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**NEW CHALLENGES IN THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS – THE
IMPLEMENTATION OF EUROPEAN PROJECTS**

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Abstract

Romania's accession to the European Union has brought along a series of structural changes at almost all levels, through the efficiency and competitiveness of the public and the private sector: increasing quality of vocational training through human capital development and connecting education with the labor market, increasing quality of life and the sustainability of long-term macroeconomic efficiency, reducing poverty and improving the health of the population, strengthening the administrative capacity. The success of the integration in the European model has been the real challenge. However, the modernization of Romania depends on the success of implementing the projects for human resources development. This huge opportunity is due to the European financial allocations and the capacity to absorb the majority of them, to be able to reduce the gap compared to the EU countries. In this context the measure of a society's development may be emphasized not only by the economic and financial indicators, but also by those related to human resources and education, indicators related to the way knowledge and learning are organized, to the types of performance expected, to the quality of educational activity, and to the ways that is supported by economic and financial policies.

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1. Introduction

The development of modern societies and education became dependent on the human assets in a proportion concurrent to the economical and financial assets. The study of this present social conditions



have to face allows for the delimitation of the larger context in which Romanian education institutions have to operate, and proves why staying put or going back to a mythical past are no longer viable options. In our times, *system education development* means to face the new social and economic–financial requirements and pressure and to improve the activity and performances by adopting the structural changes by implementing European project for human resources development.

The European Union (EU) represents an economic, political, social and cultural partnership, unique in the world, bringing together countries from almost all over the European continent. Currently, by joining the European Union, Romania goes through a phase of redefining the role in the new context and the need to affirm itself as a competitive and dynamic actor in the Union. Romania must face the challenge of permanently adapting to changes generated by a number of factors: both internal, generated by the integration in parallel with immigration, ageing and decreasing population, the necessity of adapting its institutions to the demands of European institutions' efficiency and transparency and the legitimacy of decision-making, at governmental level and adapted at the Community communication level with its citizens, as well as external, generated by the world crisis of natural resources and raw materials, the competition coming from both the EU Member States and non-EU Member States, but not only, the terrorist threat, threats that are related to the environment, such as climate change, natural disasters, pandemics, etc. (*Evaluation reports of the Sectorial Operational Programme Human Resources Development 2007-2013*).

In this international context, the European Union is a complex construction, characterized by an accentuated dynamic, and Romania should take into account of existing opportunities in minimizing vulnerabilities typical of a new EU Member State, promoting coherent policies, with the aim of increasing the welfare of the Romanian young people, of the educational system and mostly "the new information and communication technologies to be accessed and used by pupils or students on a large scale and to generate genuine learning by facilitating reception, understanding and assimilation of scientific content (Lupașc, 2016).

The current society has a dynamic accentuated lately by multiple and complex changes faced by all its systems. In order to ensure a minimum balance, the Romanian educational system is required to progress to the same extent. Evidently, a consensus evolution will be ideal, through a mutual transfer and adequacy process. In the last years, at the beginning of this new century, the fast rhythm imposed by the socio-economic and technological transformations have put unprecedented pressure on the Romanian school in general, especially on the efforts to correlate the competencies and qualifications conferred to pupils and students with society's requirements and on ensuring optimal socio-professional insertion. In such a context, the specialized literature and practitioners in the field of education talk about reconsidering the reference framework and achieving another type of educational construction, given at least some fundamental aspects (Marin, 2013):

- European and trans-European policies regarding the improvement of educational quality targeting key competencies, European Qualifications Framework, mechanism for quality assurance, etc.;
- New theoretical and methodological acquisitions and the changes in perspective regarding the scientific knowledge, learning and its cognitive, social, emotional mechanisms, planning models, curriculum implementation and evaluation;

- The already consecrated practice of advanced educational systems of periodically revising their reference framework and fundamental educational documents deriving from these;
- Diagnostice and prognostic reviews regarding evolution issues and trends of the contemporary school, in particular, and of Romanian school, after the year 2000; the emergence of a new hierarchy of values;
- The effects, particularities and expectations towards the Romanian school reform; practical action-oriented learning, as the result of scientific investigations;
- Projects for changing the institutional structure of the Romanian educational system: the structure of the education cycles, the duration of the compulsory school, the system of professionalisation of the teaching career, scientific research funding, etc..

2. Objectives and research methodology

The impact of European agreements and funds is felt at the level of the entire society and on all levels of the educational system, but the present paper is set to make a succinct analysis of the answers of Romanian teachers from the perspective of social perception towards its effects, after the implementation of the human resources development projects and an estimation of the impact felt financially on primary areas, as number of participants in the Sectorial Operational Program Human Resources Development (SOPHRD/POS DRU).

Considering that the socio-economic impact produced through the European financing projects for human resource development in education is significantly stepped down in all components of education institutions, from the normative (structure, culture), to the instrumental – strategic (strategy, management), or motivational – affective (interpersonal relations, communication, organizational climate), this paper investigates one dimension of the current stage of implementing the new European vision. One of the objectives of the research was to determine the perceived and declared impact by the population involved as target group in continuous training programs with SOPHRD financing related to the following: the impact load in projects, the involvement level of the participants, the link between the offer of training programs and the actual needs in the education system, the type of acquisitions identified as a follow-up of the participation in project training activities, the advantages and disadvantages of continuous training projects for human resources in education.

To be able to determine the impact of the POS DRU European projects for continuous training of the teaching personnel in pre-university education and identifying the social perception of the teaching personnel, two complementary inquiry methods were chosen for research, combining the qualitative and quantitative approach. Without setting out to completely clarify this complex issue, the non – standard based inquiry and institution analysis done based on systematic observance and applying a checklist sheet, have supplied relevant data to be able to answer the advanced hypotheses in the study.

Considering the wide area of the study and the strict inquiry of the socio-economic domain, research has included a specific methodology that allows documentation and gathering of quantitative data, as well as qualitative information. We have used a *questionnaire* which was conceived to answer to the objectives of the study, using miscellaneous items (open/closed, of opinion/of facts) and various measuring scales (of reports and frequencies or nominal/ordinal). After the pretesting, the questionnaire

comprised 12 items that were concentrated on bringing out the human subjectivity by requesting self-assessment, motivation, arguments, but also factual data through the allocation of ranks, degrees or shares. **The logic of the questionnaire** was built on the following indicators: the level of participants' implication, the link between the training program offer and the real needs felt in the education system, the type of identified acquisitions as a result of participating in the project training activities, the advantages and disadvantages of continuous training programs for human resources in education.

The **test object** under inquiry for the non-standard questionnaire based survey is 'in stages' and was targeted on teaching personnel in the pre-university education system: kindergarten teachers, elementary school teachers, teachers of miscellaneous specialization, a total of 643 persons. In building this sample, several stages were covered: establishing the cities from the urban and rural pre-university education, establishing the education units and randomly selecting the respondents in these schools, within gender, group age and school affiliation quotas, for schools that develop or do not develop SOPHRD projects. After the elimination of non-conclusive answers and questionnaires that were not filled in, there were 562 questionnaires to be taken into consideration for data elaboration. The quantitative empirical data gathered through the non-standard questionnaire were complemented by the data gathered through systematic observance and filling in an observance sheet e.g. check list for which a sample of 30 pre-university education institutions was prepared, developing and not developing SOPHRD projects of continuous training, in equal shares.

3. Results

The inquiry done in education institutions has lead to the collection of a large volume of data that allowed correlations, comparisons, multiple and relevant interpretations from the perspective of the approached issue. The information obtained from the questions with pre-established answers or aptitude evaluation scales was elaborated from a statistics perspective, based on the Z test of establishing the significance of differences through comparative analysis of environments for independent samples. The answers to the open items were elaborated through the content analysis that required registering all response options, followed by organising them into categories or response classes.

Items that have viewed the impact through the highlighting of purchases identified by the teaching personnel as a result of participating in SOPHRD projects training activities: 1. knowledge from the specialty fields; 2.conflict and tension solving techniques; 3.education process design and accomplishment abilities; 4. financial resource management abilities; 5. assessment and peer review abilities; 6. reflexive, critical thinking; 7. communication and networking abilities; 8. teamwork and mutual appreciation abilities; 9.proactiveness and assuming the responsibility; 10. promoting the educational school offer.

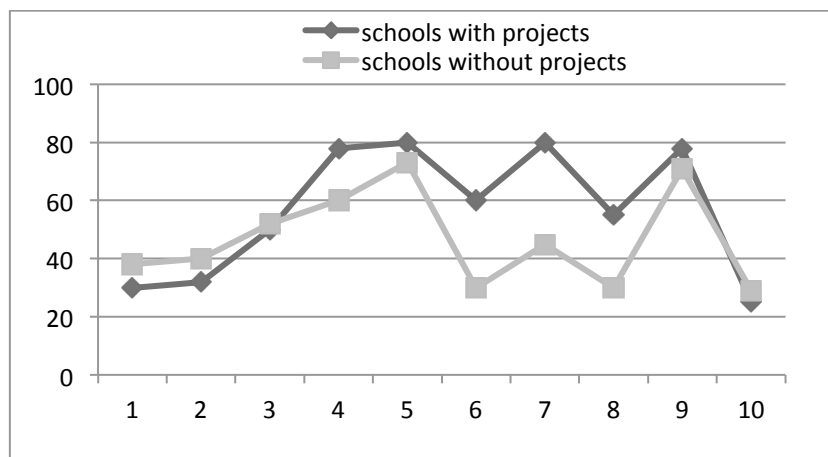


Figure 1. The perception of the teaching personnel on the impact of projects through the identification of the 10 issues of acquisition type

The statistical calculation shows that the differences between the two groups of schools are significant only when it comes to markers 6. reflexive, critical thinking, 7. networking and communication abilities and 8. teamwork and mutual appreciation abilities (for $Z > 1,96$ and $p < 0,05$), purchases predominantly promoted by the European financing projects for human resource development.

Items that targeted the perception of correspondence between the implication and engagement level of human resources in education from the continuous training programs with European financing, by allocating values for: 1. Knowledge, 2. Abilities, 3. Attitudes, 4. Other components of the individual potential.

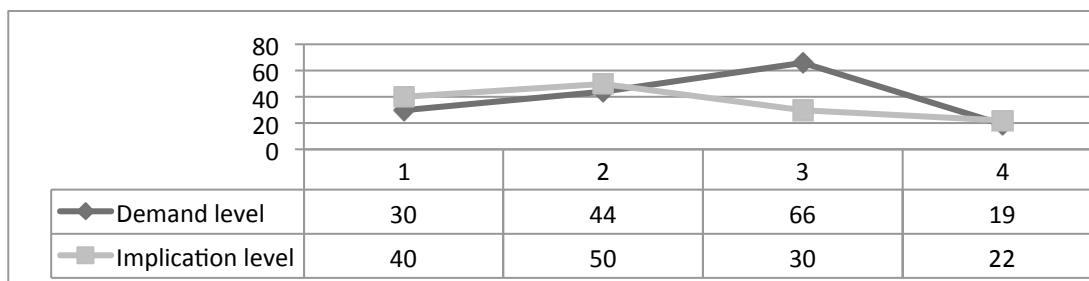


Figure 2. The correlation degree between the engagement level and the implication level of participants in POSDRU projects, from the perspective of the teaching personnel

The statistical calculation showed that the differences are significant only related to the attitude required for project development that is perceived at a very high level compared to the real and manifested attitude, perceived by the participants to the training programs (for $z > 1,96$ and $p < 0,05$).

Items that targeted the project impact by perception over the advantages and disadvantages of these types of activities in the field of training human resources in education have requested open synthesized answers in two categories:

Advantages: Innovation, information; Changes in attitude; Optimising the organisational climat; Continous training; Flexible thinking; Continuous learning; Exchange of experience; Adjustment to change/new environment; European funding for continuous training;

Disadvantages: Impact on the teaching personnel's free time; Theme overlap; Bureaucratic engagements; Scarce information; Formality and diminished usefulness; Project involvement is not sufficiently recognised and appreciated officially.

Requesting open answers has allowed targeting strong but also weak points identified in the development of continuous training programs, in the perception of the questioned teaching personnel. Whereas the entire number of questioned subjects is concerned, we can state that multiple aspects that fall under motivation/demotivation or satisfaction/dissatisfaction, as well as synthetic descriptions of issues and of generating causes (lack of cooperation and communication, subjective professional assessment, defective management, etc.) or project development optimization solutions (permanent feedback, professional management, objective evaluation, scholarships and other stimulation methods, etc).

Using the checklist type inquiry sheet has allowed the registration of observances data that reflect the educational environment and the performance mode of school institutions. Verification markers, related to the type of school, the environment, material resources, human resources, outside environment, inside environment, communication and networking amongst the teaching personnel, students and the community, were established in the inquiry sheet. In order to enable registering data, the sheet was prepared by the organizing of markers into categories and scoring them with three representation degrees: 0 for absence, 1 for presence, but deficient, idle and 2 for active presence or a functioning in good conditions. Each school has done multiple activities with the POSDRU project teams from these institutions, which has enabled gathering of data to compare the start situation with the final situation, specifically at the beginning of POSDRU project development – noted with T1 and at the end of the projects – noted with T2. The organizational scores registered during the two stages are represented in the below table for the two groups of education institutions (with or without POSDRU projects):

Table 1. Average organizational scores registered for the two groups of educational institutions

Education institutions from the research test sample	Global score registered in T1	Global score registered in T2
Education institutions that develop POSDRU projects for human resources	1,22	1,65
Education institutions that do not develop POSDRU projects	1,19	1,28

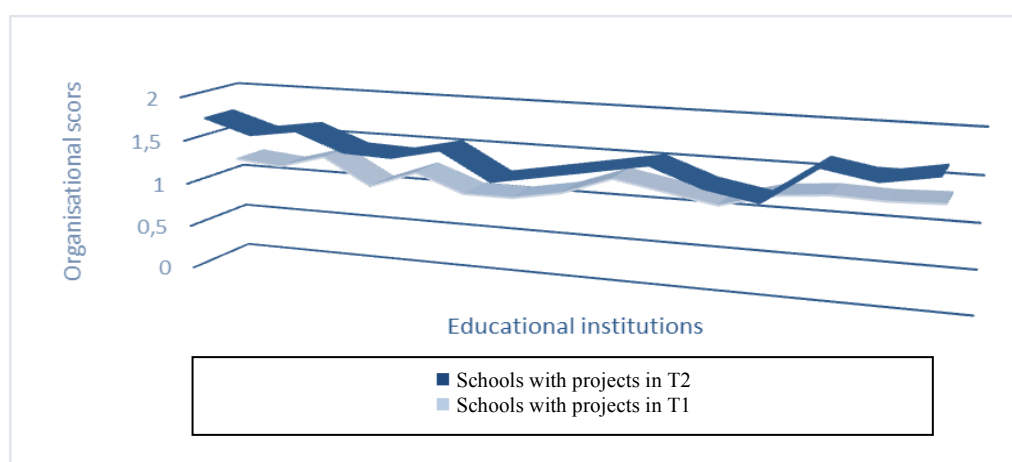


Figure 3. Medium score registered in schools that develop POSDRU projects in T1 and T2

Graphic representations and the statistic calculation show significant differences at the beginning of the projects, that is T1 and the growth registered in T2 by the schools that develop POSDRU projects

($T_1 = 1,22$ and $T_2 = 1,65$), the comparison being eloquent and through the reporting to the schools that are not involved in POSDRU projects (for $z > 1,96$ and $p < 0,05$). Global scores registered in the schools that have been included in our research show significant differences between the two compared moments and the two school groups, that had almost the same start data (1,22 and 1,19), but have registered significantly different growth (1,65 and 1,28). For the entire period of the project, school and management documents, curriculums have been analyzed, as well as products of education activities, which has served as a review marker of the veracity of data collected through systematic observance.

4. Discussions and conclusions

Through the POSDRU was generated increased investment in human capital through better education and training, improved adaptability of workers and enterprises, employees have had qualifications training/professional retraining, a great number of people have been integrated into programs for the management and organization of work, while others have been included in programs for the upgrading and improvement of competences, in order to cope with new challenges of the economic environment.

The Romanian education system has fallen into rank with the new European rules and policies, currently having a structure organised on levels, cycles, ages and program types compatible to the ones existing in the EU states. Related to the curriculum, methodology, educational climate or motivational system changes, for teachers and students, of decentralizing the teaching and management process, there are multiple paradigm shifts and concerning actions that would require a integrating vision related to the entire system. Whatever the type of European financing project for HR development in education that an educational organization wishes to carry out, this will require a specific management and a particular coordination capacity of educational changes. The ability to design, obtain European financing, implement, monitor and afterwards maintain one's own change, is still a challenge to the educational management of various institutions in the Romanian education system and the common mistake is the tendency to target issues that are not even in the indirect concern of the teaching process or the students(Alecu, 2007).

The accession of Romania to the European Union constitutes an opportunity and a meant enhance the quality of life of its citizens, along with all European citizens, generated the need for efficient use of its own resources and of Community funds, foreign and domestic investment were stimulated, as well as quick balanced and sustainable economic growth, the construction of strong and effective institutions, a coherent legal system and a fiscal system that is predictable and, last but not least, the physical infrastructure modernization, the adaptation of the educational system should be adapted to the requirements of the European Community, reviving the scientific research and innovation, with a focus on applicability in practice based on the partnership in the business, universities and research institutes.

Successful projects, that have good results in continuous training of HR in education, as well as optimising the entire education process, bring forth significant effects, such as: improving communication, networking and the organizational climate in favour of change and development. The inquiry related to the impact of the projects has also allowed the identification of weak point. From the collected and elaborated data, we can state that, amongst multiple possible barriers found in the EU management funding for the development of HR in education, probably one of the most difficult ones is

created by the fact that the institutions in Romanian education do not have a solid project culture, due to previous political orientation that imposed an excessive, long centralization when the teaching personnel did not have the initiatives, decide, analyse, involve themselves – all these being specific elements of a development project.

The study of EU management funds through the development of human resources in education is far more complex, its presentation needing an ampler space. These pages have synthesised the fundamental ideas so that they reflect the current educational context in the Romanian educational system, the interconnection between EU funding through projects and their impact on the development of human resources in education, from the standpoint of the teaching personnel. The theme remains open to other inquiries because, even though we supplied a lot of data, we cannot clarify the whole issue which is extremely complex and susceptible to an ever-changing dynamics.

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