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Romania's Willingness To Import The Improvements Of Successful Educational Systems From Europe

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Abstract

For nearly 20 years we have been trying to improve Romanian education, but without results. Most changes were made in a superficial way and this has led to weak outcomes. This study aims to make a parallel between the Romanian educational system and those from Europe, emphasizing on the most successful, such as the ones from Sweden or Finland. The conducted research shows the complaints of young people against the current system and the European education improvements that are attractive to our country. The main purpose is to create the ideal profile of an educational system shaped by young Romanians who have experienced the system deficiencies in our country. The paper uses conjoint analysis in order to achieve this goal.

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1. Romanian education in the European context

The difficult economic conditions and the sudden changes that have occurred in the Romanian society after 1989 (the fall of communism in Romania) have determined an educational system with little progress. In 1998 the educational reform was initiated as a result of gradual democratization and European funding. This reform was achieved in 4-5 years in other former communist countries, while in Romania it was overly delayed and it is still far from complete. Regarding education and scientific research, Romania must firmly follow the chosen direction made by the more developed countries. All societies, including the most developed, are facing nowadays a large historical transition, which will last several decades. They will strive to make a quick jump from an industrial civilization type to a post-industrial, informational, intellectual and cultural-intensive society. Romania must respond and act

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accordingly by adjusting to those new trends. Changes in the education system will take effect in all parts of society, being the decisive component for switching to a new and improved one. Under current conditions, education should become a national priority, especially due to the fact that increasingly more young Romanians choose to emigrate after graduation and well-trained students choose colleges from other countries with far better offers. Țițan and Oțoiu (2013) have showed that the Romanian youths have a higher propensity to emigrate than other age groups. A lack of opportunities faced by the youths in their home countries, as pointed out by Rone and Liduma (2010), seems to increase emigration, and this effect may be stronger for youths which face higher unemployment rates than older people (Layard et al. 2005).

As shown in numerous reports, the current performance of the education system in Romania is unsatisfactory, from the perspective of both national and international standards. The low results at the Baccalaureate Examination from the past two years are a good example. An improved education system would have multiple economic implications and Romania could follow the example of successful reforms in other international education systems to achieve European standards in just a few years.

Looking at other European countries for policy advice concerning education might seem the best solution. Over the last several decades, many European countries have made great accomplishments regarding their educational systems and this has also been visible in their international test scores. Many changes were introduced, but one stands out in particular: the transfer of responsibility and authority from governments – typically the federal or central government – to schools. Countries such as Poland, France, the Netherlands, Sweden, Finland and England have adopted this amendment. School leaders in those countries have been acquiring considerable autonomy over their hiring, curriculum and budgetary decisions.

For the past few years, Finland's education system has become one of the best in Europe. The world attention was drawn when everyone saw that Finnish students constantly get top positions in the PISA tests and so their methods became an interest for many. Finland's secret is simple: while many countries have an educational system focused on competition, accumulation of information, strenuous testing and achieving certain standards, this country decided to have a totally different approach - no competition, small amount of homework assignments and no tests until the age of 16. All children receive the same treatment, having equal chances. Even if some are better, they learn together, acquiring the basics (writing/reading, math, science) and they are encouraged to develop a passion for reading, because that will allow them later in life to easily discover their own areas of interest. In the first 9 years of school there are no tests, no rankings, no established hierarchy and no organized competitions between schools, cities or regions. Differentiation occurs at the age 16, at some sort of Baccalaureate Examination that allows young people to sign up for a vocational or technical high school, according to their passions. It's interesting to notice that the graduation rate is 93%. After graduating the 3-year high school, students can apply then to one of the public universities in Finland.

The three main features of the Finnish education system are: 100% free, equal opportunities for everyone and promoting interest in reading and teaching children how to learn, without any rankings. Of course, this can only apply in an educational system that has well-trained teachers, both in academic and pedagogical terms. In Finland teaching is a great responsibility and, therefore, the system is limited to professionals. The selection is very rigorous, but once the professor position is achieved, it offers prestige and will guarantee a good salary.

The Swedish education system is similar, being also free, except kindergarten and higher education (which is partly subsidized by the government). Swedish Law on education stipulates that all children and young people have equal access to education regardless of their gender, place of residence or any other social and economic factors. Also, Swedish schools cooperate with various organizations to stimulate interest in technology and entrepreneurship among youth.

In the "Universitas 21 Ranking of National Higher Education Systems", the year 2012 had the following top five: United States first, followed by Sweden, Canada, Finland and Denmark. The year 2013 brought little change, United States and Sweden remaining in their 'seats', followed by Switzerland, Canada and Denmark. 50 countries were taken into consideration, including Romania that was ranked 39th, positioned rather among the last places.

So, the purpose of this research is to provide new solutions to the Romanian educational system from a new perspective, also taking into account the views of young Romanian people. Changes demand a prior investigation into the opinions of those affected by such modifications. Yet, rapid transition from one change to another does not offer the chance of observing their effects.

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