

## EDUCATION: AN IMPORTANT FACTOR IN THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL COMMUNITIES

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### Abstract

*The role of education in society is essential. A society focused on progress is a society that puts great emphasis on the education of its members. Education is a complex process, not a simple one, which is at the confluence of several areas of interest. Nowadays, a trainer has a high responsibility both to himself/herself and to those he/she trains – as a responsible member of the community to which he/she himself/herself belongs. Education provides the individual with the opportunity to extend his/her capability beyond biological boundaries. We find, however, that, in the last period, people have changed many times, society is not as we want it, and neither is the quality of life, and we believe that **man** is responsible for all these problems – **human resource** or **human capital**. Today, human capital must cope with a society exposed to ongoing changes globally and, implicitly, nationally. It is known that the development of a company is directly proportional to the level and performance achieved through education. These are the reasons why the authors of this work have tested the evolution and trends in education and called into question the role that education has in particular in the sustainable development of rural communities through the case study presented*

**Key words:** education, society, human resources, growth, economics.

### INTRODUCTION

Education relates both to the acquisition of theoretical knowledge and to a certain ethical behaviour accepted by society.

The personality of an individual will always be influenced by his/her own value options and he/she will select, from the natural, social and educational environment, only those influences corresponding to his/her ideals.

Modern pedagogy adopts new, dynamic, flexible dimensions, trends and educational guidelines tailored to new individual and societal training needs. School can no longer be viewed separately from education and real-life experiences. (Roman, 2014)

On the other hand, a correct education should also include an ethical component. In everything we do, we must have a moral conduit beyond reproach. "To educate a person in mind but not in morals, means to educate a danger to society", Theodor Roosevelt said.

The training of teachers has a particular influence on the educational process because, without basic, scientific, methodological and pedagogical skills and, last but not least, psychological ones, the fulfilment of objectives tends to be ruined from the start. Curriculum, as well as teaching methods can easily destabilize the educational process. An overloaded school curriculum reinforced by rigid teaching methods removes individuals from the educational process and, thus, misses the very purpose for which it was created, turning into a negative factor leading to the increase of school dropout rate.

#### **MATERIAL AND METHOD**

The main methods of research used here, such as documenting and observation, provide factual information and facilitate a predominantly sociological knowledge of the topic addressed. The case study is the most appropriate method that allows a complete and in-depth investigation of the subject, but also the context in which it is carried out. The information basis underpinning the research undertaken comprises statistical data published by institutions, research and published works, as well as data gathered from the field.

#### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

As a result of studies and analyses carried out, we find that the quality of education depends on the quality of learning, the quality of culture, the quality of science, and the quality of social intelligence, which all determine the quality of a people. (Mateoc-Sirb, 2002)

We, therefore, find that educational institutions have a decisive role in modernising and developing society, and are promoters of national and international values. High or low standards of education are reflected in society. Educational institutions and, in particular, universities, need to be increasingly connected to the social environment, to maintain constant contact with the various organisations that are awaiting high-level vocational and moral training in the same time. Graduates must leave the university with solid professional knowledge and, at the same time, they need to develop and cultivate their personal skills, such as accountability, adaptability, initiative, spontaneity, and managerial spirit, and learn to respect the values of normal, rational, ethical behaviour in contrast to the success of immorality and the futility practiced by many young people today. Unfortunately, society often proposes to the young as successful models all sorts of characters devoid of morality, such as incapable and corrupt politicians, immoral businessmen, opportunists who have nothing to do with the field of activity, immoral teachers and police officers, etc. In

this situation, the education of children and young people is a delicate mission to which the school and family must participate with sustained efforts. Young people lacking a solid moral education become disoriented adults and their behaviour negatively influences the fate of the communities and, implicitly, the fate of the nation is derived.

Education can change both the mentality and character of the individual. Moral education means the formation of a good character. Good education can be done in various places (school, family, society, army, re-education institutions), in many ways (learning, coercion) and in every circumstance (at play, at school, at work, on a journey, etc.).

The teaching process is a process that must harmoniously balance all components; it should be particularly directed towards the performance of individuals, as factors contributing to the scientific, qualitative, moral and economic development of society.

If we look at the issue of pragmatic education, we find that the education of the young generation has a decisive role in stimulating economic development and, implicitly, economic growth. Education should, thus, be regarded as a long-term investment and not just as a cost in the national budget.

*“Education is the strongest weapon you can use to change the world,”* said Nelson Mandela. Thus, long-term education, i.e., investing in education, contributes to the economic development of a country, stimulates progress, and raises the standard of living of the population. (Man & Mateoc-Sîrb, 2007)

***Case study: Analysis of educational services in the Romanian rural area***

An analysis of education services in rural communities highlights reduced rural population access to education services reflecting the low level of labour qualification and being a limiting factor in the development of local economies. In the rural area, the diversification of economic activities is carried out with difficulty, because most of the time education programmes are not tailored to the specific labour market requirements of the current period. (Mateoc-Sîrb *et al.*, 2018).

School institutions in rural areas, i.e., kindergartens, primary and secondary schools are poorly endowed with teaching aids. With regard to ICT technology, there are few schools in rural communities that have adequate facilities, while the equipment required for vocational training for the various types of trades is physically and morally worn out. An important issue for schools in rural communities is the difficulty of retaining specialists, namely teachers in rural communities. (Otiman *et al.*, 2006)

The analysis of educational institutions in rural areas highlights that, in 2011, they were reduced to 3,200 educational establishments, i.e., 44.4% of all functional institutions at national level, from the 6,670 operating before

the closure of more than half of these institutions (*INS-TEMPO-time series*).

On the other hand, school dropout constitutes a major problem of Romanian education (Mateoc-Sîrb & Mănescu, 2012). Many students leave school early, with Romania registering one of the highest dropout rates in the EU. The school dropout rate increased in 2014 to 18.1% of the total number of pupils by 7%, above the EU average and the objective within the “*Europe 2020 Strategy*”, which foresees **reducing school dropout to less than 10% and increasing up to at least 40% the share of graduates with higher education or equivalent studies** among the population aged 30-34 years (*Country Report*, 2016).

The objectives of a strategy for modernising school infrastructure and vocational education and training were established in the year 2015. However, the implementation of the strategy depends on the capacity of the local public administration to access projects and to attract European structural and investment funds in this regard. In the period 2007-2015, 337 projects focused on the growth of quality of life in education and vocational and technical education. The total value of funded projects is 261.5 million euro (*MEN*). There are also proposals as in the disadvantaged areas, in 1,000 schools in rural areas, children benefit from the after-school program and a hot meal free of charge.

Data analysis reveals that, in 2013, only 5% of young people aged 14 to 24 from rural areas graduated from higher education, compared with 20% from the urban areas (*Breviar Statistic*, 2014). Unfortunately, the vast majority of young people in rural areas who graduate from college and acquire a higher qualification do not return to the village.

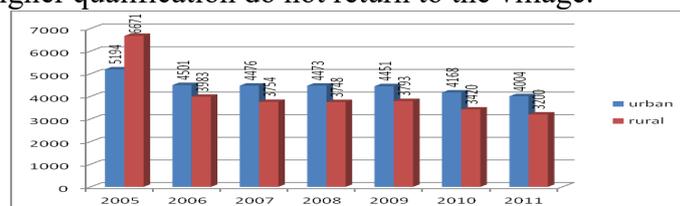


Fig. 1. Evolution of the number of educational units per environments

Statistics confirm that the biggest problems related to school infrastructure in rural areas is recorded by the drastic decrease in the number of kindergartens, which were numerically reduced from 1,692 in 2005 to just over 100 in 2011. (*Analiza socio-economica în perspectiva dezvoltării rurale 2014-2020*). The numerical decline of kindergartens in rural areas where the number of children remains relatively constant creates problems with regard to the education of these generations of children and highlights the importance of setting up new kindergartens, which would be the first step in providing the basis for children’s education.

We believe that *restructuring the education system by applying measures for the suppression of 3,470 schools and 1,790 kindergartens in rural localities constitutes the most serious error of the education system in Romania with serious consequences, with consequences, in the coming decades, on all areas of activity in Romania.*

The biggest education problems in Romania are recorded by Roma, who have the lowest level of education. Romania lacks official data on Roma participation in education because the Ministry of National Education does not collect or publish data by ethnic origin. Studies and reports in the past 10 years, however, highlight that there is a large gap between the educational outcomes of Roma children and of other children. Statistics certify that 83.6% of Roma have a very low level of education or are illiterate, and that only 15.9% have graduated from secondary schools, and 0.5% have graduated from higher education (*Agenția “Împreună”, 2012, Observatorul pentru romi: de la date la progres*). Roma pupils and pupils from poor families are vulnerable groups facing particular problems such as access to education or graduating, with the lowest school results. For children between 3 and 6 from poor families, the problems with access to education begin very early. (*Analiza socio-economică în perspectiva dezvoltării rurale 2014-2020*)

Limited access to education services prevents the development of the economy of rural communities, generates poverty, and determines poor conditions of living standards and a low level of quality of life for people experiencing such problems.

Each person has a different perception of the standard of living and quality of life, especially determined by the level of education. Some are satisfied with little; others need much more to be satisfied with their revenues and living conditions. (Mateoc-Sîrb *et al.*, 2016).

Research demonstrates that the higher level of education directly influences better employability, achieving greater incomes and, obviously, a better standard of living, namely a better quality of life. (Fig. 2)

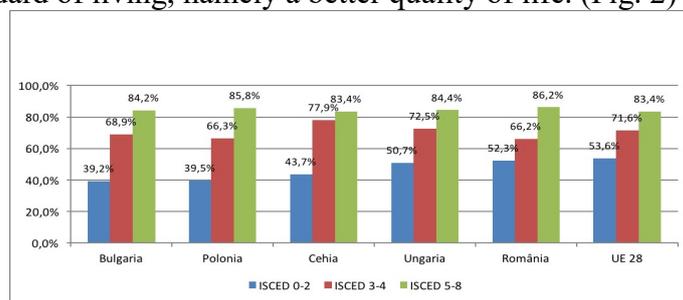


Fig. 2. Rate of population aged 20-64 years, depending on the level of education  
 ISCED 0-2 – Low level of education (before pre-school, pre-school, primary and secondary education);  
 ISCED 3-4 – Medium level of education (high school and post-secondary education);  
 ISCED 5-8 – High level of education (Bachelor's degree, Master's and PhD, or equivalent)

It is noted that the highest employment rate among people is graduates from higher education (86.2%), while 66.2% people with medium studies and only 52.3% people with low education levels. (Mateoc-Sîrb *et al.*, 2018).

## CONCLUSIONS

The way in which current teachers will adapt their learning and education strategy to the younger generation depends on the prosperity of future generations;

Actions are required to ensure high quality services in education, because the important role in rural development, and not only, lies with human resources;

Reduced rural population access to education services is reflected in the low level of employment qualification in rural areas, being a limiting factor in the development of local economies;

In the rural area, the diversification of economic activities is carried out with difficulty because of the education programmes that are not tailored to the specific labour market requirements of the current period;

The information obtained from research demonstrates that there is a direct correlation between education, level of studies of individuals, and the possibility of achieving sufficient income for him/her and the family in order to ensure a decent living;

Roma pupils and pupils from poor families are vulnerable groups facing particular problems such as access to education and graduating from school, with the lowest school results;

Early school dropout, respectively, rural school dropout, is almost always connected with poverty, with children being forced to drop out because of the financial and material deprivation of parents (very low incomes, unemployment, etc.).

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