Ensuring access to education through inclusion and equity

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Mirela Liliana Lazăr (Munteanu)
mirela1212@yahoo.com
University of Oradea

Abstract

This article examines the opportunity for access to education in terms of orientation and continuous change of the whole educational process. Every child has the right to education. The right to education is a concept that is based on the right to have access to education, the right to quality education and the right to respect within the learning environment. Starting from this premise, the interest in the study of inclusion and equity in education is a challenge to identify barriers to inclusion and equity in education and society. Since joining the European Union, the programs aimed at increasing access to education for disadvantaged groups have also started to be implemented in Romania. According to Romanian legislation, access to education is provided without any social and material discrimination, without differences based on nationality, religion, ethnicity, sex or political choice.

Key words: education, inclusion, equity

Introduction

Education is a social phenomenon which, through the action and influence of individuals' interaction, develops socialization and expresses educability in all age groups. Education conveys cultural values, responds to the individual's specific needs according to the changes in social life, is present at all ages and is a formative factor (Schifirnet, 2004). Sociologist Emile Durkheim defines education as a formative action performed by adult generations on future generations through which a social person is being shaped. Therefore, the social being is formed on the assumption that in each individual there are two beings which, although distinct, are also inseparable. Thus, the first relates to the individual part of all personal mental conditions, and the second refers to the system of ideas and feelings which do not express the personality of the individual, but the membership of the group to which he belongs. Durkheim opposes a general definition of education, as it has multiple variations depending on cultural values and geographical areas (Durkheim, 1980).

Chand Basha and Ramana (2018), define education as a continuous changing factor that includes alternatives to the development of human behavior that enable integration into society. The path of education to social behavior and self-respect eliminates the deterioration of values in society, which develops the core of both educational goals and ideals.

When developing a society, education is a fundamental aspect in forming the next generation and its social needs. The value system in education has two components: the first one shows a form of moral and ethical preparation with specific and moral values with assumptions about how

students learn and their personality, while the second component shows the role of extracurricular activities that lead to easy integration into society (Mahmood, Rizvi and Perveen, 2017). Education must shape today's generation for tomorrow's society, ready for the challenges it will face in the future. Teaching the principles, values and guidelines to the future adults must be a priority for the education system. To contribute to the future of society, education needs continuous debates in order to identify challenges, focusing on long-term values and perspectives (Besson, Huber, Mompoint-Gaillard and Rohmann, 2014)

Education as stated by (Kingston, 2000) is the most important aspect contributing to socialization by familiarizing knowledge and value formation. From the perspective of social theories, education, apart from the family, is the opportunity for society to convey knowledge, values and rules through a defining process, in order to prepare current young people for adult roles. The role of education according to the sociology of education is not only that of the main shaping factor leading to socialization, but also that of the decisive effect of the social environment

In industrialized societies, Durkheim (1925) states that the role of education is to train children in a certain area of activity, while in traditional occupational societies this process is carried out by the family. The education system needed in order to train skills in different specialized fields was created when society generated challenges that refer to the services of obtaining certain goods. A different approach to education is presented by American sociologist Talcott Parson who presents it as a value of the child's individual achievement, but which cannot be achieved in the family, but is acquired in schools due to meritocracy (Giddens, 2010).

Education underpins the economic development of any society. The Education Law has as its vision: "the promotion of value-oriented education, creativity, cognitive capacities, volitional capacities and acting capacities, fundamental knowledge and knowledge, skills and abilities of direct use, in the profession and in society, and its mission is to train the mental infrastructure of the Romanian society, in accordance with the new requirements, derived from Romania's status as a Member of the European Union and from operating in the context of globalization, and from the sustainable generation of a highly competitive national human resource capable of functioning effectively in current and future societies". Education generates skills for children through the training of knowledge and skills, useful for personal development, social integration, fostering intercultural dialog and a spirit of dignity, and last but not least, "fostering awareness of human issues, moral and civic values and respect for the nature and the natural, social and cultural environment. " (Law of National Education No 1/2011, updated, 2019, Art. 2-4).

Equal educational opportunities

In the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the right to education is granted on the principle of equal opportunities, while primary education takes the form of compulsory and free education, providing guidance and counselling, and frequent incentives in order to reduce abandonment. Every society must ensure access to education respecting the fundamental human rights and fostering respect for the children's cultural, local and national values. Equality in education is the removal of obstacles to the minimum in order to prioritize the acquisition of skills leading to inclusion, regardless of personal or social circumstances (gender, ethnic background, family). The priority of the countries that are members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) is education, the investment being focused on prevention of school failure and reduction of school drop-outs through equity and inclusion. Education policies on equity in education eliminate the ethnic background or family background of the child in order to redress the effect of inequalities. The school offers the opportunity for the student to train interpersonal skills, knowledge and other competencies that the child cannot obtain in the family.

Early education of the child who contributes to the acquisition of skills and knowledge is a predictor in the future education process (OECD, 2012). The global educational community accepts the structure for Education 2030 with the aim of giving equal access to education to all human beings, including those who have been excluded and marginalized. Inclusion and equity in education starts with the message "every student is important in the same way", and to achieve this, objective educational policy supports changes in each education system. Inclusion and equity in education depend on the skills of the teachers, infrastructure, school curricula and implemented strategies (UNESCO, 2017, p.12).

Abolishing inequalities in school opportunities has become a priority and the objective of social exclusion is targeted at disadvantaged groups. In developed countries, this includes children from families with poor economic status, disabled children or immigrant families. In Romania the risk of abandonment comes from poor families, in particular in the rural environment where boys are especially exposed, and from children from Roma families or those with special needs.. (Jigău 2002, apud Hatos 2007).

The European Union policies provide access to education for all members, with the aim of combating poverty and social exclusion. The European Union's strategy is to invest in education systems in order to ensure access to basic education for disadvantaged groups, and to stimulate participation in education for all children. In Romania, access to education is

still very different, especially in rural areas, from the urban environment and also in disadvantaged groups, one of the reasons being the reform of priorities for solving the problems in education (Stoica, 2006). Access to education for children with disabilities/SEN is adopted in mass education with the provision to support integrated and inclusive education through permanent adaptation and elimination of discrimination factors in education. In order to make everyone benefit from equality in education, physical and human support is provided at all times through the curriculum adapted to each child and through the training and information of the teaching staff. Introducing supporting teachers in educational establishments is a benefit for both the child and the family to identify innovative working arrangements that help the integration into society (Horga, Apostu and Balica 2016).

To reduce early school abandonment, the "Second chance" programme was launched and the PHARE- Access to education of disadvantaged groups, was expanded. The drop-out of Roma children derives from the socio-economic problems of the family, from the rejection of the option of enrollment in a school, constant stigmatization, negative experience of the impact with school and omissive knowledge regarding their rights (Vincze and Harbula, 2011).

Poverty represents the main factor influencing early school leaving. The economically disadvantaged family exposes the child to the labor market through abuse, as the priority is the fight for survival. The parents' training is in line with the family's attention to school and can directly affect the child's future (Ahmed and Kingsolver 2005).

According to Ulrich (2009), the results of the implementation of the PHARE and "Second Chance" programmes from 2001 to 2005 were analyzed by the Ministry of Education, Research and Innovation in 2009 in a study based on the presumption of equal opportunities in education, the prevention of social exclusion, reducing abandonment and allocating financial resources in compulsory state education. The evaluation of these programmes showed that the opportunities for education were improved by implementing the summer school/kindergarten programmes and by applying training courses for inclusive education, but on the other side the limitation of teachers' interpersonal relations with pupils and their stereotyped gender claims were obvious. After the evaluation of this program, school mediators were introduced to monitor both pupils and communication with the family (Țoc, 2018). Poverty is the main factor influencing early school leaving. The economically disadvantaged family exposes the child to the labor market through abuse, with the priority being the fight for survival. The parents' training is in line with the family's attention to school and can directly affect the child's future (Ahmed and Kingsoler 2005).

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The effect of the economic and financial crisis from 2008-2010 has had an impact on early school leaving. In Romania, as well as Spain, Portugal or Italy, the economic status of the family had an influence in the participation of children in the compulsory education system. Another factor contributing to early school leaving is adaptation, which can be considered as an obstacle due to the curriculum gap faced by the student when moving from one school level to another (Apostu et al., 2015).

Conclusions

Access to education through inclusion and equity is only achieved when the barriers leading to discrimination are removed. Preventing abandonment and social exclusion must be the priority of policy makers to act and ensure equal opportunities for all children to access education. The implementation of programmes that support disadvantaged groups is the opportunity of the education system to provide inclusive services and equity in education.

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