

THE EFFECTS OF LEGISLATIVE CHANGES IN THE FIELD OF EDUCATION ON ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN ROMANIA

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Abstract

The article examines the implications of legislative changes in the field of education on academic performance in Romania through a conceptual and normative analysis. In the context of a constantly changing legislative framework, educational reforms have aimed both to adapt to European standards and to respond to the internal needs of the education system. The paper aims to highlight how legislative changes influence the quality of education, assessment processes and human resource training, emphasising both the opportunities and risks associated with these transformations. The analysis focuses on the relationship between educational policies and academic performance, emphasising the importance of a coherent and sustainable approach to reforms that ensures equity, relevance and efficiency in contemporary Romanian education.

Keywords: *academic progress; educational reforms; educational policies; legislative changes; education system; quality of education; educational equity.*

1. Introduction

In the context of contemporary society, education is considered one of the most significant social and economic investments. It is recognised that it is directly correlated with human capital development, social mobility and the ability to adapt to the rapid changes generated by globalisation and digitalisation. In Romania, recent years have been characterised by substantial educational reforms, which have led to the implementation of a new legislative framework for pre-university and university education. This framework is designed to address both internal challenges and international and global trends in educational policy. In this context, the topic takes on significant relevance, as any normative change, whether structural or specific, inevitably has

an impact on the quality of education, student performance and the degree of equity in the system. The purpose of this article is to provide a comprehensive, detailed and critical analysis of how recent regulations influence the learning process and school outcomes. In addition, the mechanisms by which legislation is transposed into practice will be identified, as well as the advantages and limitations of the regulatory framework. Finally, the implementation conditions necessary to produce real and sustainable change will be considered.

2. Conceptual and theoretical framework

In order to understand the impact of current legislation on school outcomes, it is necessary to refer to a conceptual and theoretical framework that explains the relationships between regulatory provisions, educational processes and student performance. The current framework is based on a number of well-established theories and models drawn from the disciplines of education science and public policy.

Fullan emphasises that any educational reform involves interaction between three levels: the state (which develops legislation and policies), educational institutions (which implement measures) and individual actors (teachers, students and parents). The success of change depends on the coherence between these levels and the ability of each to adapt to the requirements of the others. From this point of view, current legislation should be analysed not only as a normative text, but also as a process of institutional and cultural mobilisation.

Education has been identified as the main catalyst for long-term economic growth, with the quality of learning being more important than the number of years spent in the education system. Consequently, education legislation aimed at improving student performance through curriculum modernisation, practical skills assessment and teacher professionalisation has a direct influence on economic competitiveness and social cohesion.

Child development is influenced by the interaction between several systems. The microsystem (comprising the family and school) is one of these systems, while the mesosystem is defined by the relationships between these environments. The exosystem is defined by community policies and resources, and the macrosystem is defined by national values and legislation. Legislation can be interpreted as a component of the macrosystem, governing interactions at other levels and setting the conditions for harmonious development. Legislation that encourages parental involvement, school-community partnerships and transparency in decision-making has been shown to strengthen social capital and, consequently, school outcomes. According to OECD recommendations, a high-performing education system is defined as one that ensures both excellence and equity. It is therefore essential that legislation includes provisions to support

vulnerable students, thus ensuring that their school performance is not influenced by their socio-economic background.

Vygotsky's theory of learning posits that the process takes place through social interaction and the support of 'significant others', who may include teachers, parents and peers. Legislation that encourages collaboration, educational dialogue and access to diverse resources has been shown to facilitate the emergence of 'zones of proximal development' and increase students' chances of reaching their potential.

3. Current legislative architecture and associated mechanisms of influence

The current legislative framework in the field of education is the result of a thorough reform that integrates innovative provisions with established institutional mechanisms, with the aim of establishing a coherent and predictable framework adapted to contemporary challenges. The programme is organised on several levels, each of which has the capacity to act as a catalyst for improving academic results. The curriculum is widely regarded as the fundamental element of the education system, and contemporary legislation has introduced measures to increase its flexibility and focus on skills development. The framework plans for secondary and vocational education have been redesigned to offer a wider range of options and facilitate better adaptation to student diversity and labour market requirements. The School-Based Curriculum (SBC) is a significant innovation due to its capacity for contextual adaptation. This innovation gives students the opportunity to cultivate their own interests, while allowing educational institutions to respond to the specific needs of their communities. While this curricular flexibility is undoubtedly beneficial, it also presents significant challenges, such as the need for solid teacher training and adequate resources for implementation.

Current legislation places particular emphasis on modernising the assessment system by introducing both standardised tools and digital solutions. National assessments in grades 2, 4 and 6 are becoming essential mechanisms for monitoring academic progress, as they provide relevant information for both teachers and parents. National assessment and the baccalaureate, through the implementation of new algorithms and the gradual introduction of competence-based assessments, are essential components of the assessment framework. These tools serve to calibrate the level of preparation and provide a comprehensive diagnosis of the entire system. Standardisation and digitisation of the assessment process have been shown to generate greater transparency and objectivity. However, it is important to note that adequate infrastructure and training in the use of new technologies are prerequisites for the successful implementation of such a process.

Another fundamental pillar of the legislation is the dimension of equity. In an effort to mitigate disparities between social categories and ensure equitable learning opportunities for all

students, the state has implemented a series of initiatives. These include scholarship packages based on merit, social and technological criteria, along with a system that guarantees student transportation. The state has also introduced programmes such as 'Healthy Meals' and 'After School' to promote student well-being. These measures have a direct impact on student attendance, active participation and performance, particularly in disadvantaged environments, and are in line with international trends to support educational inclusion.

The quality of education depends on the quality of teaching staff, a fact reflected in current legislation. This is demonstrated by the introduction of explicit professional standards, the restructuring of career stages and the promotion of professional learning communities. Teachers benefit from continuing training opportunities tailored to the real needs of the classroom, and their evaluation is based on criteria that focus on both teaching skills and student outcomes. As a result, human resources become an essential tool through which the law exerts its influence on the quality of teaching and, by extension, on school results. The reorganisation of educational governance was implemented with the intention of giving greater autonomy to educational institutions. However, this was accompanied by the establishment of strict accountability and monitoring mechanisms. Boards of directors and principals are gaining increased powers, becoming involved in strategic decisions, while parents and the community are being co-opted into consultative structures. Transparency and regular reporting of indicators are becoming essential tools for accountability, with the aim of creating an organisational culture focused on performance and continuous improvement.

A particularly important contemporary issue is that of the digital component. Legislation provides for significant investment in digital infrastructure, equipping schools with modern equipment and developing the digital skills of both students and teachers. This dimension has the potential to bring about a fundamental transformation of the educational process; however, the risk of digital inequality remains, and complementary policies need to be implemented.

4. Impact mechanisms

The mechanisms through which current legislation influences school results are complex and interconnected, acting on both the teaching-learning process and the institutional climate and socio-economic context. These can be analysed at several levels:

The legislation in force sets explicit and unambiguous learning standards, thus providing educators with consistent benchmarks and students with a degree of predictability. Standardisation is essential for mitigating disparities between educational institutions and geographical regions, thus facilitating the comparability of results and the adoption of data-driven educational policies. Aligning the curriculum with teaching methods and standardised assessments is essential for

establishing a coherent educational process. Teachers are encouraged to adopt competency-based teaching strategies, and students are assessed against the objectives set out in the curriculum. The results of national assessments, together with data collected at the school level, are used to inform educational policy decisions, develop remedial intervention strategies, and evaluate progress. This evidence-based approach serves to improve the objectivity and effectiveness of education policies. Scholarship programmes, free transport, school meals and after-school programmes have been designed to remove material barriers that hinder equal access to education. By reducing these obstacles, students from disadvantaged backgrounds are better positioned to actively participate in the learning process and achieve results comparable to those of their peers. The law supports teacher development through mechanisms such as continuing education, periodic evaluation, and support for professional learning communities. The quality of teaching is directly influenced by the training and motivation of teachers, who in turn act as direct agents of educational policy implementation. The legislation discussed here promotes parental involvement and community involvement, as well as measures to prevent violence and ensure a safe and inclusive environment. It has been shown that the positive atmosphere this creates leads to increased motivation, participation and satisfaction among students. Investments in infrastructure, together with the promotion of digital teaching and assessment resources, create the conditions for a modern and interactive education, adapted to the needs of today's society. Digitisation facilitates access to a variety of educational resources and stimulates the development of students' digital skills. Impact transmission mechanisms function as an integrated chain of actions and processes that transform legislative regulations into tangible educational outcomes.

5. Advantages and limitations

An in-depth analysis of the impact of current legislation on school outcomes reveals both considerable strengths and structural challenges that need to be carefully managed.

5.1 Advantages

Curriculum modernisation is of paramount importance. The introduction of transversal skills, greater flexibility through school programmes and an emphasis on interdisciplinarity contribute to increasing the relevance of education for students. Improved assessment: Standardisation and digitisation of exams generate greater objectivity and facilitate more accurate monitoring of progress. Scholarships, free transport and school meals have been shown to have a positive effect on reducing both dropout and absenteeism rates. This is particularly evident in rural and disadvantaged areas. The professionalisation of teachers has been shown to improve teaching quality by setting explicit standards and facilitating continuous training. The concept of school autonomy and accountability is based on the idea that educational institutions are capable of

making decisions tailored to the specific local context, thereby generating greater efficiency and fostering greater community involvement. Digitalisation has been identified as a key factor in facilitating adaptation to the knowledge society. This is because it allows access to modern resources, online platforms and computerised assessments. The alignment of the national legislative framework with European trends is evident in its adherence to the principles of convergence with international educational standards. This adherence is further highlighted by the legislation's promotion of increased mobility and the recognition of diplomas across national borders.

5.2 Limitations

The issue of administrative overload is a pertinent one in the context of the educational environment. The substantial volume of reporting requirements and bureaucratic regulations that teachers must comply with can constitute a significant drain on resources and attention. Infrastructure inequalities refer to differences between urban and rural areas in terms of digital equipment and resources, which have the capacity to amplify disparities in outcomes. The regulatory framework is characterised by a high degree of volatility, with frequent changes generating a general sense of uncertainty and posing significant challenges for schools, pupils and parents to adapt. The risk of over-reliance on testing is twofold. First, the emphasis on standardised assessments may limit the development of creativity and critical thinking. A lack of financial resources has been identified as a potential obstacle to the implementation of legislative measures. The introduction of such measures requires substantial investment, and it has been suggested that chronic underfunding may reduce their actual impact. The issue of limited administrative capacity is an important one, given that not all inspectorates and schools have the expertise and resources necessary to optimally implement new policies. Some members of faculty and school communities may be reluctant to accept change, thus hindering the implementation process.

It is clear that the advantages demonstrate the potential for modernisation and convergence with European standards. However, it is equally clear that the limitations indicate the need for complementary policies, sustained investment and a more coherent and stable implementation strategy. The contemporary legislative framework has several notable advantages, including the modernisation of the curriculum and assessment, support for vulnerable students, greater predictability of educational transitions, and a focus on 21st-century skills. However, there are also significant limitations to consider, including the risk of administrative overload, difficulties in implementation at the local level, differences in digital infrastructure, and the possible accentuation of overly test-centred learning.

6. Indicators and monitoring

In order to assess the impact of legislation on school results, a complex set of indicators, both qualitative and quantitative, must be used. Rigorous monitoring of these indicators provides an overview of progress and detailed information for adjusting educational policies. The following data should be collected: school enrolment rates by level of education (pre-primary, primary, lower secondary, upper secondary); school dropout and early school leaving rates; attendance and absenteeism rates recorded at the level of educational institutions. The following data sources were used to provide an overview of pass rates in national assessments and baccalaureate exams, as well as international test results (PISA, TIMSS, PIRLS). The purpose of including these data sets was to provide a global comparative picture. In addition, internal school progress was measured using national assessments in grades 2, 4 and 6. The following areas require further investigation: first, the existence of disparities in performance and resources between urban and rural areas; second, access to scholarships and support programmes for students from disadvantaged backgrounds; and third, the participation rate of students with special educational needs in mainstream education. The level of use of educational technologies, the financial resources allocated per student, and the number of teachers trained in relation to new curricular and digital requirements are important factors to consider. The level of satisfaction of students and parents with the educational experience; the incidence of violence and bullying in schools; and the degree of involvement of parents and the community in school life.

Current legislation provides for the periodic preparation of national evaluation reports, which must be correlated with data collected at the local level by school inspectorates. In addition, external evaluations carried out by independent institutions and international comparisons contribute to creating an objective and comparable picture. Digital platforms for reporting and data collection are also essential tools for ensuring transparency and public access to information. Consequently, evaluating the impact of education legislation should not be seen as a mere statistical exercise, but rather as a strategic process. The aim of this process is to provide decision-makers, teachers and educational communities with the information they need to facilitate the continuous improvement of the quality and equity of education.

7. Recommendations

Following an in-depth analysis of the advantages, limitations and monitoring indicators, it is imperative to formulate a series of recommendations to amplify the positive impact of current legislation. The adoption of medium- and long-term strategic plans is imperative to ensure the continuity and predictability of reforms. It is essential to limit frequent changes and establish a clear, simplified and easily applicable legislative framework. It is imperative that budget

allocations for education be increased in line with European standards. In addition, it is essential to distribute resources equitably between urban and rural areas in order to reduce disparities. It is imperative to continue programmes aimed at equipping schools with modern facilities. In addition, it is crucial to ensure that teachers receive training in the effective use of digital resources and their integration into teaching practices. The creation of mentoring programmes and professional learning communities is essential to facilitate career development. Performance should be rewarded and opportunities for professional advancement should be clearly defined. It is imperative that scholarship, transport and hot meal programmes for all vulnerable students be expanded. In addition, remedial and psycho-pedagogical support programmes need to be developed in schools with a high risk of school dropout. It is imperative to increase the role of boards of governors and consultative structures in decision-making processes. In addition, it is essential to ensure the active involvement of parents and the local community in educational processes. The system for collecting and analysing educational data must be strengthened, and independent reports assessing the impact of legislation must be published regularly.

The aim of these recommendations is to transform the legislative framework into an effective tool for educational progress, ensuring a balance between excellence and equity, between stability and innovation.

8. Conclusions:

The analysis of the impact of current legislation on school results highlights a series of profound changes which, despite the inherent challenges, lay the foundations for a more equitable, modern and effective education system. The implementation of clear standards, the flexibilisation of the curriculum, the introduction of competence-based assessments and the support given to vulnerable students are elements that have the potential to lead, in the medium and long term, to improved school performance and reduced inequalities. However, the success of these reforms depends on the stability of the legislative framework, institutional capacity for implementation and the availability of financial and human resources.

At the same time, it is imperative to maintain a balance between excellence and equity, standardisation and flexibility, digitalisation and social inclusion. If the legislation were applied consistently and supported by coherent and complementary policies, Romania would be able to build a competitive education system that harnesses the potential of each student and contributes to the sustainable development of society.

Consequently, the impact of current legislation should not be seen merely as an immediate consequence on school results, but rather as a continuous process of cultural and institutional

transformation, requiring perseverance, collaboration and responsibility on the part of all relevant actors: the state, schools, families and communities.

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