

ROMANIAN EDUCATION REFORM BETWEEN POLICY AND ACTION

Adriana Nicu

„Lucian Blaga” University of Sibiu, Romania
adriana.nicu@ulbsibiu.ro

Abstract: *The article presents an overview of the Romanian educational system reforms after 1989 to the present. Analysis of educational reform over 25 years was carried out in relation to educational policy documents. Also, I delimited the previous reforms accession Romania at the EU and of the reforms post-accession Romania at the EU. The problem we face is translating these policies into educational practices. The purpose of this article is to highlight of the educational policy from this period, and the reasons why a lot of this policies have failed. The main cause that makes difficult the road from solutions developed on paper to the classroom is excessive politicization of education. Keeping the centralizing policies and the inability of assuming governance model is a severe barrier to the evolution of Romania. The education reform must be a political action of conjugation of the effort of the experts and long-term political commitment.*

Key words: *reform, educational policy, politics, action, governance*

Democratization of the educational system Romanian, improving education quality, valuing the social role of education, development of Romanian cultural values, promotion of the identity of Romanian culture in the world culture, training people responsible, active and which able to contribute to the development of a democratic society are priority objectives of the educational policy that seeks ways of achieving practical.

1. Conceptual Clarifications

The term of reform refers to a type of higher change of the education/of the teaching being associated with „a new frame, based on new structures, new programs, new methods” (Clausse, A, 1972); "a general recovery through the system perspective of lifelong learning" which redistributes education levels in time and space, extending them, „after needs and for the benefit of everyone" (Faure, Ed. et al, 1974); „an ample change of system in orientation, structure and content”. (*Dictionary of Pedagogy*, 1979); a restructuring which has as „starting point reconsideration the substantial of the aims of education and training" (Cerghit, I., Vlasceanu, L., 1988); „a global and relevant transformation of the education system and applied according to the requirements of today and tomorrow, but also by the aspirations of learners” based on a „philosophical-pedagogical project”, developed by specialists and assumed at level of educational policy (Vaideanu, G., 1988); an educational innovation a projected long-term, which aims „the intentional and profound transformation of the social product of the process of education" which fit of finalities determined according to the level of education policy (*Dix années de reformes au niveau de l'enseignement obligatoire dans l'Union européenne*, 1996); „a major change deliberate, which targeting the transition from a present state to a projected state that trigger changes in depth”. (*Dictionnaire encyclopedique de l'education et de la formation*, 2005); „a redesign of education" which refers to the structural system innovations and which occurs at hierarchical relationships between the levels of education, in opening the school to society (Vlăsceanu, L., 2008); „an experience which aims to change the fundamentals of the educational system, the political-ideological, technical and pedagogical level of organization on cycles and delivering the content - not just improve it” (Aguerrondo, I., 2010); a profound change directed to the objectives and structures of the system and directed to the contents and methods of education. (*Perspectives des politiques de l'éducation: les réformes en marche*, 2015).

J.J. Brunner has identified four „revolutions” in the evolution of educational policies and practices (2000, apud Aguerrondo, I., 2010). The author believes that the first revolution in education occurred during his J.A. Comenius, with the advent of the famous work *Didactica Magna* (1657). Now, are put the foundations of organized classes and lessons in schools. A second revolution in education is the emergence of national school systems. The school is no longer just a private Institute, but becomes a public good. This may be located in developed countries in the XVII-XVIII century and

for Romania in the second half of the nineteenth century (school reform of 1864). These reforms were only politically. They do not produce changes in teaching because teaching is still with classical methods. The third revolution aimed massification of education. This revolution refers to the extension of school systems since the mid-twentieth century, after the Second World War. School systems, incorporating more population, but the author states, there is only an extension of social rights without a revolution in education, the purpose of redefining the classic educational model. Fourth, the social, economic and cultural changes, give rise to a revolution. For the first time, what is questioned is the traditional method. This is a much bigger challenge than any previous because there is not enough to increase the number of people receiving education, as in previous cases, it is necessary to find a new way to "make" education, adequate and according to the new school contexts (Brunner, J.J., 2000, apud Aguerrondo, I., 2010).

In summary, all these definitions have as central axis the changes inside the existing system. A relatively new approach is the reform by introducing governance as a new form of administrative and financial management of education. Governance is a space of political action, of the reforms which directly promotes the political interests of citizens and who can participate through active representation in decision-making.

The school governance can become an alternative to the traditional approach to educational reforms. The school governance is between the intentions of education policies and the realities in schools. The key to a real reform comes from understanding and applying in institutions, namely in schools, of the triad: self-government - responsibility - participation, regarded as the essence of school governance.

2. Characteristics of Educational Reforms in Romania Prior to Accession to the EU

In Romania, education reform until 2000 comprised in main of the curriculum and management components, considered priorities in education policies of the time. The focusing of the reform on areas punctual of the education system, as I stated above, it is grounded on numerous publications of the Ministry of Education and other competent bodies. The analyses on innovations in education show that until 1997 they were less relevant (Chiş, V., 1998).

The first five years after the 1989's revolution are characterized by delaying or blocking education reform. The topics about education reform begins to regain profile and to become again the subject of a systematically

debate since 1995, with the advent Education Law No 84/1995. Now is set up the National Council for Curriculum. Since 1996 they have organized numerous pedagogical and non-pedagogical debates about the kind of education reform which is necessary in the new period of transition. The results of these debates culminated in the development and implementation of the National Curriculum in schools in 1998. This document has guided the Romanian education until 2012, when a new wave of reforms comprised the education system.

Vasile Chiş makes the synthesis of the following types of reforms, but their validation in the school field always remain a controversial topic with many hesitations: (1) reform by extension, the generalization of local experiences; (2) reform of innovation, to accelerate the changes started and (3) reform the system, specifically the structure of the educational system.

Analysis of the acknowledged models in the contemporary reform of educational systems, demonstrates no limitations on the reform of the system. Modern educational systems are today in the advanced reform. Transitional education reform means the transition from hierarchical structure, on vertical, to a flexible structure, in network. The reform of the system is built on the coherent educational policy and is a prerequisite to all other innovations. For example, the vertical organization of education on the Comenius's principles, assumes the paradigm: adapting the student to school. The innovations of system change the traditional paradigm terms: adapting the school to the student. So reform of the system is a comprehensive reform and a reform of the pedagogic conception. From this, derive naturally all other innovations. Without the reform of the system, the other steps, however well would be designed, may remain a simple „makeup”.

Subsequently, it was opted for a comprehensive reform, a comprehensive education, conceived as an assembly of six measures as follows:

- curricular reform (curriculum, programs, textbooks) and the European compatibility of the national curriculum;
- transition from the reproductive learning to the creative learning through problem solving and restart the scientific research in universities;
- new connection between schools, high schools and universities, on the one hand and their environment, economic, administrative and cultural, on the other hand;
- improving infrastructure and connection to electronic communications of the today's world;
- the reform of the school and of the academic management through decentralization and the creation of institutional autonomy of schools;
- initiating advanced forms of international cooperation.

The pedagogical analysis of the six areas assumed in the reform, reveals the emergence of a reconstruction in education, necessary and imperative for the late twentieth century. The educational policies are aimed at developing Pre-University education (basic education, vocational education and upper secondary education), modernizing higher education and national qualifications levels compatible with European ones. The strategic documents of the education policy that realize a harmonization between national priorities and of the European level are: post-accession Strategy 2007-2013 (Ministry of Education and Research, January 2007), the National Development Plan 2007-2013 (Government of Romania, December 2005) and Strategy Development Pre-University education in the period 2001-2010 (Korka, M., 2000).

The diagnostic studies on education in Romania provide a coherent picture of the realities of the Romanian education. Among of these studies there should be remembered: *The Romanian Education Today* (1998), coordinated by Adrian Miroiu; *Educational Policy: Expertise, Discussion, Decision* (2003) - colloquium conducted on the initiative "Education 2000+ Centre" and the Reflection Group and Initiative „Focus Education”; *Romania of Education, Romania of Research* (2007) by Mircea Miclea.

This latter document is the Presidential Commission Report, which presents solution, besides the main problems of the education and research in Romania, and solutions. „We consider that Romania today - it's said in the preamble - is a country facing major risks because the systems of education and research do not meet the minimum requirements of a society and the European economy where knowledge is the most precious and important source of economic, social and personal development. We risk that cultural gap as against European Union countries to grow, we risk that our grown-up children to be increasingly less competitive on the European labour market, and less skilled in managing privacy; there is the risk that the economy to stagnate and us to become dependent on innovations from abroad, and democracy to operate with syncope. "(Miclea, M., 2007, p. 5)

The diagnosis made by the Presidential Commission, headed by Mircea Miclea, assumes that maintaining the education system in effect in Romania endangers the country's competitiveness and prosperity. Thus were identified four major shortcomings of the education system: ineffective, irrelevant, inequitable and poor quality.

The solutions proposed by the Presidential Commission were summarized as follows: "In education, structural changes take time and commitments must going beyond the horizon of an election cycle or the life of a government. If we really want a profound change, it is essential to achieve a memorandum for a national pact for education and research, a

commitment signed by all responsible forces of the civic and political society (Miclea, M., 2007, p. 10).

Regarding measures to modernize the higher education and research (Miclea, M., 2007, pp. 21-29), same document proposed: the differentiation universities and the concentration of resources; the differentiation of the universities and flexible financing; the establishment of the National Qualifications Framework and a system of benchmarks for higher education; reorganization of the research.

In the same year, following a consistent radiography of the Romanian education system, there was a new warning by the World Bank Report: *Romania. Note on educational policies* (Sandi, A-M. and Moarcăș M., 2007). The main conclusions of the report were summarized as follows: „The educational system in Romania is at crossroads. The important reforms that were initiated, in the education sector, after the fall of the communism (changing curriculum, students assessment, teachers training, financing and the management) must continue so as to improve the education outcomes. But integration into the European Union of Romania will put new requirements on the country's human capital, creating new challenges in this sector. The demand for skilled labour will increase, as with the share increasing of value-added production and services in the economy. These changes will require a more competitive workforce, with new skills and qualifications. To meet these demands, the government will must: (1) increase the efficiency and equity of education, in the context of decentralization, by introducing per pupil funding formula, the school network optimization and training of managers in education; (2) raise the quality of education, firstly through better management of human resources; (3) create more opportunities for training and continuing education; and (4) increase effectiveness by developing a coherent strategic program of reform, planning, administration and management of the sector. This note is summarizing the findings and conclusions of the latest analysis of the World Bank in the education sector” (Sandi, A.-M., Moarcăș, M., 2007, p. 1). The document was divided into two large parts, each one summarizing the major problems faced by the Romanian education: (1) the learning outcomes in Romania, compared to those in other countries, and (2) the main challenges in the education sector (ibid, p. 1 -10)

The diagnostic studies on Romanian education have prepared to rebuild institutional capacity, necessary to support reform after accession to the European Union.

3. The Education Reform in Romania Post Accession to the EU

In nearly a decade after access the Romania in the social, economic and cultural space of Europe (1 January 2007), the education remains a national priority at political level, and a great unsolved problem at practical level.

All these years have signified new and new changes. The work coordinated by Alexandru Crişan, *Five exercises of education policy in Romania* (2008), begins with the question: What is new and old in Romanian educational system after the 1st of January 2007? The answer was: „Entering the European Union was (...) a missed opportunity. Two years after the accession into the Union, Romanian education is - essentially - the same as a few years ago” (2008, p. 10).

In a project of the Institute of Education Sciences, in 2010, "The training of managers in secondary education using new systems of governance" tried a clarification on school governance term. Governance can be an alternative to the reformation of classical education system. It also initiated training modules for the school managers for the transition from the system governing to the system of governance. But as long as the legal framework does not allow insertion of elements of governance nor the triad authority-responsibility-participation cannot be achieved. The phenomenon of excessive politicization of education continues with modern forms of management and use of capital, through specific techniques and tools of *corporate governance* (2011, p. 21) are not being understood, and much less applied.

Long-awaited „the switching of the paradigm” still not has place in the life of schools. A confusion that persists for years in education is related to the transition from the objective-based pedagogy (the behaviourist perspective) to the competency-based pedagogy (cognitive-constructivist perspective). Since 2009 in the curriculum, the educational finalities have been changed. The programs are structured on general and specific skills. Exist overlapping terms: knowledge and competencies, and explications missing. The mission of the school as formal education is the transmission of knowledge. The training of competencies it is realized in combined contexts (formal, non-formal, informal) and a long term (school years, cycles). There are confusions between the educational finalities at the level of teaching process and the educational finalities at the level of the educational system (profile of the student's personality).

Curriculum policies are a constant problem in all Romanian education system reforms. The cause of most failures is determined by the overloading content of the school programs and textbooks, and their discrepancy with national evaluation. It also requires of a rational regime of work at school, where the students learn, but also have the necessary time to rest, play sport,

entertain, and body reconditioning. In the current overload of curriculum, a responsible student has no time for extracurricular activities, unless he is neglecting the school activities, and there is the neglecting! The question arises if not appears, involuntary to students as a sense of doubt in their own ability, a tendency towards superficiality in the learning process. It happens increasingly rarely for students, as a result of carrying out the responsibilities of school, to have the satisfaction of work well done; or, the students need experiences for their training, they need their personal victories to develop self respect, self confidence. Never a teacher will cannot talk about his professional successes, apart from the students achievements, as no one will notice the success or failure of the students without leading the thought to their teacher.

Not at least, parents reclaim that their children are overloading, and they ask more explicit standards, better defined, more quantifiable for student's assessment. Such a school environment permanently shapes its component elements (students, teachers, etc.). The changes in education are rather rejected, than accepted, but formally, most teachers are for the change.

The latest public debate proposed by the Ministry of Education, in 2015, is linked to secondary school curriculum framework. This debate has generated reactions like: „a much and pointless content, which shows the authors' desire to astound”; the school operates as a real *bed of Procrustes*, where students can not develop their own inclinations and they are viewed as learning robots etc ...”; „it is necessary to adequate the curricular content at the specific community, economic, geographic, social, cultural, at the tradition where the students live and work.” So far, there isn't a common solution for the curriculum framework of the secondary school.

The main document of educational policy post accession Romania's EU is: *The strategy for Education and Research in the Knowledge Society* (2009-2015). An analysis of the objectives to which the experts of education and the policy makers committed to achieve by 2015, shows the following situation:

Specific Objectives	Outcomes
1. Placing the Romanian students' performance on international tests (PISA, PIRLS, TIMSS) in the top 10 countries.	Last PISA cycle occurred in 2012, and the results were made public in 2013. Romania ranks 45 out of 65 participating countries and economies ¹⁶ .

¹⁶ <http://www.oecd.org/pisa/keyfindings/>, accessed on March 4, 2016

² <http://www.topuniversities.com/universities/region/europe/country/romania>, accessed on March 4, 2016

Specific Objectives	Outcomes
<p>2. Placement of at least 3 Romanian universities in the top 500 universities in the world.</p>	<p>University of Bucharest has rankings between 651-700, and the following three universities are: „Babeş-Bolyai” University of Cluj-Napoca, Timisoara West University and "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iaşi; their ranking is 701⁺ ¹⁷ of the 1672 universities assessed in 2015.</p>
<p>3. Five times increase of scientific production and tripling the global innovation index, which would allow us to reach the current EU average of these indicators.</p>	<p>The National Strategy for Research, Development and Innovation (2014-2020) shows that Romania is better rated compared to the previous cycle. But, reporting to international standards and to internal needs, points that Romania does not have enough researchers. Missing the critical mass of human resources for the development of promising areas and, in particular, for interdisciplinary research and innovation. Intra- and intersectoral mobility is limited, having an undesirable impact on the movement of technical knowledge and innovation. Private sector access to public research infrastructure is difficult, the services offered are limited, and therefore, the use of these facilities is low (RDI Strategy, p. 6).</p>
<p>4. Reducing the rate of premature abandonment of the education system under 5% (in 2008 it was 23.6%).</p>	<p>A new strategy on reducing early school leaving proposes, for 2020, a rate of 11.3%, from 17.3% as it was in 2013.</p>
<p>5. Elimination of essential differences between rural and urban education, the learning</p>	<p>"The differences between rural and urban education are major and emphasized", says Professor Mircea</p>

³<http://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-esential-20173550-rezultate-socante-evaluarea-elevilor-din-clasele-elevii-nu-invata-aplice-analizeze-cunostintele-din-scoala-mircea-miclea.htm>, accessed on March 4, 2016

Specific Objectives	Outcomes
<p>opportunities offered to disadvantaged groups (minority groups, children with special needs, etc.) and those offered to the majority.</p>	<p>Miclea, after analyzing the results of the national assessments in 2014.¹⁸</p> <p>„The conditions offered in Romanian rural schools are appalling. In many villages, schools completely lack health permits or are barely entitled to possess them, as they are only partially finished, lack running water or have external washrooms. At the same time, rural children are often forced to sit in classrooms with broken desks and chairs and no heating during winter, while rarely having access to the technically free state-provided school materials. Around 23 percent of rural children spend more than one hour each day commuting to school, either because they have to go there on foot, or because the bus transporting them there has to make numerous stops before reaching their destination. As a result of this lengthy commute, rural Romanian parents prefer to keep their children out of school, thus encouraging illiteracy, which is the highest in Europe at the moment.¹⁹</p>
<p>Transformation of the continuing education into a current social practice of each institution, public or private for to increasing to 20% the rate of participation of adults in</p>	<p>The objective of the National Strategy of Lifelong Learning²⁰ for Romania is to increase the participation rate of adults (aged 25 and 64) to 10% by 2020. In 2007-2013, Romania has not made progress significant about this</p>

¹⁹ <https://www.opendemocracy.net/can-europe-make-it/raluca-besliu/tragedy-of-education-in-rural-romania>

accessed on March 4, 2016

²⁰ <http://www.edu.ro/index.php/articles/23305>, p. 27, accessed on March 4, 2016

Specific Objectives	Outcomes
lifelong learning.	rate, which rose only from 1.3% to only 1.8%.
The transforming the teaching staff in a professional elite of the nation	The current conditions of initial and continuous training of teachers, and the teachers' salaries do not allow to raising this profession to the rank of national elite.

The essential educational policy documents for post-accession period are substantial, but the effects in classroom are yet not visible. We mention only a few of these documents, proving that the educational experts are working, but their work does not meet political interests. In the period of 2010-2012 there were published six studied educational policy. These studies have focused on the important issues of the education system: school environment, curriculum, competencies, learning outcomes, motivation of learning, alternative programs and textbooks, and the need for a new national curriculum framework. The realities described and the interpreted by education experts present real problems of the Romanian educational system. Unfortunately, we are at the point where most education policies crash: implementation and monitoring. The transition from "paper" to "the educational fact" occurs with difficulty.

The latest approach to education belongs to the Presidential Administration and proposes a schedule divided into three stages. The strategy will show its effects for the period 2018-2030. Again we witness the sterile discussions that start with rethinking, rebuilding, restructuring the education system and education. Beyond statistics and forecasts, the announcement related to a possible new reform of education generates tensions among students, parents and teachers. In the previous years many changes have occurred, but none of these changes have solved the underlying problems of the school system. The frequent changes limited to matters of "surface" and have adversely affected the Romanian school system.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the educational reform involves the replacement of structures, the durability over time, the significantly better achieving results than the ones of the previous practices and the absence of interference with other fields. Also, education reform is a political action undertaken by the entire society, in convergence with reforms of the other sectors. Since the current school system is one based on hierarchy, the changes propagate from top to bottom, for to be considered. If we want to achieve a significant

change, we must work on our basic paradigms. This paradigms are the place where to born our mentality and our conduct of teaching.

The path to a quality change involves a synergistic direction of three vectors: a comprehensive program of training and retraining of teachers, focusing on current educational needs; a program to motivate teachers who work effectively and a rethinking of the programs and textbooks.

The teachers and the teaching profession seem to matter less and less in Romania, not only for students, parents, and young university graduates, but also for those who run education. Although teachers are the most important factor for development of human resources required for a knowledge-based society, the respect according for teachers by politicians, society, family, students, and even self-esteem of most teachers, it is deteriorating steadily. Lack of consistency in introducing elements of reform and pursuing their effects are major shortcomings of the Romanian education system.

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