important tasks [1, 3, 4].

Conclusions

In conclusion, a consideration of the proposals set forth above can ensure a better quality of education in our country and favourable conditions for a sustainable development of the educational system.

Moreover, conditions that are favourable to boosting confidence in the higher education system will be met in order to build an inclusive society based on democratic values and human rights, thus creating opportunities of securing skills and abilities, innovation and employability.

We are aware that sustainable development is achieved in a political, economic and social context marked by globalization, liberalization, democratization and a clearer configuration of power centres.

Reality has proved that education underlies the fulfilment of economically, socially and environmentally sustainable development conditions within the context of security provision and that education makes us act accordingly [13].

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