
18th edition of the Conference "Risk in Contemporary Economy",
RCE2017, June 9-10, 2017, Galati, Romania

Risk in Contemporary Economy

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<https://doi.org/10.18662/lumproc.rce2017.1.1>

How to cite: Chirimbu, C., & Ionescu, E. (2017). Education in the Contemporary Economy and Society. Risks and Challenges. In S. Hugues, & N. Cristache (eds.), *Risk in Contemporary Economy* (pp. 1-8). Iasi, Romania: LUMEN Proceedings <https://doi.org/10.18662/lumproc.rce2017.1.1>

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Selection and peer-review under responsibility of the Organizing Committee of the conference



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Education in the Contemporary Economy and Society. Risks and Challenges

Sebastian Cristian CHIRIMBU*¹, Eduard IONESCU²

Abstract

The 21st century economic and social context brings about unprecedented challenges in the field of education, raising, more acutely than ever, issues related to the effective criterion of competitiveness and the extent to which graduates are equipped with the skills required in the operational context of educational markets that often exceeds national boundaries, becoming international. Education will be focused in this regard especially on the preparation, as far as possible, the experts and staff with high qualifications for leading-edge sectors, able to ensure the viability of the various educational institutions and to validate the place they occupy in the market competitive tenders as educational. The present article discusses the risks and challenges that contemporary education is currently facing in a politically, economically, technologically fast changing world.

Keywords: *21st century education, curriculum in the knowledge based society, learning to learn, learning to do, learning to be.*

1. Introduction

The fast pace of changes at all levels – political, economic, technological, cultural - has resulted in the formation of a complex set of problems of the contemporary world, which led decisionmakers to choose and discriminate among extreme solutions.

Life today is exponentially more complicated and complex than it was 50 years ago. This is true for civic life as much as it is for work life. In

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the 21st century, citizenship requires levels of information and technological literacy that go far beyond the basic knowledge that was sufficient in the past. [1]

Nowadays, the problem of education is addressed in connection with the issues of the contemporary world, a world which is characterized by multiple and complex transformations at all levels and in all areas, determined by the progress in science and technology. "The education system today faces many issues and problems of interest not just to educators and families but also to sociologists and other social scientists".[2]

On this deeply changing background education is, more than ever, a constitutive dimension of the human being. A human being cannot become a human being but my means of education considered Kant, a reasoning has not only hold its truth value along centuries, but has enhanced it.

2. Theoretical Background

Over the past 20 years, the Romanian society has crossed a period of profound transformations in its economic, political, social and cultural dimensions. During this transition, ended according to some analysts, or still in progress according to others the decision makers in the field of education have tried to outline and establish the starting point, the objectives and the envisaged result of a reform in the field of education. Thus, we have left behind a totalitarian regime based on a centralized economic, political and social system in which the citizen was in the service of the State. On the contrary, in the present want to move toward an open society, based on the autonomy of the individual and on mutual respect, in which the state institutions must be in the service of the citizen. "Within this framework, school was a faithful mirror of the society. While, for example, in the educational system before the year 1989 there were a series of rules which it was recommended that no one should disobey, today's education lies in the formation of people having a creative, harmoniously developed personality, able to integrate actively, to cope with changes, and even trigger them when necessary". [3]

If we accept that school faithfully reflects what is going on at the social level, we recognize that it has entered into a postmodern stage characteristic of the whole society. Thus, some traits such as determination of rationality, rigor, precision are accompanied by others such playful demeanor, the existence of several alternatives, waiving the limits, innovative styles, intercultural mobility, etc.

3. Argument of the paper

"The future of a nation is determined by the way it prepares its youth," asserted as early as the seventeenth century, the great Dutch humanist Erasmus. In what we generically call 21st century education, we can talk as a historical landmark the turn of the century and the millennium, in which we find ourselves, especially considering the perspective of what will follow in the future decades. In this turmoil and fast changing period quality education will represent the place of storage and transmission of identity values.

The school today is in a position to respond, to react, to modern challenges, through the promotion of certain categories of values among young people. How much it contributes to the development of the 21st century young generation so as to make its representatives integrate within the complicated modern society, how much can school today be characterized as one of the promoters of civilization in a world in which civilisations fail to get along with one another is the issue that specialists in the field of education should try hard to formulate an answer.

School represents an important step for individuals in the formation of their personality, after the defining role of the family. Accordingly, the role and involvement in the education of the family is necessary more than ever. [4]

4. Arguments to support the thesis. Creating a country vision in the field of education that should match the economic vision

4.1. Contemporary world issues – applying the concept to Romanian realities

In the recent decades, scientists, and politicians, officials responsible for different sectors of social life have begun to identify new kinds of problems (damage to the environment, limited natural resources, high increase of the population). These problems were identified s affecting all parts of the world, more or less developed and connections were found between issues such as: development cannot occur without peace, peace cannot be genuine without respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, while in their turn all these aspects cannot be overcome in the absence of proper education.

Thus a new concept was born: "contemporary world issues", characterized by features such as:

- universal character (no country and no regime can place themselves outside these issues);
- global nature (affects all sectors of social life);
- quick and predictable evolution (people are facing problems for which they have not been trained);
- multidisciplinary character, that is with strong and multiple connections;
- priority (demands prompt answers, ingenuity and financial efforts).

The contemporary world issues have generated both in the sphere of culture and policy, as well as in that of education, a number of imperatives (the defense of peace, preservation of the environment, the promotion of a new economic order).

Depending on the answer given by the imperatives of these educational systems and the people in charge of education there are, on the one hand, those who believe that educational systems do not have and cannot play an important role in preparing the world for tomorrow's challenges (they are few in number) and on the other hand a large number of professionals who believe in the power of education and its ability to contribute with specific resources in the formation of the future.

4.2. Education translated into economic value

In our era, the development of society and of the individual is in a tight connection with education and production. Economic development concerns push specialists to look towards the discovery of those modalities to facilitate the translation of scientific ideas into economic value. The objective is educational production, most of the production of goods, production of adequate work force demands of the industry, economic and social life and at the same time, a production of attitudes, knowledge, scientific and technical ideas.

Science itself is, up to a point, in the power of education.

G. Văideanu used to say that: "development will go through the education or development will be done with the help of education or, otherwise it will not be at all." [5]

Interest in education has always been a major concern of companies and the elites of societies. In the modern period, beginning with the industrial revolution, when access to school was generalized, education has started to become a priority for all social classes, an attitude generated by the justified hope, that individuals can rise above the condition given by the family, the place and the circumstances in which they were born.

Different online studies conducted in recent years having as an objective to analyse Romanian further education and higher education, either on all parameters of learning (learning to know, learning to do, learning to be and learning to live together) or on the independent parameters: "learning to know" or "learning to do" have outlined the existence of the same problems: there is a close correlation between low levels of education and economic problems of the country, not to mention social ones.

In the contemporary, globalized, super technologized and very dynamic in terms of the labour market global society, the countries that have succeeded in creating major changes and beneficial for education have had some things in common in their educational policies.

4.3. Compulsory steps to be followed by educational policies

Thus, the experience of reforms in countries such as Poland, South Korea, Canada, Singapore, Finland, Estonia or Australia, with both their majority positive features but also negative ones show that there are common features of the road to success that could be summarized in a "decatalogue" that Romania would be able to follow in its legitimate desire to decide its own destiny for future generations. Thus, the following steps or stages are necessary:

- a. Creating a vision of the country for education and education on a long-term basis. For example, Finland aims that "through high level education, the country can stay far away from the influences of major powers, thus keeping its identity"; Singapore had as a vision in the field of education "the transition from third world to first world" and in the last decade it has been focusing on maintaining at this level. Therefore, any public debate should contribute to shaping this vision which, once articulated, will represent starting point for any development and improvement strategy on a medium and long term. Performing systems analyses suggest that it takes about six years to see measurable results.
- b. Establishing high standards which should be expected from all students in all school.
- c. Providing equal opportunities for all children that should include the allocation of funds for schools and high schools from poor areas.
- d. Preparation of future teachers should be a direct collaboration between universities and schools with extensive school practice, as a compulsory requirement for awarding the diploma.

- e. Aligning the curriculum for grades 0-12 and the need for coherence in implementing it at the class level, with spijinului material. This is a very vulnerable point of the current situation, because the existing legal framework in the field of education still focuses on the teacher as a transmitter of information, while pedagogical and methodological tools are just meant to support this view and are regarded as having a secondary degree of importance.
- f. Motivating and engaging students in the whole educational process (educational trips, further preparation and practice after school, organized sports, artistic activities, etc.). In this field great progress has been made in recent years.
- g. Clarification of responsibilities and their use for development and initiatives. Who writes curricula, who tests them and how many levels of inspection are needed are still issues that need improvement. It should be noted that in many countries, evaluations and accreditations are mainly carried out at school level, while inspectors have as a main task of their mission to verify the accuracy of the schools' self assessment and to assist those who need to improve through specific recommendations. Here, it is necessary to increase the degree of objectivity in the students' evaluations and assessments of colleges and schools and the correlation with the evaluations of the national tests.
- h. The efficiency of the use of resources has registered visible progress in recent years, but unless decentralization becomes correlated with the flexibility in the allocation of funds they will both remain ineffective.
- i. Creating a "character portrait" of the Romanian student / trainee that should include those features that the Romanian society needs and desires for its members as Romanians but also as citizens of the world, capable of integrating on the world labour market, making the world economy function and successfully living in a multicultural global environment. This "character portrait" should implicitly and explicitly be expressed in syllabuses and should become the backbone of any educational system that has as a purpose the education of the individual as a member of a democratic society.
- j. Establishing connections to educational success practices in the context of globalization (e.g., promotion of analyses of John Hattie whose books have been translated into Romanian but not promoted in schools; or making decisions based on studies and data collected about students' performance; creating "learning communities").

Student centered education promoted nowadays at global level is perfectly consistent with what what Romanian society elites have envisaged in the past 150 years.

Preparing a society for the future is a complex task based on deep understanding of the problems of the contemporary world, the causes that led to it, to anticipating its developments and creatively adapting to these developments and changes.

From this perspective, major changes are required so that the educational system should serve the economic field and in terms of management of the school system that must become more flexible and more willing to respond quickly and appropriately to the socio-economic challenges of the present. In turn, teachers at all levels of organisation of education, will be encouraged to take directly and explicitly the responsibility of the student's progress, thus avoiding that the teacher-student relationship becoming an empty of any meaning.

5. Conclusions

Our context is one of rapid growth in scientific and medical discoveries, technology, including information communications technology (ICT), and the world's population. But it is also a context of growing unevenness in such developments in different parts of the world and/or within individual countries. The consequences of this situation include a blurring of boundaries, growing gaps between people, groups and countries and the end of certainty including a diminution of credibility of traditional knowledge and authority of expertise, especially in professions such as education. [6]

The 21st century economic context itself thus should bring and shall bring the professionalization of education, effective criterion of competitiveness and the extent to which graduates are equipped with the skills required in the operational context of educational markets that often exceeds national boundaries, becoming international. Education will be focused in this regard especially on the preparation, as far as possible, the experts and staff with high qualifications for leading-edge sectors, able to ensure the viability of the various educational institutions and to validate the place they occupy in the market competitive tenders as educational.

We believe that in order to cope with the various challenges of successful contemporary society it is necessary that education to move towards a non-discriminatory and not abusive disposal of pedagogical ideas of modernity but on the transformation and adapting them to the specific nature and characteristics of postmodern society imposes.

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