

A Comparative Study of the Procedures of Drawing Up External Evaluation Reports on Secondary Education Institutions in Countries of the European Union and Romania

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Abstract – The education management must be seen as a science operating on educational activities via an optimal global or strategic approach, and also as a model of performance management, applicable at the level of education institutions. The purpose of this study is to offer a summary on the theoretical basis of the concepts of performance management and quality assurance in education, through a comparative analysis of quality systems in education in European states and Romania.

Starting from the hypothesis that, if each educational institution is grounded on a set of guidelines resting on values and principles, known and adhered to by all factors involved in the system, this entails quality education delivered via an efficient management, we have set up an analysis of procedures, instruments and ways of drawing up the external institutional evaluation report, in a comparative approach between European and Romanian secondary education systems.

Keywords: Education Management, Quality in Education, External Evaluation

I. INTRODUCTION

The current educational process, based on a system of actions taken to the purpose of shaping and developing the students' personality, at the same time predominantly oriented and tailored towards certain concrete finalities, determines the development of an efficient educational management, adapted to the characteristics of the organization. We therefore must define quality in education with reference to the organization of a school– as an educational entity of reference within any educational system. The educational products created by the education entity are offered to its customers for use, which customers are the students and other interested parties, by means of a specific process, called educational service [1].

The purpose of this study is to achieve a synthesis on the theoretical basis of the concepts of performance management and quality assurance, in form of a comparative analysis of quality assurance systems in education between European states and our own country. As a methodology to achieve this, we have used secondary bibliographical resources, research reports, studies and scientific works in the field of education management.

Although notions of education quality find a common ground in ensuring the cognitive development of learners, such as building attitudes, skills and values that are likely to foster the individual well-being and the social development and equity, there is still much focus on the quantitative aspects of education [2].

Today, at a European level, the prime objective in the field of education management has become to rise the quality level of education services delivered by education institutions and to assure an efficient management. In each member state of the European Union, quality in education represents a national priority, wherefore transparent and all-accessible education systems have been developed, and their results can be seen and transferred among all European countries.

In this context, all European Union member states are encouraged to develop and promote a culture of quality, by developing a quality management based on systems of quality assurance at all levels of education. The evaluation of the quality level of education services, as provided by schools throughout the entire European Union, and especially the attempt to establish common quality indicators, remains a fundamental issue with European policies in education, influencing the economic and social success of the entire Union.

Therefore, it is to be said that in the times to come, quality is top concern priority of most agendas in

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education, and improving quality is probably the most important task confronting any institution [3].

II. THE ORGANIZATION OF THE SECONDARY EDUCATION SYSTEM IN EUROPE

In Europe, three different organizational models of mandatory education can be distinguished. These can be defined as follows [4]:

- The unique education structure (a combination of primary and lower secondary education);
- Primary education -ISCED 1 (International Standard Classification of Education – adopted at the General UNESCO Conference in its 36th session of November 2011, it represents an instrument of collection and presentation of statistics in education at both national and international levels), followed by

a period of integrated secondary education - ISCED 2 according to a “common central” offer

- Primary education, followed by differentiated secondary education through distinct educational threads, to be found in countries like Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, where at the age of 10 -11, for ISCED 2 the parents or the school choose an educational thread or a certain type of education for their children or students.

General mandatory education organized by a unique structure, where education is offered from the beginning to the end of the mandatory education cycle, without transitions from ISCED 1 to ISCED 2 is encountered in 10 European countries, among them some Scandinavian countries, then Bulgaria, Croatia etc.

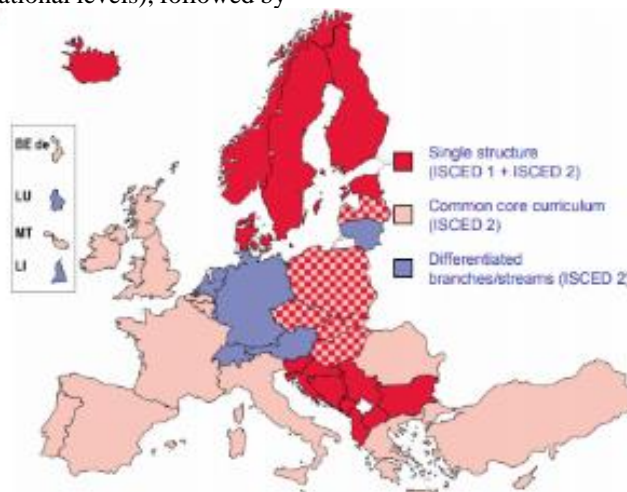


Fig. 1. The main organizational models of secondary education (ISCED 1-2) in Europe [5]

Along the general lower secondary education level, that takes until the ages 15 -16, students of more than half of the European countries go through a common curricular core. There are also countries like Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia in which, although the mandatory education is organized into a unique structure until the ages of 14 or 15, already beginning with ages 10 – 11 students can enroll into distinct institutions that provide lower and upper secondary education.

The map in Fig. 1 shows the *mainstream educational programmes* considered to be the most representative in each country. They encompass:

- Early childhood education and care provided in publicly subsidized and accredited center-based settings for children from the youngest age of enrolment;
- Primary and secondary education programmes including the period of compulsory education;
- Post-secondary non-tertiary programmes;
- Tertiary level main programmes.

The diagrams *do not show*:

- Educational provision intended exclusively to adults with low formal educational attainment and/or a low level of basic skills. The diagrams cover only the courses allowing adult to turn back to school or to gain further qualifications which are incorporated in mainstream educational programmes. Usually, these courses are integrated in the programmes providing competence-based qualifications at secondary educational level or allowing access to tertiary education (post-secondary non-tertiary educational level) [5];
- Separate provision outside mainstream education for children and young people with special educational needs;
- At tertiary level, doctoral studies, as well as the specialized studies for the regulated professions such as medicine and architecture.

In Romania, the mandatory general education comprises:

- Primary education contains preparatory class and classes I – IV, comprising children beginning with 6 years of age.

- Lower secondary education, comprises classes V – VIII, upon graduation students receive a graduation diploma and a grade sheet, both these documents being part of the educational portfolio;
- 2 years of upper secondary education, or high-school, centered upon development and diversification of key competences and on building specific competences according to the domain, profile, specialization or qualification.

III. PROCEDURES OF EXTERNAL EVALUATION OF EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN EUROPEAN UNION COUNTRIES IN COMPARISON TO ROMANIA

The information on the external evaluation of schools in Europe has been analyzed through studies made by the European Network of Information Concerning Education [6], the Education, Culture and Audiovisual Executive Agency [7], The Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Secondary Education [8].

The external evaluation of schools as an instrument of quality management, is widespread in Europe and is performed in over 31 education systems, distributed across 26 states. Although different from one country to another, the external evaluation is performed to the purpose of increasing education performances and is focused on a managerial evaluation of students' progress and of the level of abidance by regulations.

The frequency of external evaluations in secondary education institutions across the European Union in the states can be classified into three groups, as follows:

- A cyclic model, according to which evaluations are performed at regular intervals, as they are established by the performing authorities; these intervals can vary from 3 years (Macedonia, former Yugoslavian countries, Turkey, up to maximum 10 years (Belgium, France);
- A model based on sampling, where the external evaluation is focused on the evaluation of certain criteria established shortly before by authorities or on evaluation of risks, and the evaluated institutions are selected either based on criteria (size, location in the area, etc., for example Scotland), or the sampling is justified by yearly listed criteria, based on which schools are to be evaluated; such is the case in Hungary, Estonia, Belgium. For the selection of schools in Denmark and Ireland, a risk-based approach is employed. In France there is no clear selection criterion for schools to be evaluated, whereas inspectors have no obligation to evaluate each school in a systematic way.
- A combination of these two models can be found in Holland, Sweden, England and Northern Ireland, where the model is predominantly cyclic, evaluations are

performed every 5 years; with all this, some schools can be subjected to new risk evaluations as early as 1 – 3 years, if they have not been rated “exceptional” at their last evaluation.

In Romania we have a periodical external evaluation which is performed every five years on accredited schools. In addition, there is an external evaluation to the purpose of approval for provisory functioning, as well as an evaluation to the purpose of accreditation of an education institution within maximum two years after the graduation of the first generation in that school.

According to the Eurydice Report in Europe, concerning organisms responsible with the accomplishment of external evaluation of schools, there are two main types of organisms, represented from a legal point of view. The first is a department of the educational authority from a central or top level, usually identified as the *inspectorate* or, sometimes the evaluation department. A second type is a distinct agency specialized on school inspection.

In Romania, the external evaluation of the quality of education provided by secondary education institutions and by other education providers is made by ARACIP - a public institution of national interest, subordinated to the Ministry of Education and Research, with judicial personality and its own budget, founded through the Government Emergency Ordinance nr. 75/2005 concerning the assurance of quality in education, as approved in Law nr. 87/2006.

The process of external evaluation is quite similar throughout the European Union countries, and can be divided into three phases:

- Collection and analysis of data;
- Visit to the school site;
- Drawing-up of the report on findings.

IV. DRAWING UP THE EVALUATION REPORT ENSUING THE EXTERNAL EVALUATION

The activities within the process of external evaluation end with the drawing up of a report on the findings. Although this kind of report is met in all evaluated systems, its drawing-up differs among states. In six countries, Belgium, France, Italy, Hungary, Holland and Sweden, it is made without any consultation with the school, while in the other countries, the report is written ensuing discussions between evaluators and the school leadership, in some states even the teachers are involved into this process.

The steps in the writing of the evaluation report in the case such a dialog between evaluators and the school takes place, can be structured into three main phases:

- Evaluators send a draft of the evaluation report to the schools;
- Schools analyze this report and send feedback;
- Evaluators write the final report.

In Poland, the final report is written by the evaluators without any previous feedback from schools, but this report can be contested and sent back to the evaluators to be analyzed again. In Belgium and Ireland, the final report can be completed with supplementary comments from schools, concerning issues that were not mentioned in the report. In Romania, the procedures to the process of external evaluation of schools comprise all three phases:

- Collection and analysis of data from schools, which is performed through the platform <https://calitate.aracip.eu>, in two directions: one that focuses on analysis of documents that regulate the activity of the school – PDI/ PAS, and of other approvals and authorizations, the educational offer, the results of the children’s and parents’ interviews, etc., and another one that is based on calculating the school’s efficiency index, departing from 15 elements of context/risk factors. The efficiency index can be less than 1 in case of results that are weaker than expected, or 1 when the found results are those expected within the concrete environment in which the school functions, or even more than 1 if the results exceed expectations;
- During the visit to the school site, several activities take place, such as: the evaluation commission analyzes various documents of the institution, the commission members also sit in class observations, they apply questionnaires to certain target groups, analyze the evidence proving results and the effects of various activities in the direction of rising the quality of education offered by the school, in particular on the quality indicators from national standards;
- The final evaluation report is written without consultation with the school, it will be transmitted by the commission to ARACIP and to the school within 10 business days after the end of evaluation activities.

The external evaluation report will contain the scores granted to the school for each performance indicator from the evaluated reference standards. Within 30 days from communication, complaints can be forwarded to the minister of education concerning the conclusions of the external evaluation report.

The results of the external evaluation can be divided into three large categories:

- Correctional measures, requiring schools to take improvement/remedial measures for the deficiencies found by evaluators as a result of the analysis on weak points and faults, made by the evaluators;
- Disciplinary measures applied in cases of breaking regulations, or if no remedial measures for signaled deficiencies have been taken;
- Measures to increase visibility, to the purpose of achieving official recognition, notification

and dissemination of good practices resulting from the external evaluation.

The recommendations for improvement are the most common actions that are part of the external evaluation, they are found in most external evaluation procedures. The monitorization by evaluators is to be found in numerous education systems, where evaluators go on additional visits. If in most countries these monitorizations take place only in cases where the results of external evaluations were wanting, and educational deficiencies were found, in Ireland there is additional monitorization by sampling schools, while in Malta there are unannounced monitorizations within one year from the publication of the evaluation report. Monitorization through additional visits is not mandatory in Germany, Estonia, France, Latvia, Hungary.

The obligation of schools to draw up an action plan for the improvement of detected deficiencies is part of the measures required from schools after the issue of the evaluation report. In 12 education systems from Belgium, Spain, Latvia, Lithuania, Portugal, England, Wales, Northern Ireland, Iceland, Turkey, the drawing up of the action plan focused on weak points correction is mandatory. In Poland, this is only required in the case of very serious deficiencies, in Belgium this action plan is made as an option in order to avoid immediate closing down of the school, and in Hungary this plan is made for a time period of 5 years. In Belgium and Lithuania, clear provisions exist that require the involvement of teachers into the drawing up of the action plan.

The support measures point to two categories, like support measures in form of supporting supplementary professional training, that can be achieved either on the evaluators’ suggestion, or the school’s proposal, being part of their action plan. This support measure through additional training is found in 15 countries, like Belgium, Germany, Ireland, Spain, Italy, Hungary, Lithuania, Malta, Austria, England, Wales, Northern Ireland, and in France it is only applied within ISCED 1, and in Cyprus to ISCED 2.

A second category of support measures based on allocation of supplementary resources in most systems (14 countries) are in form of professional support for assistance. For example, in Lithuania, additional financial resources are allocated to hire supplementary teaching staff helping students, or in France, Cyprus and Malta, the financial support comes for the increase of staff number in schools. In England, financial resources are being offered to support partnerships/experience exchanges between schools with high performances and those with lower academic results.

Disciplinary measures, usually taken by responsible authorities are found in the legislation of 18 education systems, being applied in cases of breaking regulations/laws in Austria, The Czech Republic, Hungary, or they are applied when deficiencies are not corrected or, as is the case in other countries, when

recommendations in the external evaluation report were not followed.

These disciplinary measures are also different from the point of view of object of application: they can be applied against the school staff, and come in form of fines, sanctions, resignations of managers or sometimes of other personnel. In the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Poland, these measures of demanding the managers' resignation are taken when these have not applied the improvement plan in a satisfactory manner.

One other disciplinary method is taken against the entire school, in the form of budgetary cuts (Holland), withdrawal of the right to release recognized certifications (Latvia), the school can be erased from the schools' register (Czech Republic, Slovakia), or even withdrawn its functioning license (Estonia). In addition, a disciplinary measure is the complete closure of schools, which is applied in Belgium, Sweden and Hungary.

In Romania, following periodical external evaluations, in case of positive results – that is, the fulfillment of at least the minimum level of standards – the school receives a quality certification for 5 years, after which a new external evaluation takes place. In cases where a minimal required standard level has not been met, the school is given one year of grace time to improve, after which a new evaluation takes place. If neither the second evaluation can reveal acceptable results, the school enters a procedure of liquidation.

V. CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of European policies in the field of education reveals the conclusion that the development of an education management based on quality improvement in education represents a priority of states' policies, both at national and at international level.

One of the key objectives of the European Strategic Framework for Education and Training (ET 2020) is embodied by the rise of quality levels and efficiency of

investments in education across the entire European Union.

Therefore, it is evident that, even if the member states of the EU have education systems with different structures, with specific institutional hierarchies, and implicitly with different quality assurance systems, their common goal is to align themselves to a common European educational policy, aimed at fostering education systems with high levels of quality, based on transparency, and able to deliver recognizable finalities.

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