

A QUARTER CENTURY OF HUNGARIAN CONFESSIONAL EDUCATION IN BIHOR AND SATU MARE COUNTIES-CONSEQUENCES, FUTURE DILEMMAS

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Summary: In my paper I analyse the relevance of the school performances in a theoretical approach, focusing on the individual and institutional evaluation. Both approaches have supporters and opposers among the social scientists and I point out some major issues of this argument, especially those related to the role of the social-economic factors in the school results.

On the other hand, I also present briefly the school performances in Bihor county's high schools with Hungarian as teaching language, underlining some scientifically proven circumstances which according to the data might have a major impact on the relatively low performance indicators from these schools in this county.

Keywords: school performances, Bihor county, social-economic factors, Hungarian teaching language

Introduction

The school performances are one of the most studied fields of the sociology of education and of sociology, in general. One of the possible reasons is that unlike many other indicators of individual performances, the school related achievements are widely regarded to be results of long-term processes, even if there's a considerable debate among scientists on the origins of the school performances.

Some argue, that the school performances are rather results of cognitive capabilities and pedagogical methods, while others emphasize the importance of the so called socio-economic factors, which includes, among others, the financial situation of the family, the parents' level of education and other external circumstances.

Regardless of one's scientific attitude, it is sure that the school performances don't reflect a single moment with particular character from a child's early life, but are results of long lasting processes and are shaped by a variety of factors.\

In my paper I will analyze whether the school performances and better said, the results we have over this topic allow us to draw relevant conclusions.

The measurement of school performances: individual and institutional approach

In the scientific literature of the topic, the main research directions of the school performances have two major approaches. The individual approach focuses on the pupils' individual characteristics, and see school performances as the outcome of the personal skills, ambitions, devotion or of the various, but still individually important socio-economic factors.

Some authors believe that the socio-economic factors are more important. It is a mere fact that there are a large number of recently published papers which strongly suggest the existence of a large territorial concentration and territorial inequalities in the case of the best school performances, one of the most convincing results from Eastern-Central Europe are the findings of Neuwirth, Szemerszki (2009) while on a European scale, the claims of Florida, Mellander (2009). However, there are also some papers which did not confirm or reproduce the existence of such a decisive concentration inequality, especially remarkable are the findings of Geske, Grinfelds, Dzede, Zhang (2006) who in Latvia didn't find evidence for such concentration and inequality either.

So on the one hand the slightly majority of the recently publishing authors tend to find and claim that the school performances are strongly determined by the pupils' social-economic status (SES), like Chiu, Xihua (2008) and McConney, Perry (2010). However on the other hand, other claims, such as those belonging to Akiba, LeTendre, Scribner (2007) and Lee, Zuze, Ross (2005) do not confirm the above claimed findings but suggest that the school performances rather tend to correlate with educational, pedagogical and several other so called „soft social and pedagogical“ factors which are more difficult to put under quantitative investigation.

Such approaches tend to measure the individual school performances, and carrying out studies on all those factors which might have possibly played a role in the given pupils' school results. This approach can be useful in identifying series of factors can be of key importance and can turn out to be vital only as a result of a detailed and careful research, but normally tend to ignore the social, pedagogical and community related aspects from the pupils' performances.

The other approach, the institutional one doesn't focus on the individual achievements of the pupils, but compares institutions in terms of school performances, and often sets up different categories, based on the schools' character (theoretical, professional, artistic), the maintainers of the institutions (church-maintained or state-run, or foundational), but also on geographical situation. In countries with a significant share of ethnic minorities, like Romania, there are often comparative looks at the school performances of institutes with the majority or the minority language as teaching language.

Both the institutional and the individual approaches have vast international scientific literature. We can underline the works of Boudon (1974), Bernstein (1970) and Lawton (1974) as theoreticians for the relationship between the pupils' school performance and social background. We can likewise refer to the works of Ogbu, Gibson (1991) who suggests that such relationship is not only based on the transmission of cultural capital and knowledge, as usually described but also in a way in which the parents with higher level of cultural capital can demonstrate positive examples for the youth, offering a proof that education and gaining cultural capital can be a successful life strategy.

I could also briefly present the theories of Gronlick, Slowiaczek (1994) who focused on the importance of the direct parental influence, setting up an analogy in which the parents' financial and intellectual efforts are seen as a form of investment or input, while the expected output is obviously pupils' excellence in school achievements. I would also claim that in my views a significant contribution belongs to the theorists Richmand and Bowen (1997) who were among the first ones to identify four principal microspheres where the supportive attitude is a necessary pre-condition for the pupils to be motivated to achieve good school results.

These four microspheres are the family, school, neighborhood, friends/peer groups. Richamnd and Bowen believe that all these can have a key contribution, but if there is a conflict among the effects received from these, than other factors can become decisive. I could also turn towards the works of

Mollenhauer (1974) who analyzed former researches in such issues and came to the conclusion that there must be a series of relevant researches proving the correlation between value-orientation and school performances.

We should by no means leave out of the account Boudieu's (1978) views, who claimed that the existing formal educational structures may set the preconditions of the school performances. To my mind this is similar to Durkheim's (1980) theory who claimed that the primary task of the educational system is to train the people to be how the society needs them to be.

However, the possibilities of comparing school performances on both individual or institutional level are not the same in all the countries. In Romania, on the one hand there is a very objective measuring possibility, the results of the school leaving exams, faced by the pupils at the end of the high school. Recently the regulations have become more severe, introducing video surveillance during the examinations, and therefore the results are perfectly comparable on a countrywide basis. The other positive aspect, in terms of the possibilities for comparative researches on school performances is the existence of a centralized database run at the website of the Romanian Ministry of Education and Research, which allows the researchers to find every single students' detailed results.

On the other hand in my opinion it is a negative aspect, that the researchers do not have other moments in the pupils' school careers when they can compare the achievements. The final results, at the end of the high schools years are without a doubt useful indicators of the school performances, but it does not allow us to see where the real differences tend to appear. Are the school failures brought from the families, as a deficit in terms of socio-economic factors, or are increased or even created in the schools themselves? There can be estimations and hypothesizes, but not having other checkpoint but the school leaving exams, we can not affirm anything for sure in this regard.

Specific aspects of Bihor county related to the school performances in high schools with Hungarian as teaching language

Beyond all these claims we should take in to account a special condition, as in Western Romania, in Bihor and Satu Mare counties there is a long-running process described by Szilágyi (2007) as the Hungarian high schools from neighboring regions of Hungary tend attract large share of Hungarian pupils from Romania.

Indicators show, that even if there are three important cities in Western Romania with at least 2 high schools with Hungarian as teaching language (Carei, Oradea, Satu Mare) we do not find any of the ten best performing high schools from Romania in the period 2011-2014, neither in terms of excellence nor in terms of passing ratio.

In terms of passing ratio, the highest rate we find in the Bolyai Farkas Teoretic High School, in Targu Mures, which also leads in the terms of excellence, if we take into account only the pupils who received a general mark of 9 or higher. The lowest passing ratio in the top ten high schools would be the Artistic High School in Targu Mures with 84% (far from Oradea's Ady High school of 67%) while in terms of pupils who received at least 9 as general mark the last of the top ten would be the Mikes Kelemen College from Sfântu Gheorghe with 10%, far from Oradea's best Ady High school of 4%.¹

Conclusion

As I demonstrated in the theoretical part of my paper, school performances can be analysed from various aspects, each methodology leading to the emphasizing (or possibly even over-emphasizing) of some aspects and neglecting others. However, as in Bihor county there is a significant number of ethnic Hungarians, I found it useful to see whether the regional ethnic minority education can keep up with the countrywide elite. The data show that it does not, and a plausible explanation can be the phenomenon of choosing high schools from Hungary, especially in the case of the wealthy families, who (if we accept the theories underlining the importance of the socio-economic factors) have a better chance of achieving outstanding school results.

¹ Own calculations based on the data published on the www.edu.ro website, date of access 18.05.2016.

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