

# **New Dimensions of Education Reform in the Republic of Moldova: Equity, Relevance, Efficiency and Sustainability**

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## *Abstract*

*Economic and social development of any country is determined by its intellectual potential, built up mainly in the education system. Despite of various reforms and reorganizations the education system in the Republic of Moldova has experienced during the last two decades, it has not yet become an efficient and decisive factor of the progress on all dimensions that call for a modern development of the country in a competitive global environment.*

*For these reasons, it has become imperative that national education modernizes and adjusts to the international educational requirements. The reform ought to be based on an integrative and systemic approach, focused on quality and performance, competitiveness and relevance, autonomy and accountability, transparency and participatory management in education.*

*This paper briefly sets forth the vision upon the key issues of national education modernization, which in future will be the basis for qualitative reform processes of the field.*

**Keywords:** *education, modernization of national education, educational performances, quality assurance of education, education law.*

**JEL classification:** *I28, I20, I21*

## Introduction

Human society has always gone with education which is the reflection of changes and priorities set up by the governments and states. The changes happening in modern societies require the education to redefine its roles and diversify its functions in the context of information technologies effect on knowledge. In the modern world the education is conceived as decisive factor in the development of economy and society in the light of increasing influence of human capital.

Laying emphasis on education as priority area in accomplishing social, technological and economical changes does not mean just a paradigm transformation but a challenge for educational system which is to identify necessary resources for changes and ensure sustainable development of the society.

By Millennium Objective regarding education, the world countries have committed to provide all children of primary level with quality education before 2015, and wherever this objective is achieved, the states should give opportunities to all children for secondary education. The advantages of the abovementioned objectives accomplishment are obvious: the education is a compulsory starting point in poverty fighting, women entitling, children's protection against exploitation, human rights and democracy promotion.

Furthermore, in the age of global knowledge, the quality level of education marks the society's progress, general level of professional culture and knowledge. Undeniable strategic mission of education derives from the role the society invests education with and the way it is taken upon.

All these bring about the need to promote and support the processes of continuous development and modernization of educational systems.

To become truly compatible with educational systems of advanced countries, within its promoted policy, national education should enlist the society's support and perform multi-aspectual and consistent modernization of the system by providing necessary resources and using them by means of efficient mechanisms.

In order to ensure coherence and sustainability of education modernization and development processes, it is necessary that they are grounded in documents of national policies in the field (concept papers, strategies) and legalized in respective official papers for further implementation.

From this perspective, it is critically to review the legal framework of organization and function of national education system with regards to bringing it up to date, modernizing and adjusting it to the requirements enforced by the trend towards European integration of Republic of Moldova.

The respective objective is acuteness because of Educational Law, which has been valid since 1995, and which currently is unable to normatively ground all processes going on in the system. Numerous amendments and supplements operated into the Law document have brought about incoherence, duplicitous interpretations, and in certain situations even collision with norms stated in different legislative acts.

## 1. Educational reform and new legal framework dimensions

The reform of national education system and new legislative acts should reflect all aspects of educational system organization and functioning; these aspects will be subjected to a consistent modernization process. In our opinion, the most important aspects are as follows:

- Defining the educational doctrine of the Republic of Moldova, that will:
  - declare education as national priority;
  - guarantee each citizen equal opportunities and access to education;
  - establish as top priority the quality insurance of education
  - determine the strategic trend of education policy towards integration into European Space
- Drawing up and/or redefining the principles, functions and objectives of education that stick to the present times and are directed towards continuous development of education in its capacity of premise for country's sustainable development, on the whole.
- Making compatible the system's organizing principles including the processes that take place in the system with regards to the principles and norms stated in educational policy papers which are approved at European and international level: International Standard Classification of Education; European Qualification Frameworks, Lisbon Convention, Bologna Declaration, UNO Convention regarding the children's rights etc., which ensure the adjustment of national legislation to the Community *acquis* and to the most important documents of international educational policies.

In this regards, the adjustment to international normative provisions is even more reinforced by the existence of the areas which are ruled in a specific way, such as medical and pharmaceutical education, integrated studies, joint diplomas etc.

- Revising and determining the general organization and structure of education in the way that it ensures equitable access to education, going forward from one level to another and having opportunities of integration with both a certain type of formal education or non-formal one and labor market.

With the view to adjust to modern educational practices it has become imperatively to include into educational system a new level – early education targeting the children of age between newborns and 3 year olds. Providing educational services for early aged children is determined by this age peculiarities that play the major role in the child's intellectual development as well as personality building and social behavior.

It is required that in the structure and general organization of educational system the educational levels such as preschool, primary and secondary general are clearly defined as compulsory universal education, entirely supported by the government.

With regards to education organization, premises ought to be brought about to carry out special education based on inclusive practices in general education

institutions. Also, the system's structure should enclose career guidance units of district or municipal level, so should they be in institutions providing professional trainings of high education, non-tertiary and vocational education; another must is to promote and develop lifelong learning education on a large scale that ensures the rank increase of population's schooling and grounding.

- Restructuring, in the context of image changing and appeal strengthening, of vocational education that has become out-dated, and no longer meets the needs of labor market. The reform has to rethink the process of training qualified workers by applying the most advanced international practices in the field, and particularly it should target to restructuring educational institutions network, specializing institutions in compliance with region development trends, reappraising the contents of learning and professional training and making educational environment "closer" to that of businesses, as currently, the gap between them is extended.

- Ensuring the education quality at all educational levels and specifically of the most important elements of the system: educational process and its purposes, educational institutions, resources. The processes of academic evaluation and accreditation should be decentralized, depending on the subject submitted to evaluation and accreditation, by delegating responsibilities to the district (municipal) education directorates. For the purpose of encouraging institutions' performances and hierarchy based on the principles of achieving the quality insurance objectives, it is necessary to set up a gradual accreditation and consequently funding based on the accreditation level (except compulsory education).

Regulations are called for motivating the inter-institutional and interpersonal competition between all relevant actors of the system (educational units, teaching staff, students, pupils) that encourages the quality of education as an important factor of performance and education development.

Additionally, in order to ensure the compatibility of Moldovan education worldwide, accreditation agencies from abroad are to be involved into the process of educational institutions' assessment and accreditation.

- Rethinking current evaluation mechanisms of competences and schools' outcomes, by means of bringing in the certification of professional competences within lifelong learning. To facilitate the integration into international academic environment and labor market, the certification of linguistic skills (knowledge level of languages) as well as IT skills (ECDL) should necessarily be included into general secondary education.

Also, international methods of knowledge evaluation, such as TIMSS, PISA, PIRLS, are to be applied with the view to make compatible and assure the relevance and competitiveness of Moldovan educational system worldwide. It is important to review training contents at all educational levels aiming to ensure the convergence and orientation towards training the 8 competences established in European programs.

- Developing National Register of Education in compliance with global trend towards implementation of information technologies, which will enclose basic elements such as: institutions network, pupils and students, teaching staff, study documents, textbooks etc. The Register would ensure the system's transparency, efficient management of resources and of the system as a whole and, also, corruption elimination.

At the institutional level, it is needed to establish a relatively constant rate (at least 1% out of total expenses budgeted in the financing plans of institutions) to develop the informational system of each institution, to modernize institution's informational infrastructure and communication.

- Clearly distinguish the power of public administration authorities of all levels in the field of education; they are currently regulated by several laws which in some respects are conflicting and adjudicated by different authorities. The governing principles of decision-making processes at different levels aim at public responsibility for educational tasks, decentralization and partnership in the decision-making process.

- Based on UNESCO (1997) recommendations, *the teacher's status* is to be reconsidered; the teacher should be trained exclusively in higher education institutions and in the perspective of rights and commitments harmonization. With the view to improve the performances of teaching staff, following mechanisms should be developed and put in action:

- Teacher's career taking up in the context of social facilities and guarantees;
- Assessing the performances of teaching staff, promoting and motivating them by means of financial and moral encouragements, which would recognize and reward professional performances;
- Encouraging the teaching staff mobility etc.

In this respect, it is necessary to set up an institutional system for managers training, their initial and continuing education. The major components of this system will deal with improving the inside mechanisms of management structures, synthesizing the management practices and building a system of training/developing competences inherent to this professional area.

- Revising the mechanisms of selecting, appointing and confirming the managers' position in educational institutions of different levels and various types of ownership. In order to promote successful managers at any educational level, they are to be appointed on competition basis for the most two consecutive mandates with the length of four years each. In particular, the election and the appointment in the position of rector of higher education institution ought to be carried out in compliance with the principles of European Universities' Charter through a transparent and participative process.

The major requirement is the incompatibility of manager's position of any educational level with adherence to any political party.

- Establishing institutional autonomy by improving the management system of higher education institutions according to the needs of a democrat, open

society, and by increasing institutions' public responsibility. The university autonomy has to be conceived in the way that it doesn't become an obstacle in promoting the national strategies of development and European integration of education and its quality assurance. The university autonomy is to be carried out in three main areas:

- Organizational structures;
  - Functional domain;
  - Management of available resources
- Considering the economical agents as direct beneficiaries of educational system product; they are to get involved in an active and responsible way into training a competitive labor force for both national and international labor markets. The support of economical agents will be fulfilled by their participation to curricula development, qualification framework development, determining the educational purposes, certificating the competences; supporting entirely or partly some development projects; granting scholarship for study or research purpose; sponsoring certain educational institutions; developing private educational and professional services supported exclusively by economical agents etc.
  - Establishing the mission of educational agent within educational institution in the context of public responsibility. This objective can be achieved to the extend the educational institution with exclusively central responsibilities driven, becomes one with community responsibilities, producing knowledge and informational educational resources. The educational institution should change from central decision performer, which is deprived of responsibilities, into a decider with full responsibilities.

The role of teaching staff is also very important; they ought to become the agents of changes, having a pro-active and social approach not just in the field.

- Establishing some supporting organizations/institutions in implementation of educational policies: Quality Insurance Agency, National Centre for Information and Recognition, National Agency of Continuing Education as well as some funds aiming to support education development: National Fund for Academic Mobility, National Fund for Professional Training etc. The establishment of such structures derives from the commitments the Republic of Moldova assumed while signing the international agreements (Bologna Declaration, Lisbon Convention).

- Setting up the Republican Congress of teaching staff that periodically (once in four years) will be convoked to debate the most important educational issues, ensuring, in a democratic and participative way, the joint character in the process of educational policies elaboration, their development and implementation as well as participation to the development of normative framework of education.

- Rethinking the mechanisms and diversifying the formulas of education funding, so that it stimulates and motivates the subjects of educational process for sustainable development and performances. The funding per pupil is to be implemented, based on the principle of investment into human capital, along with other funding formulas already existing in educational system: standard funding,

reimbursing funding, complementary funding, program targeted funding on competition based (minimum duration - 3 years).

At the same time, mechanisms are to be developed according to which the private agents could also compete to get access to the public funds.

Since the beneficiaries of educational services (parents, children, students, and economical agents) require diversification of services provided by educational institutions, it is necessary that the Government approves the block of educational and social services provided by the state free of charge for each level of educational system. All students of compulsory education should have access to the standard block of state supported services, no matter what is the status of institution's ownership.

The establishment of new funding mechanisms should base on the diversification of financial sources, reform of fiscal policies, setting up of mechanisms to encourage the investments into education, increasing the responsibilities in resources management, promoting the entrepreneurship in higher education as a financial source of institutions etc.

- Approving a *new investment framework*, along with a special investment plan for minimum 15 years, with the purpose of strengthening and developing the system's technical and material base in accordance with educational standards and modern trends of promoting quality education.

The reform on each dimension has to assure the setting up of an educational environment that will facilitate the application of the newest teaching methods and the teaching rooms/areas should be built based on sustainable technologies, such as ecologically clean and energy saving which will ensure children's healthy growing up and a sustainable development of education.

## **2. Reconsideration and new dimensions of university research**

A particular role in the process of educational system reform deals with *rethinking the university researches by means of promoting the principle of synergy between education, research and innovation* with the view to assure a sustainable development of the Republic of Moldova. In this respect, a radical reform is needed in doctoral studies which will not rank as post university studies, but as the most advanced and specialized type of studies, *the latest stage of higher education (cycle 3) and the first stage in scientific career*. *Doctoral studies* should become compulsory for academic career.

Doctoral study program will focus on developing competences necessary for didactical, scientific and management activity which will be in line with European Qualification Framework and will be carried out according to the deontological norms established by „EURODOC”.

The length of doctoral studies will be divided for 3 types of activities: studies, didactical and research. The doctoral studies will be organized *exclusively in doctoral schools* accredited for this purpose. The principle of *moving from individual research towards team work* will be promoted.

With the view to ensure the relevance of university research, it is needed to support and promote the *doctoral theses performed based on the partnership agreements between universities and business*, which normative framework ought to be completed with specific provisions regarding the parents' commitments, themes selection, enrollment terms, legal status of candidates etc. Also, it is necessary to promote joint doctoral theses and joint scientific advisory in doctor theses elaboration.

To meet the principle of holistic approach of this stage, it ought to be improved the normative framework regarding the accreditation with the function of candidate guiding and research performances assessment in accordance with European practices. Accreditation activity of doctoral schools and research institutions will be integrated within unique approach of educational institutions accreditation. Getting the accreditation certificate for doctoral studies and scientific research will determine the essential differences in funding the higher education institutions. Experts from abroad will be involved into assessing activity of scientific research performances and institutional accreditation.

The reform will make provision for developing an efficient mechanism of motivating the graduates of master programs to go on with scientific career and make free of bureaucracy the processes linked to the doctoral studies and certification of scientific qualification. Also, for the purpose of harmonizing the university research with European practices and policies it is necessary to develop a normative framework that will stipulate the institutional structure flexibility to establishing interdisciplinary research teams, setting up or participation in scientific networks, organizing and funding research mobility, institutions funding based on the programs and performances. University research will be ruled by principles aiming at relationship between university – research institutes – business – government, directed to interaction, cooperation, competition, development and excellence.

### **Conclusion**

In our opinion, the aspects we elucidated make the basement of a qualitative reform of national educational system that should become a priority factor of sustainable development of Republic of Moldova, capable to meet the beneficiaries' requirement and challenges of time. Any reform, even a consistent one by its conception, objectives or action plans, may not have efficient outcomes, unless it preserves the most valuable traditions and peculiarities of Moldovan national education. But, there is something even more important: the reform agents are educators, teachers, professors, pupils, students and the reform's sustainability requires their actions, attitudes and adequate competences. Based on this, the very first view of the reform would be the change of mentality.

To determine the relevance of proposed reforms and their convergence with provisions set up in the European space and according to foreign practices it is required to perform some independent surveys, carried out by extern experts in the



field, such as European Council, European Commission, UNESCO. Based on the transparency principle, this process will prove openness, commitments and true care for reforms' promotion in national educational system.

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