



The Compulsory Education in Romania inside the Context of the European dimension of education

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Authors note

The teaching and research activities carried out currently as a Lecturer Ph.D., on the major field of education sciences, materialized in teaching / evaluation educational actions (for the initial training of the future teachers), preparation of training materials (courses, guides, etc.), but also in designing and implementing research / development / training projects (especially sighting the continuous training, the primary and secondary education teachers' improvement), and in carrying out researches on topics directly related to certain issues of school education, and also in a scientific contribution materialized in a series of articles, studies published in famous national and international journals, are especially focused on the following *areas of interest*: *General Pedagogy, Curriculum Theory, Classroom Management, Educational Communication, Educational Policies, Theory and Practice of Evaluation*.

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Abstract

A major factor in creating a modern European society in its economic and social development is the European cooperation in education and the development of the European dimension of education and training. The European dimension, as the basic component of education policy represents a finality which aims at overcoming the national particular elements specific to the European education systems, respecting diversity, emphasizing pluralism and interculturalism. Making the European dimension at the level of education and training involves linking two factors: increased cultural identity of each nation and affirmation of cultural diversity, which generates tolerance, interculturalism and respect towards each other. Some of the recommendations from the documents of educational politics applied to the compulsory education in Romania are: considering the duration and the activities in the compulsory education as a whole, operating inside the formal structure with the curriculum cycles defined in the documents of the National Curriculum, improving the coherence of the curriculum according to the curriculum cycles, their succession, education for all disregarding the social origin and the intellectual capacity, the elimination of the school abandonment with efficient solutions adapted to each situations, recovery for those in abandoning situations and ensuring efficient alternatives for re-education/ educational recovery. The curriculum is the fundamental instrument for achieving the goals of the compulsory education in Romania. The curriculum, created in approach to the new requirements of the basic education and to the European tendencies, contributes to the development of the students' personality according to the needs of a society based on knowledge. It also contributes to gaining new basic competences required by society and economy and to the formation of students for life-long education.

Keywords: pre-academic education, compulsory education, European dimension of education, basic education, Romanian educational system.

Zusammenfassung

Ein Faktor von großer Bedeutung bei der Schaffung der heutigen europäischen Gesellschaft, auch in der sozialen und wirtschaftlichen Entwicklung spielt die Europäische Zusammenarbeit für Bildung, die Entwicklung der europäischen Dimension der Bildung und Ausbildung. Die europäische Dimension, als grundlegenden Bestandteil der Bildungspolitik, stellt ein Ziel um übertreffen die nationalen bestimmte Elemente der europäischen Bildungssysteme, der Achtung der Vielfalt, um Pluralismus und Querkulturalität zu übertreffen. Die Verwirklichung der europäischen Dimension im Bildungswesen und Bildung Systeme erfordert die Korrelation von zwei Elementen: Hervorhebung der kulturellen Identität eines jeden Volkes und die Anerkennung der kulturellen Vielfalt, der Toleranz, Querkulturalität und Achtung zwischen den Menschen erzeugt. Einige der Empfehlungen aus den Unterlagen der Bildungspolitik angewandt, um die obligatorische Ausbildung in Rumänien sind: das Angesicht der Dauer und die Aktivitäten in der Pflichtschule als Ganzes; der Betrieb innerhalb der formalen Struktur mit dem Lehrplan definierte Zyklen in den Dokumenten der nationalen Lehrplan; die Verbesserung der Kohärenz des Lehrplans nach dem Lehrplan Zyklen; die Bildung für alle ungeachtet der sozialen Herkunft und der geistigen Kapazität; Die Beseitigung der Schule Aufgabe mit effizienten Lösungen an die jeweiligen Situationen, Lösungen für jene, die in der Aufgabe Situationen sind und die Gewährleistung einer effizienten Alternativen für die Umerziehung/ pädagogische Wiedergewinnung. Der Lehrplan ist das grundlegende Instrument für die Erreichung der Ziele der obligatorischen Schule in Rumänien. Der Lehrplan, erstellt in der Herangehensweise an die neuen Anforderungen an die grundlegende Ausbildung und der Europäischen Tendenzen, trägt dazu bei, die Entwicklung der Schüler Persönlichkeit je nach den Bedürfnissen einer auf Wissen basierenden Gesellschaft. Es trägt auch zur Gewinnung neuer Grundkompetenzen von Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft und die Ausbildung der Studenten für lebenslange Bildung.

Schlüsselworte: pre-akademische Ausbildung, Schulpflicht, europäische Dimension der Bildung, Grundbildung, rumänische Bildungssystem

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1. Introduction

The conditions of the contemporary society, characterized by fast development of science and technology which results in a strong dynamics of world social life, calls for the necessity of education for stability and desirable social change that should give an answer to the challenges of the 21st century, education which is founded on: the real democratization of education, ensuring equal opportunities to education for all children, creation of conditions for educating all citizens, achieving a high quality education at all levels, affirming and respecting the principles of lifelong learning at all ages and all forms of education.

The third millennium education projects aim at transforming traditional educational practices to practices based on new principles specific to the contemporary education and pedagogy: global education, lifelong learning, inclusive education, education for all, equal opportunities, partnership in education. In-depth learning, based on action and empowerment of the learner, vocational skills, integration of application knowledge structures, interactive teaching, inter- and transdisciplinary curriculum are just some concepts and ideas on which modern pedagogy has been based. These have been generated by switching European societies towards globalization and the knowledge society, by the need for synchronization between society and the development of education, by the new assessment results in the education systems, by the need of education integration and globalization.

2. European perspectives upon education

Inside a contemporary socio-economical context, humanity considers education as invaluable and fundamental instrument for further training of all individuals; active and productive individual transformation; building relationships between individuals, groups and nations; developing social aspects; diminishing poverty, social exclusion and ignorance. For these reasons, the evolution of education is a priority on a world scale. The existence of The International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century, created in 1993, is perfectly justified by its role in studying and analysing the problems of education and learning during the twenty-first century, also in making suggestions and recommendations for the decisional factors in the domain.

To satisfy the requirements which must be subordinated to education in the 21st century, widespread transmission of a growing volume of knowledge and information, on the one hand, and on the other educated individuals making available the tools needed to guide the future, the International Commission for Education in the 21st century, (created in the early 1993 with the aim of studying and analyzing the problems of education and the education in the 21st century, and to formulate suggestions and recommendations to decision makers at the highest levels) aims at to organizing education around four basic types of learning: learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together, learning to be (Delors, 2000). *Learning to Know* involves knowledge acquisition tools: the ability to use letters and numbers, to solve problems, to acquire general knowledge and specific knowledge in order to widen the field. *A link to learn how to act* in particular the problem involves the acquisition of vocational training

and skills to enable individuals to cope with different situations, the capacity to be effective at work, the adoption of appropriate social behavior, the development team, and the capacity to assume responsibilities. *Learning to live together with others* requires self-understanding, understanding others, avoiding conflicts, peaceful settlement of conflicts, cultivation of respect for the others, for their culture and spiritual values, working together to achieve common goals. *Learning to be* involves developing one's own personality, the ability to work independently, the ability to take responsibility, to develop critical thinking, imagination and creativity, development of communication skills, valuing culture, development of a personal ethical code.

The end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st mark numerous changes in the education and formation systems and the educational policies in Europe, generated by the directives and recommendations of the European Councils, the European Committee or the European Parliament, as well as by the education and formation programmes initiated by them.

The development in perspective of educational systems in Europe and the placement of education in the larger framework of the measures of improvement in the area of occupation and economic reform have been essential reference points in the *Lisbon Conference* of the European Council in *March 2000*. During this Conference the role of education has been emphasised, as integrant part of social and economic policies, in the consolidation of European competitiveness in the world and the ensuring of our societies' cohesion. The European Council established as a priority objective (in Lisbon, 2000, then restated and completed in Brussels in 2005) for the year 2010, that the European Union should become "the most competitive and dynamic economy based on knowledge in the world, capable of sustained growth, with more and better work places, and a higher social cohesion", placing permanent education at the core of every EU state's policy. The specific goal established by the European Council in Lisbon was to set the future objectives of educational systems for the following ten years. The operative conclusions targeted: the adaptation of the educational and formation system to the challenges of the society of knowledge; the substantial increase of the investment in education; lifelong learning; the reduction to a half by 2010 of the number of those who do not surpass the level of mandatory education; the creation of a European frame for defining key competences for continuous education (the technology of communication and information, foreign languages, social skills, entrepreneurial education, technological education); the increase in mobility and the recognition of qualifications; the European résumé/CV, as way to appreciate the people's abilities, for finding a workplace in Europe. The development of a quality educational and professional formation system represents a key element of this strategy (Tăușan, 2012).

A major factor in creating a modern European society in its economic and social development is the European cooperation in education and the development of the European dimension of education and training. The European dimension, as the basic component of education policy represents a finality which aims at overcoming the national particular elements specific to the European education systems, respecting diversity, emphasizing pluralism and interculturalism. Making the European dimension at the level of education and training involves linking two factors: increased cultural identity of each nation and affirmation of cultural diversity, which generates tolerance, interculturalism and respect towards each other (Bunescu, 2007).

At the level of educational policy, the European dimension involves the following:

- Emphasizing the importance of vocational skills required by a democratic society (cultivating creativity, the ability to make decisions, problem-solving, being able to choose, to take responsibility, to argue and support their views, to communicate, analyze and evaluate critically, to participate in collective activities, to establish constructive relationships);

- Focus on language courses, on the study of their literature and social sciences;
- Special emphasis on computer use in education;
- Decentralization of decision making in the curriculum and establish the aims, structure and content of education especially in the light of student interests and skills relative to social context;
- Providing a school environment consistent with the ideals of a democratic society, favorable to growing its specific values (mutual respect, tolerance of other views, accountability, ability to respect promises);

The Council of Europe has paid special attention to the European dimension in education, as evidenced by the various resolutions and recommendations reached by the ministers of education at various conferences, and developing policies, programs, projects promoting European integration of the teaching-learning process.

In the European Union's Treaty of Maastricht (1992), which introduced new powers in education, the European dimension in education is revealed by: the study of foreign languages, encouraging mobility of students and teachers, recognition and equivalence of diplomas, institutional cooperation, developing exchanges of information and experience in education (Marcu, 2004).

3. Priorities of the national politics for the compulsory education

The evolution and development of society, of the contemporary world, depends on the way in which the educational system meets the socio-economic requirements, through their transformation into educational approaches, and the extent to which it produces competences and develops human resources, both from the perspective of professional formation and the perspective of the development of creative, self-formative abilities which will allow the integration and continuous adaptation of the labour force to the scientific and technological evolution. The measure of a society's development can be rendered not only through economic indicators but also through those that refer to education, to its quality and to the way knowledge and learning are organised.

The national educational system evolves and improves according to the economic and social development and the national cultural specificity, its functioning being based on the following principles:

1. The principle of ensuring and guaranteeing the right to education;
2. The principle of organising the public educational system, the private and the confessional educational systems;
3. The principle of developing the education in all stages in the Romanian language, also in the language of the national minorities and in an international language;
4. The principle of general compulsory education;
5. The principal of free public education.

The quality of the educational system is reflected by the following indicators (Codorean, 2006: 62-64): the explicit establishment and the conscious assumption of the goals; the access and the equality of chances to education; the flexible character of the system (transferrable credits, possibilities for a second chance); the quality of the curriculum (creating the curriculum on psychologic, pedagogic and anthropologic criteria); the quality of the teaching personnel; the quality of the infrastructure; the financial resources allocated to education; the evaluation and self-evaluation mechanism in the quality of the process (national exams according to the modern methodology); the responsibility for the use of the human and material resources; scientific competitiveness.

The modifications brought to the Law for education 84/1995 in 2003 and 2004 led to: the extension of the compulsory education from eight to ten classes, ensuring the growth of the general level of education for the graduating students in the compulsory system of education and the correlation of the legal employment age with the age of graduating the compulsory education; a change in the financing system of the pre-academic education through an extended autonomy of the local authorities; the revision of the structure in the national educational system as expression of the harmonisation with the European politics.

According to The Law for Pre-academic Education, the educational ideal of the pre-academic educational system is the free, complete and harmonious development of the human individuals and the real assumption of a value scale, necessary for the construction of an economy and a society based on knowledge.

The principles that govern the pre-academic education in Romania are:

1. The principle of efficiency, in obtaining maximum educational results through the management of the existing resources;
2. The principle of relevance, for the needs of the individual, social and economic development;
3. The principle of quality, which states that the pre-academic activities are in coordination with reference standards and international good practices;
4. The principle of equity, according to which the access to learning opportunities presents no discrimination;
5. The principle of decentralisation, which grants that the main decisions are taken by the actors directly involved in the process.
6. The principle of public responsibility, which states that the educational institutions have a public responsibility for their performance.

According to the same legislative act, the main goals that direct the formation process of the young generation at the pre-academic education are: the formation and the development of specific key competencies required by the adult life: the formation of motivation for the active participation to the social, economic and political life in ensuring a sustainable development; the formation and assumption of a set of values in the behavioural and career orientation of the graduating student, ensuring a rapid integration on the labour market and in the social life.

Emphasizing the role of compulsory education among the tasks proposed at the resolution *"School at a Crossroads" - Change and continuity in the curriculum of compulsory education*, the National Council for Curriculum suggests:

- Establishing clear priorities for educational policies, focusing on compulsory education, given its relations with other levels of education, including higher or tertiary education;
- Increased consistency of the curriculum for compulsory education through the development of interdependencies between disciplines in the curriculum areas both horizontally (at the same level of schooling) and vertically (in the curricular cycle);
- Considering the development of compulsory education as a priority, with adequate budgetary allocations and by stimulating partnerships between schools, communities, employers, unions, economic and cultural units.

In the same study, proposals are made on the policies applied in compulsory education:

- Considering the educational level of compulsory education as a whole, distinct and specific, based on the continuity of primary and secondary education stage. To ensure this continuity, it is recommended: considering the duration and curriculum of compulsory education activities as an integrated whole, operating within the formal structure of education with curriculum defined in the regulatory cycles of the

National Curriculum, to improve consistency of compulsory education curriculum based on curricular courses and their sequencing.

- Schooling for all, regardless of environment (social, residential, ethnic) background and level of intellectual capacity and eliminate school leaving by adopting effective solutions tailored to each situation;
- Recovery of all those who have left school or were not enrolled, by providing effective alternatives of coming back to school / school recuperation.

Basic education, performed in compulsory education, provides the necessary skills to access further learning, lifelong learning, an idea given in the first key message of the Memorandum on Lifelong Learning, developed by the European Commission in October, 2000: "new basic skills for all ". The new basic competences mentioned in the conclusions of the European Council in Lisbon, concretely presented in a list of areas of knowledge and competence broadly defined, of interdisciplinary nature, can be also encountered at the level of compulsory education in Romania, being included in *The National Development Plan 2007-2013*:

- the study of at least two foreign languages (the first foreign language appears in the curriculum as compulsory from elementary education, and the second starting from the 5th grade);
- the interest in culture, achieved both in the formal system of education, in the curricular area "Arts", and in extracurricular activities;
- the training in information and communications technology area is realised in the elementary and secondary school in optional subjects or extracurricular activities and, starting with the first level of high school (or Arts and Crafts school) it is included in the common branch;
- the development of competences of the type "learn how to learn" is a priority at the level of compulsory education;
- entrepreneurial culture is achieved at all levels of compulsory education, in subjects such as practical abilities (elementary level), technological education (secondary level), entrepreneurial education and elements of education for business (high school level or professional schools).

The new configuration of competences is generated by the need for each person's active participation to the economy and society of knowledge, in the productive activity, family life and all levels of life in the community (locally and at European level). In order to achieve active and responsible participation in the productive and social activity of the community, there is a need to become aware of and put into practice the new perspective on the role of the school: shifting the accent from the content of subjects to the formation of adaptation skills (learning how to learn), assimilating values, attitudes, lifestyles, putting into practice the things learnt, offering models and actions necessary to the adaptation to the real world (Marga, 2005).

V. Chiș (2005:31) synthesises the following general competences and basic abilities necessary to all students/adults in various areas, as prerogatives of the school of the future: knowledge about self as subject engaged in different tasks; knowledge about others and interaction abilities; learning abilities, learning how to learn; predisposition for continuous learning, throughout the entire life; responsibility as a member of community/society; mental and physical health; critical thinking, creativity and productivity; active participation to the economic and social life.

The main goals of the compulsory education in Romania, according to the European politics in

the domain aim the following directions (according to *The Reform of The Compulsory Education in Romania*, page 14):

- For classes form I to VIII (ages from 6 to 14 years): achieving basic competencies, including new competencies necessary for a society based on knowledge: the preparation of the students for a life-long learning process (communication, writing, reading, mathematical calculations, digital and informational alphabetization, scientific and technological culture, entrepreneurial culture, communication using international languages, civic culture and behaviour, democratic citizenship, critical thinking, the capacity to adapt to new situations, team working, interest for personal development and learning).
- For classes IX and X (14 to 16 years students): the real equality of chances, ensuring base education for all students, the concomitant promotion of stability and social change; the preparation of the students for the adult and active life, for spare time, family and society; the preparation and the motivation of the students to continue the educational process in a continuously changing world.

The fundamental instrument to achieve these goals is the curriculum. The curriculum for the compulsory education, created as approach to the new requirements of the basic education and the new European tendencies in the field, contributes to the development of the students' personality in harmony with the needs of a society based on knowledge. It also contributes to the achievement of new basic competencies solicited by society and economy and to the formation of the students in a life-long process.

The national curriculum for the gymnasium is based on 8 categories of key competencies, which determine the formation profile of the student:

- Competencies for communication in the native language and two international languages;
- Fundamental competencies for mathematics, science and technology;
- Digital competencies (using informational technology for obtaining information and solving problems);
- Axiological competencies (as set of necessary values for an active and responsible participation to the social life);
- Competencies for the management of the private life and the career evolution;
- Entrepreneurial competencies;
- Competencies for cultural expression;
- Competencies for life-long learning.

According to the new approach upon the curriculum, the documents of educational politics and the psychic and pedagogic characteristics of the students, the formation profile for the compulsory education was created and included in the national Curriculum. It consists of a set of competencies, attitudes and values with transdisciplinary character, formed/ achieved as a result of the new curriculum: to show creative thinking; to use various communication modalities in real life situations; to understand the process of belonging to various communities; to prove the capacity to adapt to different situations; to contribute to a qualitative life environment; to understand adequately use technologies; to develop investigation capacities and value experience; to build a ser of individual and social values and use it for the behaviour and career orientation.

4. Conclusions

Affirming the necessity of considering the basic education a priority for the national educational system, A. Miroiu (1998:128), identifies the following arguments: it provides with the fundamentals for later education and for the development of attitudes necessary for the use of communication and logic and mathematical thinking; it represents the *sine qua non* condition for the fulfilment of individual obligations in family and community; it offers the basic instruments of learning (oral communication, alphabetisation) and its fundamental contents (knowledge, competencies, values, attitudes); it creates the premises for the development of individual capacities; it offers the possibility to improve the quality of life, through responsible decision and continuous learning.

Considering the impact of compulsory education upon the ulterior evolution of the youth and upon the development of the society, also its magnitude as social sector (educated population, teachers, and schools), we highlight the necessity of creating and applying educational politics with increased attention, engagement and responsibility.

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