



FINANCING AND DECENTRALIZATION – MAJOR COORDINATES IN EDUCATION REFORM IN ROMANIA

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Abstract *This study is designed and developed based on the assumption that education reform (Education) is part of the reform leading Romanian society in its evolution towards modernization and performance. The economy of the future, prefigured even now, is an economy of knowledge (information), involving full participation of the human factor, especially in the size of its human capital, intellectual properly prepared. Education, in all its forms of organizing and developing represent provider (manufacturer) of the main capital. The role of education and training in the construction of the future outlined itself in the programming of the European Union, according to the European economy which should have become far more efficient and competitive economy of the world. To fulfill its historic mission school at all levels should be organized and financed appropriately. In this context, the authors intend to highlight a number of issues important in their opinion on financing and decentralization of educational activity from the perspective of Education Law no. 1/2011 (updated and republished in 2013), preceded by the Education Law no. 84/1995 (republished).*

Key words:

Institutional autonomy, budgetary financing, extra-budgetary funding, private funding, core funding, complementary financing, additional funding

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Introduction

Romania's post-socialist transition, especially for a new way of producing wealth, the resource base becomes knowledge was meant to be, at least in words, a process of profound reform of the society in all its structures. Education is particularly to this process, because it is the human activity that produces and disseminates the knowledge widely. Education is therefore more than a priority, a matter to the majority of citizens (students, teachers, parents, beneficiaries) in addition to solving a problem which success depends comprehensive reform of Romanian society.

The Romanian education status at the beginning of transition proved multiple perspectives precarious, insecurity largely induced by socio-economic development of the country and the world in four and a half decades of post second World War, not only its internal problems. The integration of education in the future society demands (modern and efficient, dedicated to people - as described by the personalities of science and culture world) can become reality only by reforming its immediate (fast) and multilateral. A major component of the Romanian education is considered, rightly in our view, the implementation of institutional autonomy at all levels of education,

supported by adequate funding and structural quantitatively.

Since the mid first decade post-December were promoted, of course, a number of measures really renewing education system (education), Romanian, including the Education Law no. 84/1995 (with clarifications and subsequent republication) and the status of teachers since 1997. There have also been initiated and designed a number of sectoral reforms. After all, the reform imposed itself as a mega theme¹ of education, with a focus on finance and decentralization, as central pillars of institutional autonomy. At the beginning of the third decade post-December was promulgated Education Law no. 1/2011, updated and republished in 2013. It may be considered, therefore, that it is well defined legal framework of decentralization of funding and Romanian educational system. The problem is its translation into practice.

1. Issues and implications of the underfunding of education in Romania

Diagnosis Romanian education highlights one of the major problems thereof, namely that its funding - distortions which manifests itself in this area generates a number of other disturbances in the organization and functioning of the education system.

Concepts on the financing of the education system (worldwide, not only in Romania) cover a fairly wide spectrum, ranging from extreme statist vision that all money resources must come from the public budget, and the extreme liberal, that education should be privatized in its entirety. Currently, financial resources (financial) of Romanian education come mostly (about three quarters) of the central administration budget, the remainder to 100% being covered by local government budgets and own resources (resources from local budgets, of local governments are in fact all public resources).

Comparative empirical studies and statistics show that serious efforts were made to increase budgetary allocations for education relative to allocations for other areas supported by budgetary resources. However, budgetary allocations for education amounted to 4% of gross domestic product (GDP), level of education provided by the law then in force (Law no. 84/1995), only at the beginning of the second decade of transition, due to budget constraints rigid, despite pressures to do so. Budgetary allocations for education beyond then 5% of GDP in countries like Germany, France, Hungary, Bulgaria².

Increasing the share of budgetary resources allocated to education, especially based on the reduction share of those allocated to the other areas of public interest, did not mean necessarily from year to year increase in real terms of education financing due to repeated declines to GDP - resources budget allocated to education ensured, in principle, the minimum required system operation. According to the first law of education in post revolutionary ³Romania, education was a national priority, but, however, was a frustrated education resource to its development concerns and efforts being forced to survive.

Romanian education development depends, however, in addition to the monetary resources of a complex of factors, including the forefront is the performance obtained by using available resources - these performances, depending on the presence and intensity were and are still likely significantly improve the effectiveness and relevance deficit of existing education system for the economic development of the Romanian society and to justify, so the priority position of education in the nation's strategic portfolio.

The underfunding affects all public - Advertise cover all financial (cash) insufficient development needs, the educational system is not a situation unique in this respect. However, funds (cash) shall be deemed sufficient for the needs for many educational systems in developed countries. The underfunding of education systems, although reflects a serious situation and generates multiple imbalances in development opportunities and upgrading, sometimes has a positive

effect ⁴in the sense that, on the one hand, limiting their use resources efficiently stimulate growth through improving the performance of institutions schools that are able to act in a competitive market, and on the other hand, the competitive facilitates the implementation of new management formulas, more efficient institutions in the field faced with the need to work properly with less resources. The logic exposed above does not work, but always – underfunding Romanian education has not determined (influenced) significantly the appearance and manifestation of institutional and behavioral characteristics on which schools to adapt their work to the insufficiency of public resources. It is appreciated, and we think rightly, that the financial autonomy of educational institutions is insufficiently understood, which is why it works distorted and inefficient applied in the context of the competitive market in the Romanian educational system is incomplete. Along with public resources allocated to education dimensions, much larger significance rests to the use of resources. Real restructuring of the education system is possible only through improving the effectiveness of available public resource. We appreciate that it is interesting to note that the substantial increase resources allocated to education was absorbed by increasing the number of staff and expansion of public higher education.

Increasing the number of teaching staff led to a significant increase in salary expenses pressures on the budget of the education system. In Romania, staff costs account for about 4/5 of the education budget, compared to 3/5 in developed countries, and to 65% in other former socialist countries (Hungary, Bulgaria, Slovakia). However, relative to GDP, a teacher from Romania receives a salary of up to 2 times smaller than a teacher of advanced states of the European Union. Low wages, especially in rural areas, led to the manifestation of dissatisfaction particularly prominent at specific times (actually obtaining a higher degree of autonomy of the school, as a first step in solving many problems, including the financial order cash, has not even been a demand of teachers' unions). Measures which led, in some degree, the improvement of teachers, the reduction of teachers, decrease the number of students in a class, the granting of bonuses and salary increases have slowed the degradation of education quality, but did not determine obvious increases performance of schools in Romania.

The expansion of public higher education (considered to be the most significant of the two mentioned) occurred in a context in which the Romanian higher education was not prepared for such a change⁵. Therefore, the university education system reaction was conservation of existing structures and mechanisms of operation, pointing out such rigidity and opposition to change and renewal. Public universities

emerged in the period immediately post-December were imitations of existing rather than their alternatives.

2. The Relationship University Autonomy – Financing

University autonomy, in turn, showed hidden effects when it acted as a shield against economic and social pressures to restructure the higher education system based on new management principles, which is why some changes of the academic education system coming more from the need to meet internal purposes in adapting that system than academic programs to new requirements of the labor market. The autonomy of universities was actually a good time, a simple euphemism for public higher education was funded exclusively from public budget and decisions are taken centrally under the direct control of the resort ministry especially as regards the number of teachers and their promotion as well as the number of students and their distribution at faculties, departments or specializations.

University autonomy should promote, firstly, more efficient organization of such institutions in terms of increased responsibilities for their work. According to quite authoritative opinions we consider university autonomy aims at both autonomy in organizational structures, functional independence and autonomy in the administrative field⁶. The autonomy regulation has made progress that can not be contested, but the manifestation of university autonomy is subordinate to full implementation of financial autonomy, which rejects the total dependence of the ministry of public universities, without implying, however, the absolute independence.

Achievements on the line of establishment and consolidation of university autonomy were not accompanied, however, by reducing costs in higher education institutions, due, among other things, the absence or insufficient functioning competitive market mechanisms and behaviors of university educational services. Financial autonomy based on budgetary autonomy or freedom of universities to design, approve and execute its own budget, facilitates manifestation stronger economic motivations in developing the overall strategy of the higher education institution, becoming an essential tool and an expression of efficiency of university management.

Private funding boosts higher education institutions to increase the number of paid places and to improve the efficiency of public resource allocation, university education's policies aimed reducing the number of publicly⁷ funded places.

Public resources made available in this way can be directed towards the lower levels of the education system, which means increased equity in financing, allocative efficiency and school performance at these

levels. However, an important part of public resources can be used for equalization of opportunities of access to higher levels of education in their orientation to the lack of opportunities or financial means (money) reduced.

Extra-budgetary resources (obtained through continuing education, distance education, scientific research, expertise, consulting, educational services, sponsorships, donations, etc.) are thereby an indicator of competitiveness of higher education achievements, not just a means to support its development.

Therefore education funding (priority component of its reform) should be addressed, in our opinion, by many dimensions, including the foreground is situated the volume of resources, efficiency and competitiveness of their performance. After 1998 there have been significant changes in education funding. It seems, however, that economic constraints and political compromises oriented more towards process improvements than to some radical changes, despite the recognition of the particular importance of the latter.

The key element of this is the decentralization of funding and supporting educational institutions, through appropriate financial regulations to attract and use extra-budgetary funds resources. In this context, in the financing of public universities, from budget funds, was introduced the distinction between basic financing and complementary funding, the latter being addressed under competition research projects⁸.

However, the performance in higher education are not assessed yet by the main beneficiaries students of the field, as would be normal in a competitive market and consumer subsidies academic programs, but the existence of university performance assessment bodies, objective and transparent permit assessment activity of higher education institutions and help develop a set of criteria to finance distinguished universities and evaluation capacity to achieve scientific research projects proposed, but not only.

There was already a classification of universities according to certain criteria, some of them questionable and challenged, set up periodic performance evaluation of their work in different ways. In fact, funding is only possible after egalitarian principles of risk and irreparable fast degradation of the quality of training graduates⁹.

Differentiated funding after justified and dimensioned criteria favors and stimulates also institutions that ensure a better relationship with socio-economic and cultural environment, stimulate initiative and competition, promoting thus structural changes economically and administratively.

Education systems that will be socially legitimate aim to establish a correlation between accurate and flexible educational performance and requirements of

the national economy in terms of labor resources or human capital (manifested, of course, qualifications and skills market). The transformations imposed by changes involving extensive and profound transition in the labor market, a market characterized by major imbalances that require adjustments according to the requirements of decentralization and competition. As such, the educational system needs to be rethought in terms of skills training, skills and specializations required by emerging economy and society.

Romanian educational system is still inertial and generates rigidities and imbalances, especially in terms of invalidation in everyday life and professional knowledge provided many graduates, despite some beneficial changes occurred in the post-socialist transition. The absence, largely curriculum educational programs training skills required in the labor market (itself with major deficiencies running) and mainly theoretical character (nonaplicative) and reproductive of education is associated with serious themes for discussion of the relationship between education and the economy – the school should be an institution with a fundamental role in the effort to consolidate the new Romanian society, because the success depends on the socio-economic system transformation tight supply and formation of knowledge, skills, abilities, attitudes and behaviors according to the value system of competitive economy and democratic society.

The performance of the society depends on the nature and quality of education - education is not a purpose in itself. Economic companies developed countries ensures that, by sponsoring an important part of education financing. The flow of financial resources (cash) alternatives reaches significant levels when the business world found in curricular standards an important part of its education and training requirements. Romanian education contribution to labor productivity growth, unemployment improving (rising unemployment and maintaining it at high levels should not be made, however, in our opinion solely to the education system - the manifestation of strong demand for labor in the volume, quality and desired structure and the reasonable period, the business environment is still fragile, if not non-existent), revenue growth, promoting professional attitudes and behaviors, social and ethical specific competitive economy is rather less visible.

In this context, the aim of any educational policy must be reconsidering the role of education in terms of its economic impact. Therefore, building an education system (educational) modern, flexible and efficient is a major concern of any society, because the training of human factor is decisive for achieving higher productivity and competitiveness¹⁰.

3. The significance of decentralization in education reform

Decentralization essential importance for successful functioning of the education system educational reforms in parallel to consolidation the institutional autonomy of educational establishments (schools, colleges, universities) was again emphasized the National Economic Development Strategic Sketch of Romania developed in 2001 (at the beginning of the second decade of transition). Decentralization and institutional autonomy ever since made visible progress (palpable) especially in higher education, particularly by the appearance and expansion of private higher education - it must be said, however, that institutionalized privatization of higher education in Romania was otherwise (can says quite the opposite) than in developed countries, where private education is oriented towards elites providing extra training to public education, because, among other things, the performance of private universities sponsored by big companies and foundations.

Romanian privatization of higher education pursued in fact attract a large number of students with high taxes and making significant investments - many of the students admitted had been rejected for admission to public higher education. This situation was due principally to increased competition for admission to higher education perspectives fields (or presumed prospects) revealed positive social dynamics. Further strengthening of the position of private higher education meant establishment of the first large investments in their infrastructure (construction at first, then and equipment), which increased its credibility - private higher education tends thus become a viable alternative to the public. Private higher education has developed primarily as circumstantial requirements of the labor market (dominant were the economic, legal and other social sciences). In public higher education, some structures have become in excess, meaning that the value of the ratio of the number of candidates and the number of places available was subunitary. It should be pointed out that training programs and technical difficulty answered to the demands of the competitive market economy (not to be underestimated, however, the implications of the disappearance of large industrial enterprises which absorbed almost entirely technical staff vocational and higher) - many graduates from higher are unemployed or working in fields other than those for which the state has funded studies (and at the moment, but in Romania, the share of students in public higher education in technical sciences is at least double the EU average) . Requests labor market for graduates of technical higher education is low, while the costs per student are highest.

The challenge private higher education aims, in particular, the entrepreneurial spirit that is (or should stand) based institutions in the field - how monetary support private universities differs radically from that of public universities (state) which allows a flexibility of the activities of the former. Strengthening university autonomy, along with competition generated by private education led to infusing entrepreneurship and public higher education - academic programs of different universities work, so in a competitive environment in which to be viable and develop universities need to attract funds from various sources and multiple money.

The introduction of university fees in public higher education necessary framework has outlined manifestation competition in higher education market. The main advantages of penetration and operation of effective competition in higher education relates to improving the efficiency of product quality and increase academic university-for this, but requires full integration of higher private education in Romanian higher education system with all the rights and responsibilities associated with this field.

Reconsideration of private higher education position or as part of (organic) Romanian higher education system involves its access to public funding (public budget), the accreditation of postgraduate programs discriminatory, open and distance education, participation in organizations created by the line ministry but not only.

The decentralization of the education system in secondary education has made, but much less visible changes compared to those in higher education. First, decentralization aimed to achieve a set of objectives, among which stands out as meaning¹¹: a) reform of the central administration for the purposes of clarifying and streamlining education ministry activity - called Ministry of National Education at the time, the strategic level Decision; b) increasing the role of local administration including support undergraduate education by developing more efficient funding systems; c) educational policy decision to close the application site by granting autonomy to schools and increase their considerable powers of management or leadership, and d) decentralize training of staff in secondary education and growth locally, advisory capacity and general training in education and educational management. After that, they built and strengthened the foundations of a new system of financing and operation of school education, completed by establishing institutional autonomy of school inspectorates, schools and high schools. They created the conditions for integration and high schools in local communities, in cooperation with local authorities advantageous in terms of decentralization which aims to stimulate concern for the rational and efficient¹².

Significant advantages of adopting and implementing measures concerning real and effective decentralization in principle: a) increasing the quality of undergraduate education in the medium and long term; b) clarify, efficiency and transparency of funding and identifying financial resources (money) alternatives; c) optimal use of funds involved in the reform process; d) flexible school system; e) increasing the participation of local communities and adaptation decisions at community needs, etc.

According to the National Strategy for Economic Development of Romania since 2001, decentralization aims to provide a favorable framework for modernization and improvement of education systems in line with trends in developed countries, embodied mainly in the implementation and enforcement of contractual relations between units education and local communities, educational institutions based network reorganization landmarks demographic, economic and cultural, but also local development projects.

A very important element of decentralization of the education system university may also be able (opportunity) effective choice by those interested, parents and students, of the education programs, under conditions allowing a diversified education and training to stimulate individual tracts - this is undesirable, yet, in mass proportions in secondary education in our country. Education can mean much more to students and parents if they belong most of the decisions about what and how to teach or if they are taken with their participation - developing manuals free market system could be a good sign operational principle of election educational field.

Lack of consistency developments in the area of education reform has been generated, in most cases, weak institutional capacity change management and resistance to change education system structures.

The success of reform depends on the ability to remove structural barriers, cultural and institutional features of the ancient way of organizing education and the establishment and consolidation of new institutional realities and education¹³ network necessary organizational change.

4. Conclusions

Romania did not have at the beginning of the transition period, a network of institutional change strong enough to accelerate the success of the reform process - it is the existence of autonomous bodies (services, offices, agencies) to take over, a specialized approach and decentralized basic education reform issues such as strategic planning, project management, evaluation, consulting, training, facilitating communication in the education system.

Autonomous agencies for change management, centers of excellence, networks pilot schools, market

consulting and training in education are possible institutional arrangements capable of providing support education reform by creating a competitive environment and boosting the promotion of innovation and change in education.

Developing the capacity to design and implement educational change allows simultaneous approach of three strategic directions in education, as follows: accelerating reform programs, priming reform insertion (stimulate self-renewal capacity of the education system) and systemic¹⁴ reform.

The basic element is located in the regulation of education system functioning, in the ways that legislative framework provide directions and incentives education reform. Streamlining the legislative framework involves, first, its adaptation to the priority decentralization of the education system. On the other hand, assumes the need for proper implementation of change management training a coherent policy and legislation management, financial management alike - Romanian education needs specially trained managers, able to acquire the necessary flexibility entrepreneurship educational¹⁵ system.

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