

EDUCATIONAL POLICIES OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

(Politicile educaționale în Uniunea Europeană)

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Educația penetrează din ce în ce mai mult sfera publică și socială, motiv pentru care politicile educative fac obiectul unei dezbateri naționale. În plus, la nivelul Statelor membre, influența Uniunii Europene în materie de politici educative este crescândă. Metoda deschisă de coordonare nivelează trecerea de la inter-guvernamentalism la integrare. Uniformizarea sistemelor de educație ale țărilor europene se realizează prin intermediul competențelor -cheie, programelor de mobilitate și strategiilor europene. În cadrul acestui articol, ne propunem să ne prezentăm elementele esențiale ale politicilor educative ale Uniunii Europene, cu focalizare pe fundamentele juridice și pe « trusa educativ-politică » propusă Statelor membre. Reiese că, dat fiind acest context de risc permanent, educația trebuie să rămână un serviciu public și o competență națională.

Cuvinte-cheie: *politici de educație, metoda deschisă de coordonare, criteriile comune de referință, competențe-cheie*

Introduction and general context

At current time, educational policies burst into a stronger and stronger debate related to the societal and human consequences. At juridical level, despite of an accelerated europeanization and globalization, education remains a state competence, keeping on national governments. But at European Union level, it can be remarked a strong influence of this organization in matter of educational policies for the Member States. Through the open cooperation method, the European Union intervenes in the *educational policies*, proposing mobility programs, a European certification system, common reference criteria and key competences to the Member States. In this article, we will focus on the *educational policies* of the European Union, mainly on the juridical foundations and the „educational kit” of the European Union: mobility programs, European educational strategies and key competences. We will conclude with a focalized analysis on the impact of European Union’s educational vision on the Member States.

Main juridical foundations of the education policies in the European Union

As from its origins, the European Union is a pure economic organization, and education does not appear into the founding treaty. The main object of European Union, at the beginning, consisted only in sharing natural resources for assuring economic prosperity for the first six Member States. At scientific level, educational policies are defined as regrouping action programs from a public authority addressing to scholarly public (Rayou et al, 2011).

On one side, in the sight of promoting the common market, Article 128 of Rome Treaty makes an explicit mention to the „professional training” (Rome Treaty, 1957), emphasizing that an exclusive state competence – the education – did not make part of the initial preoccupations of the European Union. Only in 1985, through the Gravier Resolution, it is made the juridical transition from the professional training to the education made by the academic education system. This resolution represents a major „turning” (Frazier, 1995) in this field, opening the road to a more and more accentuated implication of European Union in the educational policies restructuring.

The implication of European Union in the national educational policies was slowly made, as the juridical context did not permit such thing. But, along the time, juridical subterfuges (Rușitoru, 2013) were created: the preamble of the Amsterdam Treaty (1997) makes for the first time reference to education, following that the Maastricht Treaty (1992) consecrates an article for the right to education. At present, educational policies at European level are legally founded on the Article 165 of the Lisbon Treaty (2009). Complementary, the education is included in Article 14 of the Fundamental Rights Chart of the European Union (2000). In virtue of such juridical „promotions”, the education steps out of the „semi-clandestine” position (Pépin, 2006), making space for an increasing European intervention.

On the other side, since the beginning there was a political will of European deciders, more or less explicit, to transform the education into a competence of European Union resort. Given that education shapes the mentalities and personalities of citizens, the national deciders opposed to such competence transfer from national to European level. Corresponding to its configured juridical context, the education enrolled, initially, into an inter-governmental step (Pépin, 2006). In virtue of this groundwork, the Member States keep the „monopoly” upon education, collaborating at the same time for the improvement of the educational policies. At the beginning of the year 2000, at European level, there was introduced the so-called lifelong learning education, „the open coordination method” (European Commission, 2001). Various researchers, like Goetschy (2004) or Dehousse (2004) manifested reluctance against this method, considering it „a subtle manner of bypassing the solidarity principle” (Goetschy, 2004), according to which the Member States are the only ones who can independently act in some activity fields, including education.

The open coordination method is broadly based on:

- 1) mutual evaluation of educational partners;
- 2) sharing of good practices;
- 3) common reference criteria.

The above mentioned criteria were established at European scale within two strategies: Lisbon 2010 and Europe 2020. Member States are thereby requested to reach specific common objectives related to the participation at pre-school education or at lifelong learning, at school leave or at university studies graduation. All the juridical – political instruments are directing the educational policies toward „integration”, meaning the overtaking of inter-governmentalism and the creation of common policies on education for all the Member States (Martin, 2011).

At present, the debate regarding this matter is strong, but the leveling of education systems of different European countries is counterproductive and contrary to the liberty principle, so much circulated at European and international level.

The European Union’s „educational kit” proposed to the Member States

As explained above, the European Union has an integrationist policy for education, trying through different actions to involve into the national policies and to impose Member States some educational measures. These initiatives can be configured in more categories, such as: the common reference criteria, the key competences and the mobility programs.

The reference criteria are a set of indicators appointed for the Member States. In the Lisbon 2010 European strategy, there were defined 5 indicators:

- 1) mother tongue competences;
- 2) school leave;
- 3) graduation of gymnasium cycle;
- 4) participation at lifelong learning education;
- 5) university diplomas in mathematics, sciences and technology (European Union, 2003/C134/02).

Given that this strategy was a real European failure, a new strategy was promoted for the next decade. The Europe 2020 Strategy initially appointed 5 indicators too:

- 1) participation at pre-school education;
- 2) participation at lifelong learning education;
- 3) acquisition of base competences;
- 4) school leave;
- 5) graduation rate of the university system (European Union, COM 2010)

Subsequently, there were made additional efforts to adding 3 more indicators, referring to the foreign languages competences, mobility and insertion in the labour market.

As regards the mobility, it looks like the European programs for promoting mobility among students are acknowledged as having the biggest success among European initiatives. In the 80's, the European Union launched the mobility programs, the well known Erasmus, Comenius, Leonardo da Vinci and Grundtvig. Comenius was created for the promotion of mobility among pupils, teachers and social partners, in order to stimulate the pedagogical practices and improvement of foreign languages (Popescu, 2014). Created in 1987 and designed for students, the Erasmus program can be qualified as the „educational success” of the European Union. The Leonardo program addressed mainly on the employees and persons enrolled in professional training, meanwhile Grundtvig was focused on sustaining adults in internships (Popescu, 2014). At present, all these mobility programs were regrouped in the generic title „Erasmus +” (Life Long Learning Program 2013-2020).

At the same time, the European Union established in 2006 a series of key competences which must retrieve into the educational offer of each Member State. There are 8 key competences (European Union, 2006):

- 1) mother tongue communication;
- 2) foreign languages communication;
- 3) base competences in mathematics, sciences and technology;
- 4) numerical competences;
- 5) „learning to learn” competence;
- 6) social and civic competences;
- 7) entrepreneurial and initiative spirit;
- 8) sensitivity and artistic expression.

This panoply of competences does not target the whole human personality development, because it lacks the reference to moral and spiritual values.

All these elements: mobility programs, reference criteria and key competences, are the policy foundation of education at European scale. Correlated with the juridical principles and the open cooperation method, these elements configure the official direction of European Union in matter of educational policies.

Conclusions

In the context of a rapid Europeanization, the educational policies tend to pass from the Member States competence to the European Union resort. The passing from „inter-governmentalism” to „integration” in matter of education is done more and more rapidly through the open coordination method, through the common reference criterias and through the key competences.

Regularly, new pedagogical, juridical and political instruments are created in order to overcome the non-interference principle and to make the uniformization of educational systems. It is circulated the hypothesis that at university level it can already be seen the „common space of research”. In the vision of European deciders, adepts of integrationism, the next step would be the transfer of this „common university space” to the mandatory education level. Besides the fact that the harmonization of educational systems would violate the

juridical principles in force at present, this thing would reduce the European liberty and diversity, leading to the ceiling of national knowledge systems. For this reason, it is imperative that educational policies must remain a public service addressed to all social categories and to function as a national competence, the state being the solely authority of decision in this matter.

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THE RESULTS OF A QUESTIONNAIRE ON THE GUIDELINES, DIRECTIONS AND STRATEGIES IN MODERN TEACHING

(Rezultatele aplicării unui chestionar privind principalele orientări, direcții și strategii în didactica modernă)

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Sunt recunoscute de didactica modernă următoarele orientări, respectiv direcții de cercetare și acțiune: acțiunea de prospectare; reevaluarea și selectarea conținutului învățământului tehnologic adaptat la noile cerințe ale cuceririlor științei și tehnicii; intensificarea procesului de învățare astfel încât într-un timp scurt procesul de asimilare de cunoștințe și abilități să fie realizat; creșterea și valorificarea potențelor educative ale instrucției; asigurarea unui raport profesor-elev; orientarea spre educația permanentă; asigurarea unui feed-back permanent; desfășurarea activității pe grupuri și microgrupuri; valorificarea mijloacelor tehnice moderne și elaborarea metodologiilor de utilizare a lor în scop didactic; elaborarea unei metodologii a cercetării științifice.

Lucrarea elaborată prezintă câteva opinii ale cadrelor didactice din învățământul preuniversitar și universitar din județul Harghita referitor la aceste orientări/respectiv direcții de cercetare și acțiune. S-a realizat o cercetare constatativă având ca scop creșterea eficienței predării - învățării - evaluării învățământului din țara noastră.

Cuvinte-cheie: didactica modernă, județul Harghita, chestionar, programe școlare

Introduction

At the onset of the third millennium new modern teaching dimensions, trends and guidelines are well defined.

According to *The Didactics of Technology Education*, didactics research studies focuses on aspects such as psycho-pedagogical research, prospection or digitalization of education (M. Marinescu, 2009, pp. 117-118). New guidelines force us to rethinking some pedagogical components or principles, to adopt a specific type of approach to content, new ways of training the trainers and new educational policies. A. Toffler's remark that "*the illiterate of tomorrow will not be the one who can not read, but the one who has not learned how to learn*", expresses the reality of the Romanian education. „*Sine experientia nihil sufficienter sciri potest*” (Roger Bacon's *Opus majus*, 1267-8) (Without experience nothing can be known sufficiently), but the experience needs knowledge too.

The aim of this research is to provide a radiography of the Romanian education for both high school and university level, focusing on Harghita county.

The sample consists of 40 high school and university teachers, who accepted to answer the questionnaire.

Research data collection methods

– questionnaire-based survey. *The questionnaire has eight questions, the answer time is 1 hour (Appendix 1);*

– interview.

The two methods are part of qualitative pedagogical research.

Interpretation of responses

After processing the data, a radiography of the educational process was performed. The teachers' answers unfolds issues like trends and guidelines in modern teaching, current

instruction and education problems faced by local communities and the status of the teacher in the Romanian society.

The **first two items** were ment to provide a truncated SWOT matrix for the secondary and university education in Romania. Starting from the obtained results, the strengths, weaknesses and opportunities were idetified.

Strengths:

- 40% - the „other type of school" programme, the week of extracurricular and nonacademic activities (Appendix 2);
- 32% - the emphasis on applicative curricular and extracurricular activities; developing practical skills;
- 18% - encouraging the teaching - learning creativity for both teachers and student, the inventiveness, the introduction of the new (presenting the latest science achievements);
- 9% - refers to tuition fees for both state and private universities, private school education, the teachers` concern for leisure education, for new education directions (eg. nutrition education);
- 1% - non-responses.

Weaknesses:

- 41% - overloaded curriculum and discipline sheets;
- 36% - teacher salaries;
- 19% - lack of up to date textbooks, and outdated content in case of secondary education. The university discipline sheets are updated;
- 4% - relate to marginal use of experimental methods (modern methods of teaching and assessment), ineffective teacher-student collaboration.

Opportunities:

- 60% - providing appropriate educational resources and facilities in schools; professors concern for deepening theoretical and practical knowledge of subjects taught, atteding additional and psychopedagogical courses; concern for self-improvement; organizing tenure competitions with great strictness, focusing on professional skills and teaching ability of teachers;
- 40% - relates to career education, educational and vocational guidance, counseling students.

The **second item** capture responses that relate to the strengths and weaknesses of the curriculum and how to optimize its content.

The following strengths were identified:

- increased efficiency of the „other type of school” programme;
- sufficient bibliographical sources (references) to acquire and assimilate the theoretical and practical content of the course/lesson;
- digitalization in education;
- good equipment of laboratories with computers, projectors (emphasis on prospective thinking of students);
- other issues relate to centering the discipline sheets/curriculum on skills, focusing on the formative aspect of teaching activities.

Weaknesses:

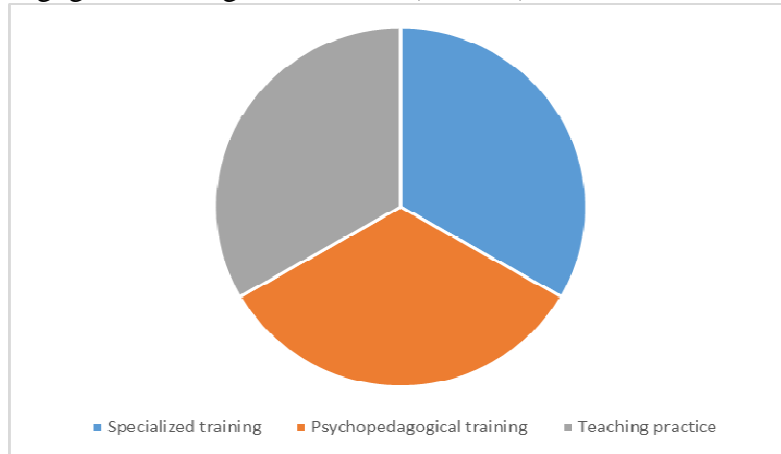
- teachers (discipline holders) do not put stress on giving and receiving feed-back;
- the curriculum/discipline sheets are not developed in groups of teachers, but individually;
- do not integrate the latest scientific findings.

Opportunities:

- giving and receiving feedback;

- consulting a large number of teachers in the elaboration process of school programs (including teachers who teach in rural areas);
- discipline sheets in higher education to be presented in the departments;
- developing evaluation form of the scientific content of the course by students and teachers.

In the **third item**, teachers were invited to rank according to importance the specialized and psychopedagogical training as well as the teaching practice for a teacher. As shown in Fig. no. 1, there is no significant difference between the ranked features, the results are as follows: the teaching practice (34.23%) is followed by specialized training (34.05%), but the score for psychopedagogical training is also close (31.72%).



▪ **Fig. no. 1.** Graphical representation of importance: specialized training, psychopedagogical training and teaching practice

The **fourth item** asked the particularly important *modern teaching guidelines* to be marked by each subject. The results were the following:

- *prospecting* 1%
- *reassessment and selecting the content of education, the insertion into the curriculum of knowledge, skills and competencies essential to keep up with the accelerated acquisition rhythm of science and technology and to prepare the young generation for the future* 33%
- *intensify the learning process so that in a short time assimilating knowledge and skills to be achieved* 5%
- *accelerating the digitalization of education* 15%
- *orientation towards lifelong learning* 1%
- *ensuring a permanent feedback* 22%
- *organizing the activities in groups and micro-groups* 11%
- *utilizing modern technical means and develop methodologies for using them for teaching purposes* 10%
- *developing a methodology of scientific research* 2%

High percentage, 33% was obtained by the *reassessment and selecting the content of education, the insertion into the curriculum of knowledge, skills and competencies essential to keep up with the accelerated acquisition rhythm of science and technology and to prepare the young generation for the future*. The younger generation needs to be prepared for a future that may also be uncertain. According to the prospective pedagogy, today's generation will find its forces only 10 – 15 years later.

Jacques Delors is credited with the provision of the most complete definition of