

## Knowledge Based Society - Ideological Challenges and Changes in Educational Policies<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** *The global vision concerning the development of education and knowledge-based society is illustrated in strategic documents on European development in which there are stated the political intentions to create a prosperous Europe, to promote knowledge creativity and human capital by integrating all European policies, so that they contribute to the achievement of cultural, educational, economic, social and environmental objectives.*

**Keywords:** *knowledge-based society, educational policies, school organizations development, educational changes.*

The society continuously records social, political, ideological, cultural changes, which, reflected in the educational system, outlines the various behavioural patterns according to the values promoted at that time. Throughout time, it has been shown the impact which these patterns have on the formation of young people personality, the school being in this sense, the main source of behavioural models with a formative and educational value, a status recognized by the large share of formal education in human development. The new conditions require the orientation of specialized studies towards interdisciplinary approaches, which are capable of analyzing the changes driven by the knowledge-based society and to highlight ways of restructuring the educational system so as to promote behavioural patterns concordantly with social values and desiderata. In this context, the knowledge-based society and the issue concerning human resource development lies in the actuality of educational research, these points of interest being tackled as fundamental premises for the development of the society, with theoretical and practical implications on the process of reforming educational systems and thereby on the formation and efficient recovery of capital. In this context, the analysis of educational policies and strategies for human resource development through education, of professionalism patterns, standards and professional competencies, as well as the identification of the requirements, characteristics, best practices, procedural failures and changes induced by the development towards the knowledge-based society is a necessity to optimize this approach in terms of quality in education.

The characterization of the knowledge-based era necessarily involves the analysis of the intensive technological development, which generated a huge potential and broad accessibility. Possible limitations of technological development have their sources in the possibility of human factor knowledge, namely the capacity for assimilation, acceptance and development of these technologies for use in new fields, new products, services and activities. The understanding of the knowledge-based society is related to another scientific concept and reality - knowledge-based economy. The society represents the integrator framework in which the culture, economy, science and advancement of knowledge ends with the exquisite formation of human personalities. In this regard the European Union has assumed in the Lisbon declaration to develop within a decade the most competitive knowledge-based economy. This statement contains an action plan showing the main strands of the target mentioned in our analysis: education, research, information society.

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The three directions represent a unique chapter in “the action plan” developed by the Committee of the National Strategy for Economic Development of Romania, during April-May 2000.

In a knowledge-based society, similar to those contemporary societies in full development, the school as an institution of knowledge holds a fundamental position. The measure of progress of the Romanian society can be identified not only by economic and life quality indicators, but also by those with view to education school quality, namely indicators on how to organize knowledge and learning, the types of expected performance quality of education and methods for distributing education in society. The development of modern societies depends on human and intellectual capital at a rate that competes with other forms of capital - physical, economic, financial, etc. The school is the one that enshrines the level and quality of employed human capital development. Here is an organizational reality which acts as a two-dimensional social context: global - historical - characterized by a specific ideology that takes the form of traditions, norms and practices - and an immediate context represented by the concrete situations of institutional policy derived from the ideology and the culture specific to school organizations. The emphasis on the impact of socio-economic and cultural factors on educational field proves that the school, through its structure, rules, regulations, climate, institutional policies, etc., creates a “social learning framework”, framework that can be stimulating, favourable for the process of development or, on the contrary, can block the individual - organizational - social transformation process (Păun, 1999, p. 14).

The study of the current changes with which educational institution are facing allows the delimitation of the large context of *paradigm* change and global and concrete practices in which the educational system must work. The European policy in the field of knowledge development, education and research, states that the essential concept of “European Research Area (ERA = European Research Area), which involves enhancing and deepening cooperation within the European Union and beyond its limits. The importance of research was highlighted by a European Commission report, which shows a deficit of the European Union's import-export balance in high technology and is conditioned to make efforts to intensify the research. The ERA concept was implemented with the Sixth Framework Program (2002-2006) which provides an unprecedented degree of concentration of research efforts by providing funding on the following areas: financing large projects that are to solve key problems and ensure European competitiveness, network of research, partnerships between states. Romania has the chance to participate as a member country of the EU, which means that we can not ignore the benefits of knowledge, but on the contrary, we must focus on the latest global developments in general and in Europe in particular.

The relationship between education and society, as well as the impact of social changes on schools and educational policies has to take into account the specific ways of educational changes, the fact that these are not immediate and direct objectives of social requirements, but rather mediated and often distorted by the internal logic of the educational system. The social logic and the educational logic are not always convergent, because the internal educational logic is the result of its own history – points out P. Bourdieu (1970) - a result of successive systematization which generates a set of practices, attitudes and pedagogical mentalities that have a tendency of self-preservation and self reproduction, relatively independent of external pressures and changes, holding the role of ‘filter’ in the relationship with the school office. The restructuring of the Romanian educational field is felt both theoretically and practically through the requirement to adapt the new strategies for school development to basic principles of the knowledge-based society. Educational factors have to restructure their activities supporting the idea that

development and innovation through knowledge is the goal of any educational institution that wants to survive in the contemporary world, and the mechanism of institutional and individual development is represented by change.

The specificity of changes in the educational field is given on the one hand by the long history of the Romanian school, which generated a rich and powerful corporate culture and on the other hand the complexity of school organizations that may be part of the area provided with four major dimensions:

- The structural dimension: human resources, objectives and organizational culture;
- The instrumental-strategic dimension: the physical agent, material conditions, strategies and methods of action, means of intra and extra-organizational communication, management;
- The socio-emotional and motivational dimensions: interpersonal and inter-group relations, ways of motivating and promotion, organizational climate;
- The community integration dimension: local community, regional, national and international community.

Any attempt to educational development and evolution does not apply in an empty space but in a Romanian school organization that has centuries of experience and social culture behind. This is why the genuine school change assesses the correlation between components and development strategies, i.e, between the WHY, WHAT and HOW of change, in order to create an appropriate approach to change the contemporary society. This goal can be achieved by fulfilling specific conditions arising from the new type of knowledge-based society:

- Change, instability and resistance in all facets of society, not only in education, should be considered realities of contemporary life. Although inevitable, changes are not always positive, and this is why people and schools have to filter them off. Nevertheless resistance is considered irrational.
- Succeeds in the context of a school with a “rich” culture - to create a collaboration among teachers in order to promote educational development – practical models are needed, in which schools can build cultures based on collaboration and development.
- If a change should occur, the aims and activities of various individuals and institutions involved must be consistent and that’s the reason why partnerships are mostly recommended. A positive school policy can build productive connections between educational partners.
- Achieving sustainable school development projects, tailored to individual schools and involving all members of the organization. Weak projects in education have increased reluctance to change! The greatest resistance is found in schools where people need to implement educational change but who have been excluded from taking most of the ultimate decisions. Such practices have led schools to become conservative institutions which over time have resisted change and sought to maintain continuity with their past experiences.
- Reality has shown that these attempts for school development, through lack of school members’ involvement have failed in the past and will fail in the future, because teachers have not taken part in the changes and do not find personal weight in the cause- hence the need to involve teachers in designing and implementing educational changes.

At times, genuine change occurs very slowly, due to the complexity of the educational and school organization field. A school can plan its own evolution over a

period of time if it takes into account official and school board initiatives, the mosaic of its unique context and students, parents, teachers and other community factors. One of the conditions of success and resilience over time is that people who blaze change must come from within the education system to strengthen the initiatives for change and thus achieve the institutionalization of change.

The knowledge-based society suggests a different approach to education. The mission of the education reformers is becoming increasingly difficult due to the reconfiguration of the aims of education under the new cultural, political, economic, ever-changing requirements, subjects to the specific requirements of the 21st century. The educational policy decisions become the global changing project's foundation of human resource formation through educational reforms initiated at European level, which gives them a character of universality. The exacerbated socio-economic crisis in the recent decades, determines as strategic solutions, a series of reforms with a focus on optimizing the relationship between social requirements and the quality of education, between personal and organizational development.

Research, development and innovation depend on social and political investment in key elements of a knowledge-based society and economy. The achievement of the global objectives for sustainable development is conditioned by the restructuring of the educational system and the adoption of educational policies and strategies for human resource training specific for "information societies where knowledge and creativity represent the most important capital and the success of any society consists in educating its members in order for them to lead and work in this continuously changing socio-economic environment.

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## Gender Differences Influences upon Educational Practices

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**Abstract:** *Literature has shown that parents and teachers tend to consciously or unconsciously reinforce children's gender-stereotyped behaviors. The family interactions are the primary source of gender role socialization, while the traditional classroom interactions offer gender-based behaviors, interests, cognition styles, and performance evaluations. Thus, parents and teachers must be informed about the issues of gender differences in educational practices and they must recognize the necessity of them valorization or compensation.*

**Key-words:** *gender, behavior, education*

Even since he is born the child comes into contact with the norms and the socio-cultural beliefs which establish the adequate and the inadequate behaviors of its gender and thus implicitly the social contexts are created for him in order to be grown and educated. The gender category will establish the relationship between the child and his environment (irrespective of the social agents which take part in the development of the child along his life), the way of responding and behaving in different social situations, the opportunities he gets into contact with, the activities he can undertake and, sometimes, even the expectations he can have in as far as the success in an activity is concerned.

In time, the social environment will hallmark the child, the friends, the school and the mass-media influencing the training and above all the development of the self, of the gender's beliefs and behaviors, reinforcing the attitudes and the congruent actions with the gender stereotypes promoted at socio-cultural level and enforcing the incongruent ones.

Leaper & Friedman (2007) affirm that, most of times, the contemporary theories which try to explain the way the gender develops, from a psychological point of view are rather complementary than contradictory, because most of them admit, explicitly or implicitly, the combined influence, bigger or less, of the socio-structural, interpersonal, cognitive-motivational and biological factors. However, theories differ in point of the degree of role stressing and importance of each process in transmitting and developing the gender. (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). The socio-cultural factors include the division of labor and the prevalence of the patriarchy in the wide society.

The interpersonal factors affect and motivate the types of opportunities, the way they render the world they live in and the child's reactions to them. The child becomes aware of the group he belongs to, described by a certain characteristics, that of the gender, this turning into the basis of the social identity.

The cognitive-motivational factors organize the child's behavior and the way he renders the world he grows in. In that way, the child uses certain gender schemas, which are configured by means of the child's socio-cultural experiences. For example, Sokal, Seifert and Piotrowski (2001) proved the fact that boys have a capacity of resuming the gender broader than girls', due partly to the fact that from a socio-cultural point of view the non-gender-typed behaviors are more severe enforced in the case of the boys.

The biological factors refer to the physiological differences between sexes which are (or are not) relevant for the development of certain roles or activities.

The gender differences influence the educational practices irrespective of the field, the level of application or the implementing social agents.

Normally, the parents are the first social agents who influence the children's behaviors and playing preferences. Various researches highlighted the parents' in forming and developing the stereotype behaviors of children from the very first year of life. By

choosing the toys (Leonard & Clements, 2002), the clothes' color or even the games and activities adequate to the gender, parents do not do anything else but to encourage and to strengthen some behaviors considered specific to a gender or another. They act as patterns which can influence the children's developing ideas and values, sometimes expressing indirectly their attitudes, encouraging the behaviors and the gender-typed activities and enforcing the non-gender-types ones, incongruent with the norms and the values imposed at the society (or family) level.

Gelman, Taylor și Nguyen (2004) marked out the fact that by using some statement as „girls play with dolls” or „boys play with trucks”, children's gender stereotypes can be transmitted and reinforced in such a way that they could learn and develop gender behaviors approved at social level.

Also, ever since the pre-school period, differentiated activities can be noticed based on children's gender, rewards granted differenced, role plays and sometimes even forming the groups for activities are based upon the gender differences (Hayden-McPeak et al., 1993).

Teachers can influence the development of the attitudes and of gender values by emphasizing or diminishing the gender relevance in the activities performed.

A very important aspect is that of the gender differences evinced at the expectations, the motivation and the academic success levels. Studies and researches have pointed to the fact that parents' gender-typed attitudes can influence children's choices, success and academic expectations (Sokal, L.; Seifert, K. & Piotrowski, C. 2001). Parental educational practices mark out different study fields for boys and girls.

Thus, mathematics and sciences are academic fields „reserved” to the boys, the girls showing their capacities in fields such as literature or social sciences. Many times parents manifest their own gender stereotypes in different expectations they have in as far as the academic success of their children is concerned: if they have low expectations from the part of the girls then their trust in their mathematical abilities and capacities will decrease, which determines a decrease of the motivation and a sub-evaluation of the importance of the mathematics for their children's academic future.

Bussey și Bandura (1999) highlighted the relationship between the perceived level of the competence and the expectations referring to the success and motivations and of the performance. Boys show a higher interest in exact sciences and the girls in the social ones, the success and mostly the expectations referring to the success in one field or another being in fact the result of the gender stereotypes influences formed and developed during the years previous to the school period.

The educational practices are different not only in point of the science field, manifestations of the gender stereotypes are also noticed in the field of the sports. From a cultural point of view, the sport and the activities requiring physical effort have always been associated to the masculinity.

The parental education encourages the physical activities and the involvement in the field of the sports. However, many times these behaviors are reinforced positively only in the case of the boys, whereas the girls are directed towards activities/ sports which suppose less physical effort. Many parents consider that their sons are more competent in sports than their daughters. Thus, many times these beliefs can become self-fulfilling prophecies, by means of self-efficacy decreasing in own sport abilities and in girls' motivation of involving in sports activities.

The Romanian educational system promotes mostly the academic success and encourages less the sports success. For all that, sports activities, even if they are in minority, enforce, to a greater extent the gender-typed behaviors.

Nowadays, as a result of numberless studies and researches, a change in educational practices and their direction towards the equality of gender is tried to be modified. Although a resistance concerning this change is noticed both from the parents' and the teachers' sides, it is obvious that it needs equal chances and a decrease of the gender differences in point of organizing and developing the educational activities, irrespective of their level of organization.

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