A MODEL TO ENHANCE THE ROMANIAN COMPULSORY EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM EFFECTIVENESS

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Abstract:The compulsory educational system has the role to prepare children for literacy and developing the basic knowledge for further studies or different occupational jobs. The globalization has had significant implications in the national educational systems. The Romanian compulsory system has been the subject of several changes in the last 25 years, some of them contributing to the increase in quality management, but others to the decrease in effectiveness of the children education. This paper is aiming to present some ideas found in the literature about the effectiveness in schools and then to analyse the main weaknesses that have lead to the coming-down effectiveness of the compulsory educational system in Romania. In the last two parts of the paper several suggestions to increase the effectiveness of this system based on eight identified drivers and a model of change process are proposed. The methodology used in this research is based on own observations and experience, analyse and the conceptualization.

Keywords: school effectiveness, compulsory educational system, Romania, weaknesses, drivers, model for change process

1. Introduction

The transformation of the entire socio-economical environment worldwide that have been provoked by the globalization, the new competences required by the employers, the ITC revolution and the changes in behaviour and mentality of the new generation of children determined the National educational systems to adapt to these factors. The national educational systems adopted different approaches to evaluating the educational effectiveness, mostly being focused on the teaching-learning methods and the outcomes.

Regarding the Romanian educational system it has been known as being a very efficient one. In the last 25 years, this system suffered various transformations imposed by the legal framework in the continually change process. But, due to the political decision factors having group interests or lack of vision and competences, the educational system lost most of its effectiveness in terms of children results and competences acquired.

Considering the main ideas regarding the education's effectiveness, this paper is focused on the Romanian compulsory educational system, illustrating some weaknesses that are lowering the effectiveness, based on own observation and experience. The last two parts of the paper are willing to propose several ways for effectiveness enhancing and a model for change process to be applied in Romania by using the literature ideas and the conceptualization.

2. Effectiveness in the schools

The effectiveness in schools or the educational effectiveness is a complex concept, being seen from a multitude of facets, depending on the outcomes considered.

The general definition of effectiveness is the ability to achieve stated education goals (Ford Seiler, 2013). Scheerens (2013) underlined that the 'school effectiveness' refers to the level of goal attainment of a school in terms of responsiveness to the community and teachers' satisfaction. The author is making the differentiation between school effectiveness and educational effectiveness, saying that "when effectiveness is the predominant quality perspective, the focus is on the instrumental value of input and process indicators to maximize output (Scheerens, 2013).

The worldwide educational systems are continuing improving and adapting to the advanced information technology, labor market requirements, and quality recognition standards. "Education, like almost every other area of our society, has evolved in leaps and bounds in recent years.

Among several other inputs-outputs correlations used in enhancing the educational effectiveness, the most important ones may be the types of teaching-learning methods, a subject under continuous debate.

Traditional teaching techniques, based mainly on a teacher explaining a topic and students *taking notes,* may still be useful on occasion, but education today revolves more around encouraging the student to awaken their curiosity and desire to learn" (Santos, 2013). The traditional teaching method has failed to develop critical thinking in students (Luther, 2000).

The new paradigm in education considers the cognitive education as being a better kind of students' development. "The cognitive education is composed of the set of instructional methods that assist students in learning knowledge to be recalled or recognized, as well as the students understanding and intellectual abilities and skills" (Reigeluth, 2009, p.52)

The worldwide schools are mainly concerned on finding new methods to keep the students aware and open to absorb knowledge and develop the competences needed in the real life. In this respect, the "Top 10" new teaching techniques for 2015 are: write on windows; students find the mistakes; include silly answers in quizzes; fix the sick slides; select a travel partner; pair-work: take charge; teacher for the day; repeat tasks 3-4 times; theme for the month and funny socks (Lern, 2016).

In the era of the rapid informational and communication technology (ITC) development, the use of the animated video could better capture the students' attention. "The optimal learning environment is not to sit passively waiting for a lecture to end. The ideal learning environment is when the student sees, hears, and feels the material themselves" (Sherbill, 2014). To give feedback giving is also very important in clarifying the accumulated knowledge. "In some situations, learners can learn more from reflecting back on the solving-problem experience than they learn doing it" (Reigeluth, 2009, p.67).

Many efforts to adapt the educational system to the new ITC have been done in many countries along the time. The Ireland, for example, has introduced in 1960 new child-centered approaches that encourage students to "discover" knowledge by themselves, working at their own individual speed or in groups in a minimally guided environment, with the teacher offering support. But, the teaching methods have to be adapted to the course subjects. It has been proved in China that math and science are better taught using whole-class teaching method to add the knowledge to the long-term memory (Reville, 2015). BI 2020 (2013, p.3-5) as a Norwegian

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provider for education has anticipated the future educational environment using scenarios, such as:

- "Just-in-time skills 2020" is a scenario where learning is tightly intertwined with business and industry. To a greater extent, students must perform in a real-life context by solving actual tasks. The different educational institutions provide a collection of module-based courses that can be combined to meet company-specific demands.

- "Connect & Share 2020" is a scenario that suggests that the global learning structure is flat, in terms of providing accessible web-based solutions that revoke the importance of physical presence. Content is offered in modules, where low-end is free, and high-end is expensive. Knowledge is created and integrated into networks that are continually changing.

- "Branded learning 2020" is a scenario where acknowledged institutions are recognized as safe providers of knowledge and competence, both in a short-term and long-term perspective. The quality of education is accredited through the work of affiliated scholars.

These scenarios are based on the practical competencies proven by students.

Nevertheless, "many institutions are moving towards problem-based learning as a solution to producing graduates who are creative; think critically and analytically, to solve problems" (Damodharan & Rengarajan, 2002).

3. Weaknesses in the Romanian compulsory educational system

The compulsory educational system in Romania comprises: one pre-school year called "form zero", four years in the primary school and six years in the secondary school for children between 6 to 16 years old. The compulsory educational system is the basics for the high school studies and then the university studies or technical schools.

The main characteristics of the Romanian compulsory educational system are briefly described on the website: "Elementary and secondary education in Romania is compulsory until the age of 16. In practice, given that most Romanians start school at the age of 6, the first ten years have been made compulsory by the ministry. Aside from the official schooling system, and the recently-added private equivalents, there exists a semi-legal, informal, fully-private tutoring system. Tutoring is mostly used as a supplement to help prepare for various examinations, which

are notoriously difficult. Tutoring is wide-spread, and it can be considered a part of the education system" (https://www.justlanded.com/english/Romania/Romania-Guide/Education/Education-in-Romania).

The Romanian strategy regarding the compulsory education system lacks with a clear political vision based on long-terms objectives budgeted accordingly. Probably, some of the actual weaknesses are derived from this lack.

The effectiveness of this educational system may be conducted by eight drivers, such as: curriculum, teaching methods, assessment methods, support materials, educational staff, technology, quality management and public budget. None of the enumerated drivers are more important then the others, but any of them may contribute to the system's effectiveness increasing or decreasing.

Curriculum

Everybody knows and officials are recognizing that the curriculum is too "heavy", but anytime it is evaluated some other new courses are added and it becomes more loaded. One of the causes is the pressure maintained by many experienced teachers to keep their courses in the educational plan, sheltered by the Unions in education.

Teaching methods

The traditional teaching methods are mostly used, being based on "learning by heart" and being indifferent on the children's fitness to a course or another, to the competences acquired or creative and practical skills developing. The main cause is the worse quality of the teaching staff regarding the psycho-pedagogical skills.

The tasks are mostly very difficult to be solved by the students alone without the help of their parents and the study and tasks solving take daily at least 5-6 hours, because every teacher is considering that his/her own course is the most important one. The children are spending between 4 and 6 hours daily at school or 8 hours if they are registered at an after school program and then they are working at home until 10 or 11 PM to finish their tasks. They are feeling tired and bored and many of them reject going to school.

Assessment methods

The teachers and children's assessments are also based on citing from the memory entire pages from the manuals or notebooks and not to creativity.

Educational staff

The teachers are not periodically trained with new teaching-learning methods and their nomination is based on a huge quantity of literature to be proved they recorded.

Support materials

The manuals, full of information and data, mostly not relevant are not attractive. A heavy package of several manuals and notebooks are carried on every day affecting the children's spine.

Moreover, the schools are not interested in organizing sports teams and competitions.

Technology

The classrooms are not equipped with multimedia equipment to be used for teaching and the school labs are not equipped properly, not used or they don't exist.

Quality management

Even a special institution to assess the quality in the pre-university education is set up and the schools are periodically evaluated and accredited, some relevant aspects are not really considered, such as the right competences to be acquired vs. the children' age, the time spent by the students to prepare their tasks or the use of modern teaching-learning-assessment methods.

Public budget

The shortage of the public budget is reflected on the educational budget, as well. It emphasize the lack of funds for manuals, technology and infrastructure, teacher's training programs, research projects, competitions and other needs.

The results are accordingly: stressed, demoralized, bored and unprepared to face the real life children and unmotivated teachers. Instead of actively participation to the learning process

the children are spending their time during and after the teaching hours using their mobile phones by writing messages and playing games.

4. A vision: suggestions for the effectiveness improvement

Having in view the main drivers that are contributing to the effectiveness of the compulsory educational system and their characteristics that might increase the effectiveness of this system in Romania a new vision is presented below (figure 2).

Strategy

The Romanian strategy regarding the compulsory education needs a new vision based on long-terms objectives. The new vision needs to be focused on the children's knowledge and competences acquiring and on the development of children's skills for research, innovation and creativity in the context of the ITC revolution.

Curriculum

The curriculum has to be focused on the children's acquiring and developing competences. It has to comprise a few basic compulsory course subjects, such as literature and grammar, math, IT, civic knowledge, history, geography and science (physics, chemistry, biology), as well as other subjects as options, such as foreign languages, arts, music, sports, economics, religion, technical activities, and others, depending on the children's age.

The civic knowledge course is a very important one in the children's education. This course needs to approach practical aspects of the real life, such as:

- Behavioral rules at home, on the street, in a vehicle, in a canteen and so on, regarding the cleaning keeping; vocabulary used; respect to the people; respect to the laws, regulations, and rules;
- The importance and methods to protect the nature and cultural artifacts and values;
- the use of banks, the Internet, smoking, and drugs, underlining the threats that may appear;
- Building and managing a budget;

- The importance to eat natural food and the implication of the processed food on the health.
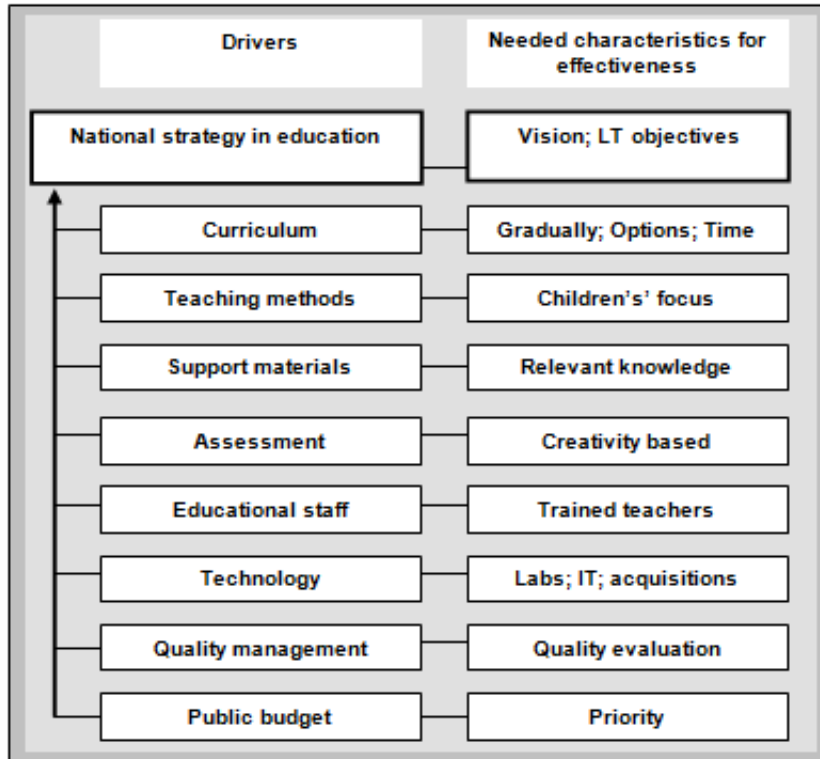

Fig.1 Drivers for the compulsory educational system effectiveness

The knowledge has to be provided gradually, according to the children's age and form and to be focused on the development of the creativity and innovation skills, rather then storage in mind the learned by heart data.

The syllabus has to provide information about the estimated teaching and learning activities and time, according to the children's age. Also, it has to present the subjects composing a course, which needs to be selected among the most relevant and useful knowledge.

The teaching and learning activities have to be mostly organized in the classrooms and laboratories. The children must fulfill their didactical tasks mostly in school, not at home, excepting the home assignments with creativity tasks.

The time spent by children in school for teaching and learning process, including the didactical tasks is very important. These activities have not exceeded in total 4-5 hours in the

primary school and 6-7 hours in the secondary school. The children need time for rest, sports, arts, books reading, Internet searching and other extra-didactical activities, while the adults are working 8 hours daily.

Teaching methods

The teaching methods are also very important in the children competences acquiring. They have to be adapted to the children's age and focused on the children's competences development.

In the primary forms the teaching has to be based on games to facilitate learning without realizing and having fun.

In the secondary forms the course has to begin with a holistic presentation, because the students need to know previously what they are expecting for.

The active communication with the children during the subject presentation may lead to the development of communication skills, curiosity, and creativity. Any idea expressed by the children has to be appreciated and not one idea has to be considered as being wrong.

The self-learning and the preparing a course lesson in advance at home are facilitating debates in the classroom. The teachers have to coach and encourage all children to express their ideas about a subject and to actively communicate.

Assessment

The children's knowledge has to be evaluated the whole year by using credit points, considering the active participation to the debates of different subjects, home prepared marked assignments, tests in the classroom and different small projects realized in teams or individual. The role of the teaching-learning-assessment must be to develop the medium performance for any children. The children willing to get high performance in one specific field need to be taught in special groups.

Support materials

The manuals have to be uniformly for all the children studying into a form. The Ministry of Education has to re-set-up the House of printing manuals, under the strict control of the Ministry of Finance regarding the expenses because the system of nomination the printing house by public auction is not a good practice for anyone (delay in providing them in time, quality and knowledge). The manuals need to comprise the relevant and useful knowledge necessary for the literacy and competences acquiring.

The schools' libraries need to be equipped with relevant books and journals necessary for supplementary studies, chosen very carefully, in accordance with the courses description.

Educational staff

Regarding the teachers' quality two main aspects have to be considered: their nomination and their continuing education.

- **Teachers' nomination**

The teachers' nomination has to be based on the practical skills of psycho-pedagogy, rather than the selected theoretical concepts and the literature that are used in the teaching process. The teachers need to prepare within the nomination process three compulsory forms of examination: (1) written tests in the classroom or IT lab regarding the manuals content; (2) written psycho-pedagogy plan regarding the knowledge delivery methods focused on the children that could be prepared at home, in accordance with the manuals and course description and (3) oral examination consisting in the plan presentation in front of an examination team.

- **Teachers' continuing education**

The Ministry of Education has to provide and support all annually expenses to implement a plan for the psycho-pedagogy continuing learning programs during the summer time, ended with a compulsory examination of all teachers. In advance, several corps of trainers needs to be prepared in concordance with the changes in the teaching-learning process.

Technology

All the classrooms have to be equipped with wireless Internet access and/or multimedia equipment and inteligent board to be used in teaching-learning process. The labs also need to be

equipped accordingly and used for different optional courses, such as: IT, chemistry, physics and so on.

Quality management

The national criteria and quality indicators regarding the educational process evaluation have to be revised and improved accordingly with the new national strategy in the compulsory educational system.

The time schedule of the courses needs to facilitate the children's practical skills and relevant knowledge acquiring. In the same time, the number of courses per day needs to be reduced at a minimum possible to avoid the carrying on the school bags with many manuals and notebooks that negatively affects the children's health.

The entire program has to be organized in such a way that the children should be continually coached and supervised.

Public budget

The compulsory education needs to be financed as a priority based on an educational budget drafted for at least 5-10 years and to comprise, apart of the personnel wages, five other sections regarding: equipment acquisition, manuals printing, teachers and another type of staff annually training and scientific research and competitions.

5. The process of change into the compulsory educational system

It is no doubt that the weaknesses briefly presented above need to lead to several changes into the Romanian compulsory educational system (fig.1).

Even if the kindergarten forms are not compulsory, the changes must begin when children have 3-5 years old, when knowledge have to be provided by using games.

The process of change comprises 3 phases.

The first phase is going to be developed into 3 steps, each with three parallel objectives. The objectives may be developed in 2-3 years, according with a timetable, which is not design here. It has to start with the funds allocation for the compulsory educational system from the National budget to finance the activities that are to be developing in the first phase called here "preparation".

The first step includes the trainer's training regarding new psycho-pedagogical methods and new curriculum and course description elaboration by experts' teams. Prior to the new curriculum design and elaboration, the Ministry of Education might organize the selection of experts that will form the working groups for the new curriculum, course descriptions, manuals and other support materials for teaching-learning process by forms.

The second step includes the teachers' training on new psycho-pedagogical methods for teaching-learning-assessment and new manuals design, elaboration and printing. The Ministry of Education will select a single public printing house, controlled by the Government.

The third step is dedicated to the improvement of the management quality standards.

The second phase is dedicated to the system's gradually implementation, starting with the pre-school form, the next year with the first form of the primary education and so on.

The third phase is willing to provide feedback by evaluation and accreditation procedures and to establish improvement actions.
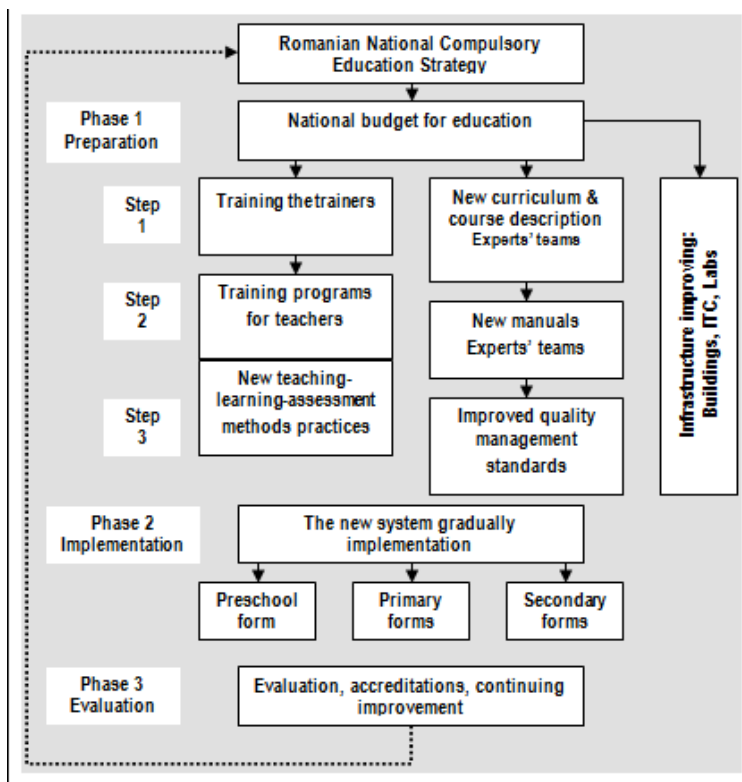
Fig. 1 The process of the compulsory educational system change

Conclusions

The compulsory education needs to be adapted to the new environmental requirements. In this respect, in many countries the experts and scholars are searching for a best fitted system to attend this vision and to take into account the new generation of the students' affinity for ITC and freedom of ideas expression. Romania, as the other countries needs a new compulsory educational system.

Based on the main weaknesses briefly described in the paper, some suggestions are given considering eight drivers that are considered to be the coordinates of an effective system: curriculum, teaching methods, assessment methods, support materials, educational staff, technology, quality management and public budget.

Finally, a model of a change process to reach the expectations of all stakeholders, but mainly of the students and teachers, is proposed. The holistic view of this process implementation might lead to the construction of a compulsory educational system that is required for the next decades.

However, the model is free to be improved and might be a subject for further debates.

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