

# Beyond Instrumental Education: Subject Formation and Educational Discourse in Socialist Romania

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## **Abstract**

*This article examines education in socialist Romania as a structured mechanism of subject formation rather than a neutral domain of knowledge transmission. Drawing on a conceptual framework that treats subjectivity as institutionally constituted, the analysis explores how educational discourse promoted instrumental self-regulation while marginalizing practices associated with autonomous interiority. Through a historically grounded analysis, the study demonstrates how centralized governance translated ideological objectives into everyday pedagogical norms, shaping compliant forms of subjectivity. Particular attention is given to the case of Transcendental Meditation, which serves as a diagnostic lens for exploring the conditional tolerance and subsequent exclusion of practices that exceed institutional mediation. The findings reveal the structural limits of educational innovation under ideological governance, showing how systems can absorb change without altering their core evaluative grammars or mechanisms of control. By foregrounding subject formation as an analytical category, the article contributes to interdisciplinary debates on the politics of innovation and the governance of interior life.*

**Keywords:** *subject formation; educational discourse; socialist Romania; ideological governance; educational innovation*

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## **1. Introduction**

In socialist systems, education was not conceived primarily as a space for individual development, but as an instrument for social coordination, ideological alignment, and economic functionality (Apple, 2004). Educational policies and curricula were designed to produce predictable, disciplined, and socially useful individuals, capable of internalizing norms rather than questioning them. Within this framework, learning was subordinated to instrumental goals, and the value of

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education was measured largely through conformity, productivity, and political reliability. The school thus functioned as a central institutional mechanism through which the state sought to shape not only knowledge and skills, but also conduct, attitudes, and forms of self-relation.

This instrumental understanding of education reflects a broader modern tendency to treat schooling as a technology of governance rather than a space of open-ended intellectual formation. Educational institutions do not merely transmit knowledge; they establish normative expectations regarding discipline, responsibility, and acceptable modes of self-regulation. Through curricula, evaluation, and everyday pedagogical routines, education participates in shaping how individuals relate to authority, norms, and themselves. In this sense, schooling becomes a key site where political rationalities are translated into embodied practices and internal dispositions, long before they are articulated as explicit ideological commitments.

This raises a broader analytical problem: how educational discourse contributes to the formation of specific types of subjects within ideologically governed systems. Rather than treating education as a neutral transmission of knowledge, this article approaches it as a discursive and institutional field that defines legitimate forms of discipline, autonomy, and self-regulation.

Focusing on socialist Romania allows this analysis to move beyond purely descriptive accounts of educational policy and toward a structural understanding of how education functioned within ideologically governed systems. The Romanian case is particularly relevant because it combined strict political centralization with an extensive pedagogical apparatus designed to regulate not only institutional behaviour but also individual conduct and self-relation. Rather than treating education as a passive reflection of ideology, this approach highlights its active role in translating political rationalities into everyday pedagogical norms. In this sense, Romania offers an analytically productive case for examining how educational discourse participates in the formation of subjects under conditions of ideological governance.

In the Romanian socialist context, this instrumental understanding of education was particularly pronounced. The educational system was tightly centralized, ideologically supervised, and explicitly oriented toward the production of a socially compliant subject aligned with the political objectives of the state. Disciplines that encouraged reflexivity, critical inquiry, or autonomous interiority were progressively marginalized, while pedagogical practices emphasizing discipline, repetition, and obedience were normalized. As a result, education functioned not only as a means of skill acquisition, but as a technology of governance aimed at regulating conduct and shaping the internal dispositions of individuals.

Rather than offering a comprehensive history of socialist educational policy or an evaluative account of pedagogical effectiveness, this article adopts an analytical perspective centered on subject formation. The focus is not on curricular content or institutional reform as such, but on the normative assumptions embedded in educational discourse and practice. By examining how education delineated

acceptable forms of discipline, autonomy, and interiority, the analysis seeks to clarify the structural conditions under which certain modes of self-relation could be cultivated, tolerated, or excluded within ideologically governed systems.

This article examines how educational discourse in socialist Romania operated as a mechanism of subject formation, promoting instrumental forms of discipline and self-regulation while marginalizing practices associated with autonomous interiority. By combining conceptual analysis with a historically grounded case study, the paper seeks to clarify the structural limits of educational innovation under ideological governance and to contribute to broader interdisciplinary debates on education, discourse, and subject formation.

## **2. Conceptual Framework: Subject Formation and Educational Discourse**

In this article, the term *subject* does not refer to an individual understood primarily in psychological or experiential terms, but to a socially and institutionally constituted form of personhood. The subject is approached as the outcome of historically situated practices, norms, and discourses that define acceptable ways of thinking, acting, and relating to oneself. From this perspective, subject formation is not a spontaneous or purely individual process, but one mediated by institutional frameworks, particularly education. Schools, curricula, and pedagogical norms play a central role in shaping how individuals internalize authority, discipline, and expectations of conduct (Rose, 1999).

It is important to clarify what is not meant by subject formation in the context of this analysis. The concept is not employed to describe processes of personal growth, psychological development, or the cultivation of individual authenticity, as these approaches tend to privilege inner experience over institutional mediation. Nor does it refer to educational models centered on self-expression or personal fulfillment. Instead, subject formation is understood as a fundamentally relational and normative process, shaped by external expectations and stabilized through institutional routines. This delimitation allows the analysis to focus on education as a mechanism of governance rather than as a domain of personal meaning or individual emancipation.

Central to this conceptualization is the notion of interiority as an object of institutional concern rather than as a private or purely experiential domain. Interiority refers here to the ways individuals relate reflexively to their own thoughts, motivations, and conduct within normative frameworks established by institutions. Educational systems do not access interiority directly, but seek to shape it indirectly through routines of evaluation, discipline, and self-monitoring. In this way, interior life becomes legible and governable, even when it is not explicitly articulated as a pedagogical objective.

This understanding makes it possible to distinguish between instrumental self-regulation and reflexive autonomy. Instrumental self-regulation involves the internalization of external norms in order to function efficiently within predefined

institutional roles. Reflexive autonomy, by contrast, implies the capacity to relate critically to norms themselves, evaluating expectations rather than merely adapting to them. While both involve self-monitoring, only the latter introduces a potential displacement of authority from institutional frameworks to the individual. It is precisely this displacement that renders reflexive autonomy politically and pedagogically sensitive in ideologically structured contexts.

Accordingly, the analysis deliberately avoids treating subject formation as a matter of inner experience, personal belief, or individual spirituality. Instead, it focuses on the ways in which educational discourse establishes normative boundaries that distinguish legitimate from illegitimate forms of conduct and self-relation. This shift allows education to be examined not as a domain of personal meaning, but as a structured field in which institutional expectations are articulated, transmitted, and enforced.

Educational discourse is understood here as a set of institutionalized narratives, norms, and pedagogical rationalities through which education defines its aims, methods, and acceptable outcomes. Rather than merely reflecting social values, discourse actively structures educational practice by shaping what can be taught, how learning is evaluated, and which forms of behavior are encouraged or discouraged (Foucault, 1977; Ball, 2013). In this sense, discourse functions as a productive force that contributes to the formation of subjects by normalizing specific forms of discipline and self-relation (Foucault, 1977). Education thus operates as a privileged site where power is exercised not primarily through coercion, but through the internalization of norms and expectations embedded in everyday pedagogical routines.

Discursive norms acquire practical force through their incorporation into routine pedagogical mechanisms. Rather than remaining at the level of abstract policy statements, educational discourse becomes visible in the concrete organization of practice: curricula, grading systems, classroom discipline, and evaluation criteria translate institutional aims into repetitive procedures that shape habits of attention, obedience, self-assessment, and modes of self-regulation. Over time, these routines stabilize expectations regarding acceptable conduct and legitimate forms of self-relation, so that discourse does not merely inform education “from above,” but becomes embedded in the embodied experience of schooling and operational through procedures that reproduce particular forms of subjectivity.

From this perspective, education can be approached as a key institutional site through which ideological objectives are translated into pedagogical norms. As an apparatus that mediates between state rationalities and everyday practices, the school contributes to the reproduction of social order by shaping compliant forms of subjectivity rather than fostering autonomous self-formation (Althusser, 1971). This conceptual lens is particularly relevant for the analysis of socialist educational systems, where discourse, policy, and institutional control converged to define narrowly circumscribed models of the legitimate subject.

Approaching subject formation through the lens of educational discourse thus allows for an analysis of schooling as a site of governance rather than

emancipation. By focusing on how norms of discipline, self-regulation, and interiority are institutionally produced and enforced, this framework clarifies the conditions under which certain forms of autonomy become structurally problematic. These conceptual distinctions provide the analytical basis for examining how socialist education translated ideological rationalities into everyday pedagogical norms, shaping compliant forms of subjectivity while marginalizing others.

### **3. Socialist Education as an Instrumental System**

In socialist Romania, education was explicitly framed as a strategic instrument for economic development and ideological consolidation. Educational policy documents and curricular reforms emphasized the role of schooling in producing a disciplined, productive, and politically reliable workforce, aligned with the broader objectives of the socialist state (Fitzpatrick, 2000). Learning outcomes were evaluated primarily in terms of utility, conformity, and adherence to officially sanctioned values, rather than critical understanding or personal development. Within this framework, education functioned as a centrally coordinated system designed to align individual formation with collective goals, reinforcing a model of subjectivity grounded in obedience, discipline, and functional integration into the social order (Marin, 2018).

The centralized organization of the educational system reinforced this instrumental orientation. Decisions regarding curricula, textbooks, teaching methods, and evaluation criteria were taken at the highest institutional levels, leaving little room for pedagogical autonomy. Schools operated as extensions of state authority, tasked with implementing uniform norms and ensuring ideological consistency across all levels of education.

Centralization did not operate solely at the level of policy design, but structured the everyday experience of schooling. Standardized curricula, uniform textbooks, and tightly regulated assessment practices reduced pedagogical discretion and limited opportunities for interpretive engagement. Students learned early to navigate educational expectations by anticipating evaluative criteria rather than by cultivating independent judgment. In this way, centralization fostered a pedagogical environment oriented toward predictability and risk avoidance, reinforcing adaptive behaviours aligned with institutional demands. Over time, this pedagogical environment fostered dispositions oriented toward compliance and risk avoidance, as educational success became increasingly tied to the anticipation of institutional demands rather than to independent judgment.

Within this centralized framework, discipline and productivity became core pedagogical values. Teaching practices prioritized repetition, standardization, and the strict regulation of behaviour, fostering habits of compliance rather than critical engagement. Students were encouraged to internalize externally imposed norms, learning to regulate their conduct in accordance with institutional expectations. Educational success was thus closely tied to the ability to conform, follow instructions, and demonstrate reliability within predefined roles. Such practices

contributed to the formation of a subject who was not only externally disciplined, but also trained to monitor and adjust his or her own behaviour in line with the system's requirements.

Over time, these pedagogical norms were internalized as dispositions rather than experienced as external constraints. Students were trained not only to follow rules, but to monitor their own conduct in relation to institutional expectations. Educational success increasingly depended on the capacity to self-discipline, suppress deviation, and demonstrate reliability within predefined roles. This process contributed to the formation of subjects who participated actively in their own regulation, aligning internal motivations with externally imposed norms.

This pedagogical orientation was embedded within the broader ideological project of creating the "new socialist man". Education was expected to shape individuals who embodied discipline, collectivism, and loyalty to the state, while minimizing traits associated with individualism or critical autonomy. The ideal subject of socialist education was thus defined less by intellectual independence than by functional integration into the political and economic order.

The emphasis on discipline and ideological conformity imposed clear limits on the development of autonomous forms of subjectivity. While self-regulation was encouraged, it remained strictly instrumental, oriented toward the efficient fulfillment of assigned roles rather than reflective self-determination. Practices or modes of learning that fostered introspection, independent judgment, or alternative forms of self-relation were viewed with suspicion and often excluded from the educational sphere. As a result, the formation of the subject was confined within narrow normative boundaries, reinforcing a model of internalized control aligned with institutional priorities.

Taken together, these features indicate that socialist education in Romania operated as a highly instrumental system of subject formation, structured around discipline, conformity, and ideological reliability. Rather than encouraging diverse modes of learning or self-relation, the system delineated strict boundaries between acceptable and unacceptable forms of conduct and interiority. This configuration reflects the broader logic of ideological governance, in which education functioned as a central mechanism for stabilizing social order and reproducing political authority (Marin, 2018; Tismăneanu, 2006).

Socialist education thus operated as a mediating apparatus that linked ideological rationalities to measurable pedagogical outputs. The key effect was not only the production of disciplined conduct, but the normalization of evaluative legibility: students learned to render their behaviour readable within institutional criteria. This created subjects whose self-monitoring was calibrated to the system's demand for administrative predictability rather than to reflective autonomy.

#### **4. Acceptable and Unacceptable Forms of Subject Formation**

Within the socialist educational framework, not all forms of subject formation were treated equally. While discipline and behavioural self-regulation

were actively promoted, they were valued only insofar as they supported institutional efficiency and ideological conformity, a pattern documented in analyses of Romanian educational policy under socialism (Marin, 2018). Educational practices were assessed less by their capacity to foster understanding or autonomy than by their ability to produce orderly conduct and predictable responses, consistent with the broader logic of centralized governance (Tismăneanu, 2006). This distinction reveals that self-regulation itself was not rejected, but carefully circumscribed and defined in strictly instrumental terms.

Instrumental self-regulation occupied a central place within socialist educational discourse. Students were encouraged to monitor their own behaviour, time, and performance, but always in relation to externally defined objectives and norms, reflecting the broader emphasis on discipline and political reliability in schooling (Marin, 2018). This form of self-regulation did not imply autonomy or reflexive self-determination, but rather the internalization of institutional control mechanisms, consistent with the logic of ideological reproduction through education (Althusser, 1971).

This emphasis on instrumental self-regulation created a zone of conditional tolerance within the educational system. Practices and forms of knowledge were not excluded a priori, but assessed according to their compatibility with institutional objectives. As long as they could be framed in terms of efficiency, discipline, or productivity, certain pedagogical approaches were provisionally accommodated. This flexibility, however, remained strictly bounded by the requirement that educational authority and ideological mediation remain intact.

By contrast, forms of learning and self-relation that encouraged reflexivity, critical inquiry, or autonomous interiority were treated as problematic within the socialist educational order. Disciplines that fostered interpretive thinking and self-reflection were progressively marginalized, as they were perceived to weaken ideological coherence and institutional control, a dynamic evident in the treatment of philosophy and related fields during the communist period (Maci, 2018). Such domains introduced forms of subject formation that exceeded purely instrumental regulation, opening spaces for independent judgment and alternative modes of self-understanding. From the perspective of ideological governance, these forms of interiority represented a potential risk rather than a pedagogical asset.

Reflexive practices introduced a subtle but significant shift in the locus of evaluation, enabling individuals to relate to norms and expectations not only through enactment, but also through assessment. This shift did not necessarily generate dissent or explicit opposition; rather, it altered the conditions under which judgment and conduct were formed within the educational process. When evaluation was no longer fully anchored in institutional routines, the relation between the subject and pedagogical authority became less predictable.

The perceived danger of reflexive practices did not reside in their ideological content, but in their capacity to relocate judgment away from institutional mediation. By enabling individuals to assess norms rather than merely internalize them, reflexivity disrupted the predictability upon which centralized educational

governance depended. Conduct that was no longer fully standardized through pedagogical criteria became more difficult to anticipate and regulate. From the perspective of ideological control, such indeterminacy constituted a structural risk rather than a pedagogical resource, as it weakened the mechanisms through which subject formation could be reliably managed.

Nevertheless, the boundary between acceptable and unacceptable forms of subject formation was not always rigid (Yurchak, 2006). Certain practices and forms of knowledge were temporarily tolerated as long as they could be framed within scientific, technical, or utilitarian discourses compatible with official ideology, a strategy frequently employed by educational institutions to manage potential tensions (Marin, 2018). Such conditional tolerance allowed limited experimentation, while preserving the overall primacy of ideological control.

Autonomous interiority became problematic because it produced a form of self-relation that could not be reliably re-coded as instrumental performance. In other words, it crossed the boundary of conditional tolerance: once interior practices ceased to be translatable into institutional outputs, they became ungovernable within the system's evaluative grammar. When self-relation was no longer mediated exclusively by official norms and pedagogical routines, subject formation escaped direct ideological supervision, undermining the predictability on which centralized educational governance relied and introducing uncertainty into the reproduction of social order (Tismăneanu, 2006). From this perspective, reflexive autonomy was incompatible with a system that depended on stable, standardized forms of subjectivity.

Taken together, these distinctions illustrate that socialist education did not simply suppress interiority, but actively regulated its acceptable forms. Self-regulation was encouraged only when it reinforced institutional discipline, while autonomous interiority was excluded once it threatened the monopoly of ideological mediation. This selective logic of inclusion and exclusion created a structural threshold beyond which certain practices of subject formation could no longer be accommodated within the educational system (Popkewitz, 2008).

The distinction between acceptable and unacceptable forms of subject formation thus did not hinge on discipline versus disorder, but on the source and direction of regulation. Self-regulation was encouraged when it reinforced institutional norms, and excluded when it enabled autonomous self-relation. This selective logic delineated the boundaries within which educational practices could operate, setting the stage for the marginalization of practices that exceeded instrumental governance.

## **5. Marginalized Practices of Subject Formation: The Case of Transcendental Meditation**

Against this background, the case of Transcendental Meditation (TM) provides a particularly revealing example of a marginalized practice of subject formation. Introduced and circulated informally in Romania during the late socialist

period, TM was initially framed by its proponents as a neutral technique of concentration and self-regulation rather than a spiritual doctrine. Its trajectory within the educational and intellectual milieu illustrates how practices located beyond instrumental self-regulation tested the limits of institutional tolerance.

Transcendental Meditation emerged at the intersection of these tensions as a practice that addressed concentration and self-regulation without relying on institutional mediation. Its informal circulation within academic and intellectual milieus positioned it ambiguously between acceptable techniques of self-discipline and forms of autonomous interiority. This ambiguity explains why the practice initially attracted curiosity rather than immediate repression, while simultaneously exceeding established pedagogical categories.

This initial phase of relative tolerance should not be interpreted as openness toward autonomous practices of interiority, but rather as a moment of classificatory uncertainty. Transcendental Meditation did not immediately trigger repression precisely because it did not fit established ideological templates of deviation. It lacked explicit political content, religious institutionalization, or visible organizational structures, all of which traditionally functioned as markers of ideological threat. As a result, educational and security authorities initially struggled to determine whether TM should be treated as a harmless self-improvement technique or as a latent source of ideological instability. This ambiguity delayed direct intervention, while simultaneously intensifying surveillance and information gathering. The uncertainty surrounding TM reveals an important mechanism of ideological governance: practices are tolerated not when they are deemed compatible, but when their implications for subject formation remain insufficiently legible to institutional authority.

In order to gain legitimacy, Transcendental Meditation was frequently presented in scientific and technical terms, emphasizing its purported effects on concentration, stress reduction, and cognitive efficiency rather than any spiritual or doctrinal content (Carrette & King, 2005). Internationally, this framing drew on physiological and psychological studies that described meditation as a measurable technique of mental regulation, distinct from religious practice (Wallace, 1970). Such interpretations allowed TM to be temporarily aligned with acceptable educational goals, particularly those related to performance and self-control. Within the Romanian context, this strategy sought to situate the practice within the narrow zone of conditional tolerance afforded to techniques that could be translated into instrumental benefits compatible with official discourse (Marin, 2018).

Alongside this technical framing, contemporaneous testimonies by key actors involved in the introduction of Transcendental Meditation in Romania. In an interview conducted in 2003, Nicolae Stoian, one of the main figures responsible for transmitting TM to Romania, described the practice not as a belief system, but as a technique fundamentally oriented toward interiorization: “the purpose of this movement is not to project outward, but to interiorize; the human path leads inward, not outward” (Jela, Strat, & Albu, 2004, p. 280). From the perspective of ideological governance, such an inward orientation was not neutral. By relocating meaning and

regulation away from collective and institutional mediation, meditative practice enabled forms of subjectivity that escaped established frameworks of vigilance, evaluation, and pedagogical control.

Yet this dimension was systematically neutralized in public and semi-public accounts, as proponents of Transcendental Meditation sought to shield the practice from political suspicion. In the same interview, Nicolae Stoian explicitly rejected interpretations that framed TM as a form of psychological influence or ideological manipulation. He emphasized its impersonal and technical character, describing it as “a mechanical technique” that does not rely on belief, suggestibility, or individual predisposition, and likened its functioning to a machine that operates identically regardless of the user (Jela, Strat, & Albu, 2004, pp. 280–281). The role of the instructor, he insisted, was strictly procedural, limited to verifying that no effort or concentration was imposed during practice: “What espionage, what politics? It is absolutely absurd” (Jela, Strat, & Albu, 2004, pp. 280–281).

However, the attempt to legitimize Transcendental Meditation through scientific language also exposed a fundamental contradiction within socialist educational rationality. While the regime officially promoted science, rationality, and technical progress, it remained deeply suspicious of practices that produced effects outside institutional control. The emphasis on measurable benefits such as concentration or stress reduction was insufficient to neutralize concern over the practice’s inward orientation and non-institutional transmission. In this sense, scientific framing functioned less as a guarantee of acceptance and more as a temporary shield against repression. Once it became clear that TM cultivated modes of self-relation not anchored in pedagogical authority or collective discipline, its scientific vocabulary lost protective value. The limits of scientific legitimacy thus became visible precisely at the point where subject formation escaped institutional mediation.

This strategy of scientific and technical framing was not unique to Transcendental Meditation, but reflected a broader pattern through which practices of interiority sought institutional acceptance under ideologically regulated systems. By translating experiential or introspective techniques into the language of efficiency, regulation, and performance, such practices attempted to align themselves with officially sanctioned rationalities. This translation did not eliminate the underlying tension between autonomous self-relation and institutional control, but temporarily obscured it by recoding interior practices as neutral technologies. The eventual failure of this strategy highlights the structural limits of accommodation when practices of subject formation cannot be fully subordinated to instrumental objectives.

Within the Romanian socialist context, the circulation of Transcendental Meditation quickly attracted institutional suspicion. Despite its technical and secular framing, the practice was monitored by state authorities and gradually reclassified as ideologically deviant, due to its perceived capacity to foster autonomous self-relation outside official educational and political channels. Archival evidence indicates that TM was interpreted not merely as an individual technique, but as a collective practice capable of generating alternative forms of authority and allegiance, thereby exceeding the limits of tolerable pedagogical experimentation (Andreescu, 2008).

This shift marked the transition from conditional tolerance to systematic surveillance.

Security documents from the early 1980s indicate that this suspicion intensified as TM began to be associated with informal educational influence. Reports increasingly emphasized the presence of students, young academics, and teaching staff among practitioners, framing this involvement as a sign of pedagogical vulnerability rather than individual preference. Particular concern was directed toward the possibility that TM could circulate within universities as an alternative source of authority, operating parallel to official curricula and ideological instruction. The educational environment was thus redefined as a site of potential contamination, where interior practices threatened to undermine the formation of ideologically reliable subjects. In this context, surveillance targeted not only individual practitioners but also the social spaces through which TM circulated, revealing how educational institutions themselves became objects of securitized control<sup>3</sup>.

Archival and testimonial sources further indicate that participation in Transcendental Meditation was not confined to marginal or socially isolated groups. On the contrary, sessions attracted members of Romania's intellectual elite, including university professors, researchers, physicians, psychologists, and students from leading academic institutions (Jela, Strat, & Albu, 2004). The presence of highly educated participants intensified institutional anxiety, as the practice appeared to circulate within precisely those milieus responsible for knowledge production, pedagogy, and symbolic authority. From the perspective of ideological governance, this association transformed TM from an individual technique of self-regulation into a potential vector of alternative influence within elite educational and intellectual networks.

The incompatibility between Transcendental Meditation and the official educational discourse did not stem from the practice itself, but from the mode of subject formation it enabled. By cultivating a form of self-relation not mediated by institutional curricula, pedagogical authority, or ideological supervision, TM disrupted the established chain through which educational norms were legitimized and internalized. From the perspective of the socialist state, such practices introduced an autonomous source of meaning and regulation that could not be fully absorbed into existing disciplinary frameworks. Consequently, TM was no longer interpreted as a neutral educational technique, but as a challenge to the monopoly of institutional mediation over subject formation (Andreescu, 2008).

Archival evidence indicates that the core concern of the socialist state was not the practical content of Transcendental Meditation, but its implications for subject formation. Internal reports repeatedly framed practices encouraging inner calm and self-observation as undermining ideological vigilance and institutional loyalty within educational environments (CNSAS, 1982)<sup>4</sup>. Such practices were seen

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<sup>3</sup> Romanian National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives (CNSAS), Informative Fund, File no. 12678/1983, fol. 22.

<sup>4</sup> Romanian National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives (CNSAS), Informative Fund, File no. 12345/1982, fol. 27.

as relocating the process of regulation from pedagogical institutions to the individual, thereby weakening centralized control over the formation of conduct and belief. From the perspective of state authorities, this shift introduced an autonomous source of self-relation incompatible with the standardized and predictable subjectivity required by socialist educational governance.

The emphasis on inner calm and self-observation was particularly troubling for a system that equated psychological alertness with ideological reliability. From the perspective of socialist educational governance, reduced reactivity and inward attention were interpreted as forms of withdrawal from collective discipline rather than as indicators of mental well-being. Security assessments repeatedly suggested that such practices diminished responsiveness to institutional authority and weakened the emotional mobilization required by socialist pedagogy. By framing calmness and introspection as precursors to passivity, state discourse transformed psychological balance into a political liability. This reframing illustrates how mental states themselves became objects of ideological evaluation, reinforcing the notion that acceptable subject formation required continuous alignment between interior life and institutional expectations<sup>5</sup>.

Taken together, the case of Transcendental Meditation illustrates the structural limits of tolerance within socialist education. Although initially accommodated through a technical and performance-oriented framing, the practice ultimately exceeded the boundaries of acceptable subject formation by enabling autonomous modes of self-relation. Its marginalization reveals how educational governance responded when the monopoly over pedagogical mediation was challenged, confirming the centrality of controlled subject formation to the stability of the socialist system.

At a more general level, the marginalization of Transcendental Meditation shows that practices of subject formation were evaluated less by their educational or therapeutic effects than by their compatibility with institutional mediation. Once a practice enabled self-regulation beyond the reach of pedagogical authority, it crossed a threshold of tolerability. This dynamic clarifies why educational systems operating under ideological governance can accommodate innovation at the level of methods or techniques, while systematically excluding practices that reconfigure the relationship between the individual and institutional authority.

## **6. The Limits of Educational Innovation under Ideological Governance**

The dynamics observed in socialist Romania point to broader structural constraints affecting educational innovation under ideologically governed systems. Innovation was not rejected outright, but was permitted only insofar as it could be aligned with predefined institutional objectives and translated into measurable gains in efficiency, discipline, or performance. Educational change was thus evaluated

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<sup>5</sup> Romanian National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives (CNSAS), Informative Fund, File no. 12345/1982, fol. 27.

through an instrumental lens, privileging techniques that reinforced existing forms of governance while excluding those that reconfigured the relationship between the individual and the institution (Ball, 2013). This logic reveals how innovation in education can be selectively incorporated without altering the underlying mechanisms of subject formation.

Educational innovation under ideological governance must therefore be understood as structurally constrained rather than pedagogically neutral. Innovations that refined techniques of instruction or assessment were readily absorbed, as they enhanced efficiency without altering normative assumptions about subject formation. By contrast, innovations that transformed how individuals related to authority or to themselves introduced qualitative shifts that exceeded instrumental adjustment.

At this point, it becomes necessary to distinguish between different meanings of educational innovation. Innovation understood as the refinement of techniques, methods, or delivery mechanisms remains compatible with instrumental governance, as it enhances efficiency without challenging underlying assumptions about subject formation. By contrast, innovation that alters the conditions under which individuals relate to authority, knowledge, or themselves introduces a qualitative shift that exceeds technical improvement. Such forms of innovation are inherently disruptive, not because they oppose institutional goals, but because they destabilize the normative frameworks through which conduct is regulated. This distinction clarifies why certain educational changes are readily absorbed, while others encounter systematic resistance under ideologically governed systems.

From an economic and policy perspective, this instrumental approach resonates with models that conceptualize education primarily as an investment in human capital. Within such frameworks, the value of education is assessed in terms of productivity, efficiency, and predictability of outcomes, rather than transformative or emancipatory potential (Becker, 1964). Under ideological governance, this logic was intensified, as educational innovation was expected to optimize performance without destabilizing established structures of authority.

When education is conceptualized primarily as an investment in human capital, innovation is evaluated through metrics of performance, predictability, and output. Such frameworks privilege techniques that optimize existing structures while marginalizing practices that cannot be easily measured or standardized. Under ideological governance, this logic reinforced the exclusion of forms of innovation that fostered reflexivity or autonomous interiority.

Innovations that seek to transform not only methods or outcomes, but the very process of subject formation, encounter systemic resistance under ideological governance. When educational practices alter how individuals relate to authority, knowledge, or themselves, they challenge the tacit assumptions upon which institutional control depends. Such innovations introduce forms of unpredictability that cannot be easily measured or standardized, undermining the administrative rationalities of centralized systems. As a result, these initiatives are either neutralized

through instrumental reinterpretation or excluded altogether, regardless of their potential pedagogical value.

Although the Romanian case is historically specific, the structural dynamics it reveals extend well beyond this particular national and temporal context. The patterns observed in socialist Romania point to a broader logic through which education is mobilized as an instrument for securing ideological coherence, administrative predictability, and normative stability. Rather than functioning as an open space for experimentation or transformation, education in such systems becomes a calibrated mechanism for managing conduct and aligning subject formation with institutional priorities.

Across ideologically structured contexts, innovation in education tends to be selectively incorporated rather than embraced in its full transformative potential. Practices and reforms are welcomed insofar as they enhance efficiency, manageability, or performance, while remaining compatible with established modes of governance. By contrast, initiatives that alter the relationship between the individual and institutional authority—particularly those that reconfigure self-relation or interior autonomy—are more likely to encounter resistance, regardless of their pedagogical merits.

This selective logic reveals that the limits of educational innovation are not primarily technical. The decisive criterion is not whether an innovation can be implemented effectively, but whether it can be absorbed without disrupting dominant rationalities of control. Educational change is thus constrained by deeper structural conditions that define which forms of subjectivity are considered governable, reliable, and socially acceptable within a given system.

The Romanian case illustrates how educational systems can accommodate change while preserving their foundational mechanisms of subject formation. Innovation may occur at the level of methods, curricula, or institutional procedures, yet leave intact the underlying assumptions governing authority, discipline, and self-regulation. In this sense, transformation is often confined to surface adjustments, while the normative core of subject formation remains largely unchallenged.

These dynamics provide a critical lens for understanding both historical and contemporary debates on educational change. As long as education continues to function as a central mechanism for regulating subjectivity, innovations that foster autonomous self-relation will face structural constraints. The tension between innovation and governability thus emerges not as a contingent difficulty, but as a constitutive feature of educational systems operating under strong normative and ideological rationalities.

## **7. Conclusions**

This article has shown that education in socialist Romania functioned not as a neutral space of knowledge transmission, but as a structured mechanism of subject formation embedded within ideological governance. Through centralized administration, standardized pedagogical routines, and regulated evaluative

frameworks, educational discourse promoted instrumental forms of discipline and self-regulation while systematically marginalizing practices associated with autonomous interiority. Rather than cultivating critical or reflexive capacities, schooling operated as a technology of governance that aligned individual conduct with institutional predictability and ideological reliability.

The case of Transcendental Meditation illustrates with particular clarity the structural limits of educational tolerance under such a regime. Initially accommodated through technical and scientific framings compatible with instrumental rationalities, TM exceeded the boundaries of acceptability once it enabled forms of self-relation that could not be reliably re-coded as institutional performance. Its marginalization was not the result of doctrinal deviation, but of its implications for subject formation: by relocating regulation and meaning away from pedagogical mediation, the practice disrupted the evaluative grammar through which education governed interiority. In this sense, TM functioned as a diagnostic case, revealing how practices become intolerable precisely when they render subject formation ungovernable.

By foregrounding subject formation as an analytical category, this article contributes to interdisciplinary debates on education, governance, and innovation by shifting attention away from policy design or curricular reform toward the normative architectures that regulate interior life. The analysis demonstrates that educational systems can absorb methodological or technical innovation while preserving their core mechanisms of control. Innovation becomes structurally constrained not at the level of implementation, but at the point where it alters the locus of evaluation and authority. This perspective extends existing approaches by showing that the limits of educational change are rooted less in ideology as doctrine than in the institutional management of subjectivity.

Although grounded in a historically specific context, the Romanian case highlights dynamics that extend beyond socialist regimes. Whenever education functions as a central apparatus for regulating subjectivity, practices that foster autonomous self-relation will encounter structural resistance, regardless of their pedagogical or therapeutic value. The tension between innovation and governability thus emerges not as a contingent feature of particular political systems, but as a constitutive condition of educational governance itself. Recognizing this tension invites a more critical understanding of educational reform—one that accounts not only for institutional change, but for the deeper normative limits that shape which forms of subjectivity are considered acceptable, manageable, and legitimate.

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