

ROMANIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM SYNCOPE'S REVEALED BY PISA TESTS. CAUSES OF SCHOOL FAILURE AND POSSIBLE AMELIORATIVE INTERVENTIONS

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ABSTRACT. PISA type tests involving Romanian students in 2000 and until now have led to poor results, highlighting that the education system in Romania has many weaknesses. The national test results are not satisfactory. Of course, there are many students who achieve a higher level of academic preparation, proven in many situations. Schools proclaim its success citing their achievements. Nevertheless, the situation of school failure for many of their colleagues need urgent improvement interventions in terms of material and financial resources, school curriculum, learning strategies, improving teacher. In this study, we present in a synthetic manner, the undesirable situation, the causes that we believe generated it and possible solutions.

Keywords: *Testing, Assessment, Curriculum, school failure.*

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG. Die PISA Tests, an denen sich die rumänische Schüler seit Jahr 2000 bis heute beteiligten, endeten sich mit bescheidenen Ergebnissen, die zeigen, dass das Bildungssystem in Rumänien viele Lücken hat. Die Ergebnisse der nationalen Tests sind aber auch nicht zufriedenstellend. Natürlich gibt es einige Schüler, die ein höheres Maß an akademische Vorbereitung erreichen. Das kann in vielen Situationen bewährt werden. Die Schulen verkünden ihren Erfolg anhand dieser Leistungen. Aber die Situation des schulischen Misserfolgs, in der sich vielen ihrer Kollegen finden, verlangt dringend verbessernde Maßnahmen in Bezug auf materielle und finanzielle Ressourcen, Curriculum, Lehrstrategien, die Fortbildung der Lehrer. In dieser Studie bieten wir eine knappere Übersicht dieser unerwünschte Situation an. Wir stellen auch vor, die Ursachen, die unser Meinung nach, dazu geführt haben und mögliche Lösungen.

Schlüsselwörter: *Testen, Evaluation, Curriculum, Schulversagen.*

1. Introduction

For the past two decades, the educational reform has been one of the priorities on the agenda of all the successive governments. In this regard, a large number of legislative, institutional and content-related changes have been undertaken, the latter

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being stipulated in the new *Law of national education* (2011). The need to raise the Romanian educational system to high-quality standards for the benefit of the educated and the society as a whole has been frequently mentioned. The results obtained by the Romanian students at the national tests and especially at the international ones show that older practices are still in place and that the good results fail to become visible in an educational system that is permanently shaped by uneasiness, incertitude and lack of resources.

For most of the Romanian students studying means effort, an excruciating, docile and obedient effort that implies the ability to endure a great number of hours sitting quietly and focused in class. Moreover, apart from the great number of classes, students have to handle homework. How can the pleasure for learning emerge in such conditions? In school environment, the willingness to study should arise from thematic content, the form of activity, cooperation among colleagues, the possibility to share one's own experience with others, the teacher's function of facilitator, and the frail distinction between what students must study and what they wish. In many cases though, students do not go to school for the pleasure or its usefulness, because they cannot identify themselves and their world either in the schoolbooks or in the school curricula. Thus the educational system alienates students through its priorities: in fact, the curriculum is more important than the students, homework is more important than the individual's development, abstract knowledge is more important than practical knowledge, the theoretical-discursive abilities are more important than behavioural ones, providing information is more important than nurturing the student's development.

Schoolbooks and curricula are designed to „select” a minority and, hence, fail to guarantee to most of the students' chances to success. It makes sense, however, that there are many students who achieve higher performances, as it was demonstrated in many situations, through their socio-professional evolution after the completion of studies. Schools claim to be successful because of such results. To reward students has been considered to be an end in itself for any school. However, many students do not attain a satisfactory level of quality in the learning process. Reports drawn by the Ministry of Educational indicate, whenever they have the chance, that there is a growing number of students who are either mediocre or on the verge of becoming dropouts. These reports analyse the problem from a statistical point of view and then narrow it down to causes and solutions.

2. Failures of the Romanian educational system

The poor results obtained by the Romanian students at international assessments, added to their socio-professional integration difficulties show that the current state of things must be changed without further delay and that the Romanian educational system displays many problems, which call for prompt action. Among the international evaluations, we can mention the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) representing a programme set up by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation

and Development (OECD) to assess through some standardized tests the level achieved in the learning process by 15-year old students from different world countries. The assessment takes place periodically, every three years. Each assessment period is named according to the year in which it takes place. During all PISA sit-ins both literacy rates regarding reading and competences in mathematics and sciences are assessed. Every period of assessment is preceded by a pre-assessment stage, which takes place one year before the main assessment and in which 800 to 1200 students from every country participate. In the main assessment there are 4500 – 10000 participants registered from every country. There are four periods of assessment already implemented at international level, which were completed in 2000, 2003, 2006, 2009. The 2012 PISA evaluation is to be carried through with 70 OECD participating and partner countries.

In the 2000 PISA evaluation the key subject was reading and contained an extensive set of tasks in this area. The 2003 session focused on basic mathematics skills with an extra field added in order to assess trans-curricular competences. The 2006 PISA test focused on sciences. In the 2009 evaluation reading was once again approached as the main subject. In the forthcoming 2012 evaluation, mathematics will be again the key subject of evaluation.

The PISA test measures the students' performances in the following subjects: reading, mathematics and sciences. They primarily allow the assessment of the level of preparation for adulthood. These areas are analysed in terms of mastery of basic knowledge and the skills needed in adult life, lifelong learning and on the labour market, and not in terms of school curriculum mastery. Assessing trans-curricular skills is a fundamental part of PISA testing. In this regard, each student will have to go through a two-hour written test. The test items follow different typologies: simple and complex multiple choice items, series of questions which require the production of short answers. The items are organized into sequences based on a text, usually taken from a real life situation. Students also answer a questionnaire on socio-educational issues, providing information about themselves, their families, their study habits, the school environment in which they learn, study conditions etc.

After processing and interpreting the results in the main assessment, a basic profile of knowledge and skills of students for all the tested subjects are drawn up. The Coordination Consortium of the PISA project calculates different types of contextual indicators associated with the relation between the students' performances and the socio-educational characteristics, including systemic ones, such as: gross domestic product, expenditure categories etc. Starting with PISA 2009 results, indicators of the tendency can be worked out and consolidated, illustrating how results and performances have varied in time for each subject (the first of which being reading), which can be significantly compared to the results of the year 2000.

Romania's participation in PISA is important because the results of the assessment can highlight the degree of preparation of Romanian students for lifelong learning, for further studies and life in general at the end of the compulsory-level education and can be used by educational management systems to identify issues which require improvement. The results of the assessment also allow comparisons

between the performances of the Romanian students (and their conditions of study and socio-economic environment) and the results of other students of the same age in OECD countries and partner countries.

The Romanian educational system has always obtained poor scores in the PISA tests, below the average score of the assessed countries. In 2000, Romania ranked 34 out of 43 participating countries, in 2003, it ranked 34 out of 38 countries and in 2006, it ranked 47 out of 56 countries at reading, and 45 out of 57 countries at mathematics (the penultimate place in Europe after Montenegro).

The ranking criterion at the 2009 PISA testing was the score obtained at reading and written text comprehension. In this test, the Romanian students did not obtain very good grades at any of the sections of the exam that they set for. The assessment, for which the Romanian participants had been selected according to certain criteria from amongst countryside schools, included three key subjects: reading, mathematics and sciences. In the overall ranking Romania was placed on the 49th position out of 70 assessed countries. In reading, Romania scored 424 points, 28 points more than the score recorded in the 2006 assessment, but 69 points below the average of participating countries, which was of 492 points. The results in mathematics were not better either. At this test, Romania scored 427 points, 12 points above the previous assessment, but 72 points below the average of 499 points. In the sciences section assessment, Romania scored 428 points, 10 points more than it achieved in the 2006 assessment, but 73 points below the average of 501 points. Although the 49th position out of 70 countries doesn't seem very worrying, if we were to refer strictly to the European Union, Romania occupied the last position. Moreover, among the European states, only Montenegro and Albania ranked below Romania. The most competitive educational systems have proved to be again Finland, South Korea, China, Canada and Japan.

The results obtained at other international evaluations are not more encouraging. TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study) is a study conducted by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement, conducted every 4 years. Its purpose is to assess the educational background of students around the world. The evaluation regards students in final years of primary and middle school cycle (fourth and eighth grades in our case). Romania participated for the first time in 1995 when it ranked 34 out of 41 participating countries in mathematics, and 31 in sciences. In 2007, Romania ranked 26 out of 48 countries in mathematics, which represented the penultimate place in Europe after Bosnia, and 28 in sciences, that is the last position in Europe. PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study) is another study undertaken by the same team which coordinates TIMSS. The methodology is similar to the TIMSS evaluation. Every five years, PIRLS assesses the linguistic competences of students in their final year of primary education. In 2001, Romania ranked 22 from 35 countries, and in 2006 it ranked 36 from 45 countries. These international tests show a correlation of results, as countries, which had achieved good or inferior results, are, generally, the same in all three rankings.

3. Explanations of Failure

As a result of both international and domestic assessments, including the evaluations carried out by business and of non-governmental organisations involved in education, it has been concluded that education in Romania is inefficient, inequitable, and irrelevant. Obviously, there are explanations that account for this situation, and most often the lack of motivation on behalf of both students and teachers, the insufficiency of investments in education or the irrelevance of the curriculum have been invoked. In respect of the results of the above-mentioned assessments, the explanations that account for the failure centre on the following aspects:

a) *The educational framework.* The failure of the Romanian students in these tests can be explained also through the existing differences regarding the educational contents and paradigms. The Romanian educational system preserves an educational framework based on theoretical contents, which is less practical and less interdisciplinary, where students are expected to move over, somewhat easily and naturally, from knowledge to competences. The foreground of the Romanian educational system continues to be governed by the principle „learning for knowing” and only than by „learning for doing, being, and living with the others”.

Various studies (Ungureanu, 1999; Stanciu, 1999; Chiş, 2002) reveal that the compulsory areas of the national school curriculum are: theoretical-conceptual, practical, interdisciplinary and competence-generating. The Romanian curriculum continues to favour the first area, when, in fact, it should start from the list of envisaged competences and level-based expectations, and only thereafter, it should focus on defining the targeted contents, capacities and attitudes.

The Romanian educational system has no integrated approach to teaching, except for the integrated curriculum used for preschool level education. To this end a change is necessary and urgent.

b) *Different assessment methods.* Over the last years, there have been many debates regarding the results scored by the Romanian students in the PISA tests, and the expressed opinions range from the assumption that Romanian education is positioned at a low level compared with the positions held by other countries, and the idea that the results do not actually reflect the real situation, given the fact that the Romanian educational system is not structured and organized to meet the requirements of such an assessment.

It has been also opinionated that this kind of assessment culture is absent in the Romanian educational system. The Romanian assessment system is not compatible with the PISA test because students are not accustomed with such an evaluation, as in normal, daily assessments, the emphasis falls on the quantity of the acquired information, while the PISA assessments are built on a completely different approach. Although PISA tests seem very easy at first sight, they are based on a different teaching paradigm, which relies on the learners' logical thinking and on the relationships between the acquired knowledge.

The way in which students are evaluated must be changed as well. For instance, in an assessment that evaluates mathematics, physics and chemistry-related knowledge, one may have in view how much and how can students think without relying strictly on the learnt formulas. Here is an example of a comparison of the same item viewed both from the Romanian perspective and from that of the PISA tests. The Romanian approach would be: „Find out the perimeter of the polygon in the next figure”, while the same task in the PISA tests would require: „The garden of a family has the shape and dimensions illustrated in the next figure. The family wants to build a fence, made of 20 cm wide boards. How many boards will be necessary, given a loss of 20% of the boards, and a 2 cm space between boards?” This is an example of the difference between the Romanian educational philosophy and that of the countries which scored higher in international assessments.

c) Learning by heart. In Romanian schools students have been used to learn by heart what they are taught or what they read in textbooks, therefore, the correlations with notions from other subjects, i.e. interdisciplinarity or trans-disciplinarity, have been, thus, overlooked.

The Romanian schooling system is based excessively on memorization, which is another cause of the poor results in the international assessments. There is still too much emphasis on theory, on irrelevant information without applicability in the real life of many students. Students are forced to memorize unnecessary information which is quickly forgotten after the test in question.

4. Directions for Action

a) Increasing investments in education. As a result of the *National Educational Law* (2011) and its related methodologies, both an improvement in the learning performance of students and an increase in the quality of the Romanian educational system have been expected. Understandably, the specific normative acts are not sufficient in this case. Instead, the following aspects are very important: the allocated investments, teaching materials, medical assistance, school transportation, the number of students in a classroom and equity. First of all, if we want to attain results, we should direct our attention to investments, which are essential for guaranteeing equal chances to students, especially to those living in rural areas, because they represented the majority in the group of students selected for the PISA assessment. Unfortunately, due to the new *National Educational Law* (2011), which stipulates the incorporation of the 9th grade of high school into the gymnasium level education, the students from rural areas will have even fewer chances. At present, the 9th grade functions as part of high schools, that is to say in educational institutions that are mostly located in cities, which has been an advantage for students, given the fact that there schools are better equipped and teachers are better prepared. Through this measure, we almost condemn the students from rural areas to remain there, when normally they should have been encouraged and helped to attend schools in

urban areas. How can students concentrate on studying when in many areas students are not even guaranteed school transportation? Many students are obligated to walk kilometres daily in order to get to school. On the other hand, if we wish to attain performance, we should also invest in the „After School” programme. When parents are concerned about surviving, that is to say about ensuring to their families all the necessary commodities for living, they scarcely have time to supervise their children. Without investments we will not solve anything and, unfortunately, as we can see, the annual percentage allocated to educational according to the Budget Law is very low, far from complying with the legal provisions, i.e. 6% of the GDP, given that European Union states, such as Denmark, Norway, Sweden and/or Finland generously allocate to education 8.5% of the Domestic Gross Product.

On the other hand, the decentralization process, i.e. the process of moving the decision making process as much as possible to where the basic activity takes place, must be accelerated. The success of the decentralization process depends mostly on two requirements which must be fulfilled:

- 1) Decentralization must concern all aspects involved in the educational process: curriculum, human resources, financing, administration;
- 2) Decentralization must contribute to strengthening the quality assurance mechanisms.

Decentralization is not an end in itself, it becomes meaningful only if it makes the system more efficient, more relevant, more equitable and improves its quality.

b) Moving beyond elitism and exceptionalism. Although we cannot minimize the progress achieved in restructuring and innovating the curricula, the Romanian educational system has not succeed yet to fully guarantee the development of all students' personal identity through integrity, self-assertion, reciprocity and behavioural abilities. In order to complete the compulsory level studies, students must prove the acquisition of knowledge rather impersonally, than functionally. Moreover, the complexity of the knowledge students must acquire exceeds by far, what they should know on completion of this study level.

The general and shared opinion among specialists in educational sciences is that education must not favour abstract content to the detriment of more formative aspects, and that a transition from knowledge encyclopaedism, impossible to achieve in the contemporary society, to a culture of contextualized action, is necessary. In spite of significant successes which have been achieved in the field of restructuring and modernizing the Romanian educational system, conservatism, egocentrism, exceptionalism, intellectualism, elitism, depersonalization and inequality of chances still make their presence felt.

Romanian education has remained largely an elitist education. Textbooks still contain very much information, which mainly makes use of logical and verbal intelligence, and address less intuitive, relational, communicative, emphatic, emotional and artistic intelligence. Although generous objectives of normative nature are stipulated in the curricula and many of them have a trans-disciplinary character, there

are too few approaches to facilitate their achievement. An implicit achievement of these is expected only as a consequence of the attainment of the objectives of informative nature.

Elitism and exceptionalism are the product, not necessarily intentional, of the overloaded curricula, of a hypertrophied intellectualism and of the assessment criteria. They cause and are caused by the influence of the decision factors to perpetuate a non-critical triumphalism. The pride of the decision factors increases and decreases according to the number of awarded students and medallists at the international Olympic contests. The first are highly interested in subjects for whom prizes are awarded at such contests, in inventorying medals, and less in the causes of school dropout and mediocrity or in the fact that after the completion of studies the youth thicken the lines of unemployed or are deficient in terms of civic education.

Subjects focus on abstract problems, which are unidentifiable in direct or real-world experience. This is why, for instance, after many years of studying physics and chemistry, many high-school graduates cannot explain the direct impact of physical-chemical phenomena, nor do students, after studying anatomy, know their organism and how to protect it. The history curricula and textbooks comprise topics whose content can be explored and exploited for the purpose of maximizing their impact on the students' life, such as: the prehistoric man (tools, weapons, occupations), the medieval man or the man in the Age of Enlightenment. But to what extent these topics can contribute to such an end is, however, debatable (Vlăsceanu, 2002). Moreover, in all these cases, the word „man” is used with a rather generic meaning, i.e. of human being, while the real-life people, real individuals, are completely missing from the picture, as sometimes occupations and lifestyles are also described in a most general manner. In addition, most of the times, relationships are not defined as linking people, but rather linking states and the latter are usually conflict-based, explained in terms of who controlled whom.

To this end, textbook writers should be more careful regarding the balance between general and particular when they design or plan out the topics to be taught. In this respect, every textbook should provide a balanced approach between general and particular elements. It is true that students accede to the general dimension through the mediation of close factuality, but, again, the latter's pre-eminence can, sometimes, block the path to the universal dimension. Therefore, one should reflect at the frequency and extension of circumstantial elements used in classroom teaching, especially if these are accidental or perishable.

For a long time an educated man was considered to be a person who possessed a large amount of knowledge from various fields, i.e. he was „encyclopaedic”. The emphasis on developing the skills of „knowing for doing” and „knowing for being” which contribute to the configuration of the personality profile we want students to be shaped up for, was also enormously overlooked. Intellectual education has been often perceived unilaterally, as an accumulation of information. According to such an approach, learning refers mainly to recording, storing and reproducing the

knowledge, which the teacher considered necessary to enhance the general knowledge of students (Pinas, Reynolds, Slattery, Taubman, 1995). Their reasoning and action were directed and controlled rigorously from the exterior, and the educational activity developed in a „sermon-inquiry” like way. Nor was there sufficient encouragement for research and discovery, personal reflection and creativity, except for the eternal repetitive exercise. Students’ life experience and real daily life were, thus, ignored.

The over-assessment of knowledge during a certain period, in the detriment of the complex development of the individual’s personality was not late in revealing its negative effects, that is: the unrealistic character of the educational system, the requisite that intellectual education is considered superior to other aspects of education and that training results are unilaterally developed, rendering people incapable of adapting themselves to the social needs (Salade, 1995). The authors of the old curricula and manuals have shared the so called „myth of the intellectualist” view, according to which the students had to be provided with a broad amount general knowledge mainly based on quantity, and the general assumption that the one who possesses this knowledge can as well make adequate use of it in life. This perspective has resulted in particular cases of high performance students, but at the level of the student masses it has proven to be a real failure.

The exaggerated encyclopaedic–intellectualist tendency cannot satisfy any more the requirements to which the current educational is subject. Certainly, the value of the knowledge of the students training cannot be argued, but what is extremely important is the formative character of this type of education, which should be based on the development of desired competences and attitudes. Knowledge acquirement alone cannot implicitly lead to the development of intellectual capacities and aptitudes. In the long-term approach of the new purposes of education, the reductionism which characterizes the traditional educational system is counterproductive. Reducing training to the transfer of information, taking the informed individual for the cultivated one, and transforming the encyclopaedic approach into an educational aspiration, have all biased student training and have sidetracked education from the current society’s requirements.

The objection that can be brought to the exaggerated intellectualistic education is the fact that structurally and cognitively it produces dogmatism, while affectively and inter-relationally it generates authoritarianism. It proves to be insufficiently formative as it over-emphasizes the purpose of the knowledge and does not encourage a complex development of the student’s character. School must not favour abstract contents to the detriment of formative aspects (Siebert, 2001). The reasons are not to do with formative exigencies only, but also with the impossibility of training for the acquisition of knowledge from a wide range of fields, the amount of which is growing in an alert rhythm.

The curricula shall orient the teaching and learning process towards „the training objectives which target the attainment of high-level competences, their applicability to new contexts and acquisition of theoretical and practical problem

solving skills” (Marga & Georgescu, 1999, p. 3). From such a perspective, the contents do not become less important, but turn into formative tools for high-level intellectual and relational competences, for the attitudes and behaviors that a young man needs in a democratic society.

c) Curriculum innovation and flexibility. A curriculum projection for a quality education that can respond efficiently to social exigencies requires a continuous revision and readjustment of the objectives, contents and action strategies, which exceed and improve the old models and principles. It is only in this way that a formative profile, appropriate to a world in a continuous and rapid change, can be promoted

The purpose of nowadays schools is to equip the student with a well structured set of functional competences. These mark the transition from an encyclopaedia of knowledge, impossible to be attained under the current conditions, to a culture of contextualized action. The curricula must entail only the essential skills to be learned, in order to avoid an overload of information, to meet the rapid rhythm of human knowledge development, and therewith to achieve the objectives of formative nature.

Consistent with the results of the modern pedagogical research and with the international tendencies of educational practice, the Romanian curriculum must design educational practices, characterized by:

1) Placing the learning process in the center of the school activities (it is not important what the teachers have taught, but what the students have learned).

2) Orienting the learning process towards the acquisition of competences and attitudes through the use of interactive strategies which can stimulate teaching and learning.

3) Creating a flexible curriculum and not a uniform and unique educational structure for everyone, designed to suit an abstract student, but a system of education tailored to meet the needs of each student, i.e. adequate for a real student.

4) Adapting the learning contents both to the real life situations and to the student’s activities, interests and aptitudes.

5) Introducing new ways of selecting and structuring objectives and contents according to the principle “not much but efficient”; it is not only ‘what’, but ‘how’, ‘when’ and ‘why’ we learn, and also what benefits it brings later on in real life of what we learnt in school.

6) Offering to students access to personalized educational pathways that are motivational, innovation and self-fulfilment oriented.

7) Assigning to all teaching staff responsibilities regarding designing, monitoring and evaluating the curriculum.

Curriculum flexibility can be also achieved through:

1) Increasing the number of classes in the curriculum by the school.

2) Increasing the teacher’s liberty to implement the curriculum for each subject.

Schools should be able to decide on the general curriculum in proportion of 20% in the compulsory educational level and 33% at high school level. Each school will decide, depending on the children’s learning needs, what exactly should be learnt

in 1/5 of the compulsory level classes, and in 1/3 of high school classes. Thus, schools will be able to make the student their main concern while responding to the community's needs and, at the same time, to be different in terms of the range of fields they offer.

At the same time, each discipline requires a flexible curriculum. A valid way of achieving this flexibility is by covering 75% of the teaching hours with the national curriculum and allowing teachers the freedom to decide on 25% of the curriculum for each discipline. Depending on the students' traits and the school strategies in which a teacher functions, he will decide if 25% of the time assigned to his discipline will be used for remedial learning in the case of students with deficiencies/ learning problems, for knowledge consolidation, or for stimulating those who are capable of higher performances. Such a flexible curriculum will give the chance to teachers to design individual lesson strategies, customized for each student.

d) A new approach to evaluation. The Romanian evaluation system is centered excessively on memory and deductive capacities, releasing, thus, cohorts of „poor students”, whose mental faculties are not sufficiently exploited. Well-prepared students are called those who prove to be faithful and conform to the system during knowledge reproduction. In such a case, we have to do with a summative assessment and not with a formative one.

Knowledge assessment practiced until present day in Romanian schools entails a series of major deficiencies:

- 1) The assessment focuses on the memorized information, rather than the developed competences
- 2) There is no relation between the rhythm of the assessment and the curriculum cycles of information acquirement
- 3) Assessment is often used to establish a hierarchy rather than give a feedback to both students and parents and create individual learning routes.

In order to be successful, the curriculum innovation process must be associated with the innovation of evaluation procedures, which, in turn, is based on the following principles:

- 1) Current and periodic evaluation is concerned not only with memorizing information but also with developing competences and attitudes;
- 2) Each curricular cycle, corresponding to the acquisition of certain skills, must be associated with a type of relevant periodic evaluation;
- 3) Periodical evaluations must not result solely in a rating grid, but must also consist of: a) a detailed report regarding the transcript of record and appropriate guidance forwarded to parents; b) a personalized learning-teaching route, recovery plans for the students with learning problems, speed up or knowledge consolidation plans for the talented students;
- 4) The national evaluation at the end of compulsory education and the Baccalaureate must provide a grading system similar to the PISA (The Program for International Student Assessment), which certifies the student's personal performance vis-à-vis the national curriculum requirements.

5) The use of a comprehensive assessment and monitoring tool, called the student's (educational) portfolio, that will provide not only results of the periodical assessments but also assessment reports, notifications regarding the student issued by the teachers or by the school board, degrees and certificates acquired by the students, or commissioned by other institutions than his school which can certify his special skills and performances. The educational portfolio will grant a more complex, multi-level and comprehensive assessment of the student.

e) Teacher training for the management and implementation of a new curriculum. Competence-focused curriculum and the increase of curricular flexibility are two options which run the risk of remaining poorly valorised in the absence of an appropriate training of the teaching staff and of the heads of school. Consequently, tools must be created and made available for schools, head teachers and trainers for identifying learning needs, analyzing students' characteristics, for drafting and the assessment of a decentralized curriculum, so that this could result in really formative effects for students. It is equally important to enrol the teachers in a rigorous training process to enhance their ability to use interactive teaching methods (Iucu, 2004; Cozma, 2008). Only this way, the children will rediscover the pleasure to learn new things, to discover the world. In addition, it is extremely important to motivate the teachers and to provide them with career development opportunities including through lifelong learning programs.

5. Conclusions

The evolution of an economy is closely dependent on the qualification of human resources, which, in turn, depends on education. Even though an individual learns and is continuously improving his knowledge, study years are crucial for his development as an active person. A weak educational system cannot produce alumni generations, and this will have a huge impact on a country's rhythm of economic development. The quality of education is assured through a set of coherent actions aimed at the development of the institutional capacity of framing, planning and implementing efficient learning programs which meet the training needs of the beneficiary. The governments often declare that education is a foreground domain, but when the resources are divided most of these statements are completely forgotten, even though it is clear for everyone that without a healthy educational system you cannot obtain a long-term economic development. Since 2011, Romania has a new *National Educational Law*, which aims to bring major changes in what concerns the activity and the organization of this sector. Following the national and international assessments, we shall see what its effects will be.

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