

EDUCATION OF PARENTS: AN INTERCULTURAL PROJECT OF THEMATIC APPROACH

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Abstract: *Governance of education is a key issue for the necessary reforms of quality education and training targeted in the Strategic Framework 2020. In our work, we are drawing key points from the formalized data of European pilot project report Construction d'indicateurs de la participation des parents dans l'enseignement obligatoire (IPPE) that took part and Romania, alongside England, Belgium, Switzerland, Italy, Spain, Portugal on the evolution of parental education in terms of right to education. In other side, we used the formalized data and testimonial analysis of the official framework of international debates as follow -up of project. The project on parents education as an intercultural project based on thematic approach highlighted several different levels due on the application of indicators on the information right, right of appeal, right to choice and right to participate in the involved countries. Our conclusions aim at a major thematic European intercultural project, with similarities and differences among these common topics: quality of information, community participation of parents and equality by ensuring equal conditions, including rights of minorities, funding by the state of public and private compulsory education, simplification of administrative rules and procedures of the schools, usefulness of an European thematic campaign, investing in training of parents.*

Keywords: *governance of education, parents education, rights of education, intercultural thematic project, formalisation, testimonial analysis.*

1. The conceptual framework

Governance of education systems is a key issue in determining necessary reforms to make education and quality training concerned in the European document *Education and Training 2020*. Since May 2000, *the European Report on quality of school education* underlines the parental involvement as one of the quality indicators in this area.

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During 2009 - 2011, Romania, together with England, Belgium, Switzerland, Italy, Spain and Portugal, attended the European pilot project **IPPE** - *Building indicators of participation of parents in compulsory education* (*Construction d'indicateurs de la participation des parents dans l'enseignement obligatoire*) whose goal was to develop a set of indicators of participation of parents in compulsory school for measuring their efficiency, which can thus contribute to improving governance in education and training. Project report on indicators of parental involvement in compulsory education was the European Commission and representatives working in the field belonging to the participating countries - governmental and nongovernmental parties.

Indicators of this project aims at **the individual rights (the right to information, right to choose and right of appeal) and the collective rights of parents (the right to participate).**

Individual rights

Right to Information

1. What information is made available to parents and whether this information is necessarily available?

- ♣ criteria for admission
- ♣ organisation of the school

(For example, curriculum and students assessment procedures, participating organizations, information on appeal, scholarships or financial help)

- ♣ project school (if any)
- ♣ organisation of the school

(For example: school after school, balanced work program, cafeteria, changing the route of education through mentoring)

- ♣ assessment of the institution

(For example, PISA results, the final studies - baccalaureate, maturity assessments, internal assessments)

2. Information is adapted to the parents of school?

(Information translated into several languages, mechanisms for informing families at risk)

Right to choose

1. Is there a diverse landscape of school projects?

2. Are there financial measures to enable parents to choose schools other than public? (Article 13 PIDESC, Al 3 and 4.)

Right of appeal

1. Are there mechanisms for exercising the right of appeal and on which topics?

- ♣ admission
- ♣ discipline
- ♣ assessment (repetition, orientation)
- ♣ the right to participate
- ♣ decisions of participation bodies

2. Appeal mechanisms are effective?

3. Under current rules:

- ♣ is there a time when the nearest body (head, board) have to respect?
- ♣ must answers be motivated?

Collective rights

Participation rights

1. Are there bodies of participation (administrative council, school board, etc.) of parents and which are their skills at different levels?

School

- ♣ full autonomy without external intervention (decision)
- ♣ limited autonomy
- ♣ the governing body decides on a list submitted by the authorities
- ♣ body takes decisions, but they must be approved by the authority
- ♣ without autonomy, the organs are available, but the authority decisions

Regional

- ♣ full autonomy without external intervention (decision)
- ♣ limited autonomy
- ♣ the governing body decides on a list submitted by the authorities
- ♣ body takes decisions, but they must be approved by the authority
- ♣ without autonomy, the organs are available, but the authority decisions

National / central

- ♣ full autonomy without external intervention (decision)
- ♣ limited autonomy
- ♣ the governing body decides on a list submitted by the authorities
- ♣ body takes decisions, but they must be approved by the authority
- ♣ without autonomy, the organs are available, but the authority

decisions

2. The bodies of participation, which is the type of representation provided for parents (majority, parity, minority)

- ♣ school
- ♣ regional
- ♣ national / central

3. What is the percentage of parents participating in the election of participation in the representative bodies?

4. Does the state regularly gather opinions from parents?

2. Formalisation of research data

The results developed on indicators for each studied country were performed on a series of comparisons that allowed some conclusions and recommendations. Overall, we can say that **individual and collective rights to promote parental involvement in compulsory education are respected**, even if we can highlight differences between the analyzed countries. The measure of effectiveness was provided by a global number indicator by the sum of four indicators relating to rights which have been investigated in the project: **right to information, right to choose and right of appeal - individual rights, the right to participate - as a collective**. United Kingdom (England and Wales) and Portugal are countries where rights are considered effective in global society while. The analysis of the situation in Italy, Spain, Romania and Switzerland (analysis of cantons) has values below the project, 70.5/100, but more than half of scoring. Romania scores a constructive 62.5/100.

Research has shown the need to develop devices that reflect expectations and opinions of parents, for example, through a *Euro-barometer* to allow establish more accurate indicators. Vision that should leave the European efforts is essential based on needs, **the needs of education and social cohesion**.

We also found that, often, knowledge of European and international standards in education and major projects in Europe is low, especially, in terms of the strategic framework of education and training 2020. Rights-based approach allows people to defend their right to education which, unfortunately, there is not in *the Strategic framework 2020*. Rights-based approach involves the placing the rights holder - child - the heart of education.

Case law has also shown the importance of diversity and ideological pluralism. In this respect, it is regrettable that no country that is part of the

IPPE has not ratified *the International Convention for the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and their families*, recognizing the right to education for migrant children. Instead, it is remarkable that it recognized the importance of political dialogue, and participation of stakeholders, social partners and civil society is a priority, as it contributes to policy dialogue and implementation of society policies.

The indicators developed by the project IPPE allows to assess the quality education systems in terms of stakeholder participation, and including parents. The research team has developed indicators of parental involvement in compulsory education using their rights based approach. The project includes studies of 15 European Union countries. Study results are found in detail in the book: *L'implication parentale au sein de l'école. Une approche innovante pour une éducation de qualité*, L'Harmattan, Paris, 2011.

3. The training framework

In the IPPE project, **training modules based on parental participation** through associations have been developed. These indicators will be used for public policy of monitoring, providing to different stakeholders in education and public opinion, generally. Finally, the IPPE project provided for the creation of an *Observatory to involve parents*, which will periodically evaluate public policy in this area and aims to help as such governments to control the education system in its whole operation www.parentsparticipation.eu

Compositionally, *the Observatory* has IPPE consortium objectives, indicators to be developed for the countries studied and the results obtained. There are highlighted the lack of a device to reflect the expectations of parents and rights-based approach, the need to develop new forms of parental involvement, predicting idea of higher investment in their training and, ultimately, adapt labour laws to the participation right.

Efficiency of right to participation and effective participation of parents in the compulsory education were investigated on several items. By this measure, we can determine at what level the participation of parents is: school, local/regional; national/or canton - in the case of Switzerland), on the one hand; on the other hand, to what participation is evaluated and accepted in the power decisions more or less simple or impact in consultation, but final decision is leaving to the authority.

At school level, compared to other levels (local/regional/national and/canton), participation at this level is the most effective and

autonomous. None of the countries covered by research does enjoy full autonomy participation bodies at the local regional level. Only in Portugal, England, Wales and Spain, bodies of participation at this level are able to make decisions, but in a context of limited autonomy, while in Romania and in Bern bodies are found only if the authority decides. In Italy, Belgium and the cantons of Geneva, Vaud, Zurich and Tessin there is no participation bodies at this level. At the national or cantonal level, in Belgium and Romania, participation bodies of parents have limited autonomy, while in Portugal and Spain are consulted when the authority decides that is necessary. In all other countries, there is the involvement of parents at the national level. In almost all countries, parents' participation in the representative bodies at all levels is minimal. The research also focused on the degree of interest that the state is taking the parents views - almost all countries in this pilot project are taking into account the opinions of parents. For the last indicator of achievement of a training device, we believe that **governments should become more involved in the training of parents**. The results showed that, in almost all countries, except Portugal - paradoxically, there are the parents training devices.

The need to diagnose problems and identify best practices of participation is within the timeframe, but currently it cannot be done because:

- lack of appropriate tools;
- complexity of standards and administrative procedures affecting school is a significant barrier to participation - it is urgent, in this regard, to simplify rules and procedures;
- Therefore, some emergency measures are necessary:
- to bring technical vocabulary in everyday language education;
- to invest more in training parents to promote their participation in school life, and also in the management and organisation of the school.

Training should include several dimensions:

- rights and duties of parents;
- emphasizing the importance of education in national and international context;
- trends and general orientation of education;
- education system with all its components;
- composition and competencies of existing bodies of parents participation in the country.

- training together teachers and parents.

According to parents' associations and practice of researchers of the project, a priority is to adapt labour laws to the right participation of parents for compulsory school, so that parents who engage in participatory bodies are not penalized in their career or financially. It is necessary to apply also to institutions and associations of parents, to develop indicators of participation to ensure a minimum standard of training.

In Europe, the results showed, firstly, the usefulness of a European public campaign to sensitise parents to participate as part of existing mechanisms to promote active citizenship in this area, **a rights based approach and a new culture of participation**, in which the above formalised ideas to be included the European pilot project *Indicators construction of participation of parents in compulsory education*.

The device created by project - *Observatory* / training modules - provides various activities, including a questionnaire based on IPPE indicators that can be completed *online*.

4. An intercultural project with thematic approaches

At data formalisation, we add also a testimonial analysis based on two axiological assumptions: complementary adaptive logic arises from mixing paradox - opening itself to otherness involves even overlapping otherness; natural differentiation of human practices as cultural marks, that they are not attributes of objective nature, are actions and properties of human thought. State administration is no exception to the rule of the cultural: unification of objective space and human lens under its cultural power does not mean a single management - human values are controlled by administrative management. In the era of globalisation, state mission ranks geographically the central and local practices, and transparency of space management is a major stake for asserting its powers. To get control over the legislative and executive interaction and social dynamics, in our case, education of parents in the schools and for society is needed of transparency of its policies and authorized maps of the area to manage - public education and private education. But given the human element, space perspective brings to the point of global perception of communities and individuals, but also to the point of perception of free transfer in space. The concept of perspective has a dual function: it recovers anthropological and pragmatically- morphological nature and of human entry into the modern space, but it associates its newly acquired human

nature to the ubiquity (with its effects of space depersonalization and experiential objectification), ranking it on a map of his interests.

The success of a project, such as the European project IPPE, may be transferred spatially according to interests concerning the quality of education systems and subsystems, as shown in our testimonial analysis¹. At the *Final Conference in Madrid* attended by representatives of public powers, who have expressed their views on the common sensitive issues and parent education indicators implementation in different societies:

Parents have rights and obligations - the school should act in synergy with parents (M. Gallo, president of the region La Rioja, Spain);

The universal nature of parental involvement should be beyond debate on public-private character of the school (M. Necco, responsible for international projects Higher Institute for Research and Training Statistics, Lombardy, Italy);

It is necessary to strengthen the educational freedom, the spirit of teacher management; increased participation of civil society could fill some inequalities between different communities (Gutiérrez Cortina, secretary of the Education Chamber of Deputies, Mexico);

Actually, the following are obvious: the need to create an obligation for all states to inform and advise parents; the role of the Council of Europe aimed at strengthening democratic institutions, political pluralism to promote human rights and the rule of law, and also support the development of democratic culture the Member States. Project results will inspire, perhaps, a pan-European action in the parents' participation in democratic governance of education. Indicators developed in the project have portability and adaptability data. And this project demonstrates the state's obligation to inform and make decisions about the quality of public institutions and curricula; on the other hand, the right of parents to enrol their children in private education system at all levels (M. Qiriazzi, secretary of the Board of Education, Council of Europe).

To all these considerations, we add a brief testimonial analysis of ideas taken at the round table in the final of *the Madrid Conference* on the provision of quality education by creating a type of learning and respect for cultural diversity, ensuring participation of all stakeholders in civil society:

The responsibility of states is important for the education of children

¹ *Gouvernance et participation des parents. Un défi pour une éducation de qualité, Rapport de la conférence finale du projet IPPE, Madrid décembre 2011, Working Paper 16, OIDEL, Geneve.*

and also the need to provide public funds to private schools. For example, in U.S. *schools under contract* (funded by the public power) is organized every year and get the best results. Private schools are of two types: the first is independent and reserved to the rich families, as they are expensive; other ones are religious, catholic mostly. Currently, the new law favours contracts with independent public schools which may therefore benefit from public funds. They are based, most often, on teachers who have an alternative vision of education and pursue a well-defined plan for five years. These schools are attended by children from poor, ethnic minorities, which fail to properly follow the courses offered by public schools; on the other hand, attended by children from the middle class, whose parents do not want to send their children to the neighbourhood school. The results are really good and allow reducing social injustice for the parents who cannot pay for a private school. Request of parents is important and every year the number of *schools under contract* increases, although this innovation policy ignores the schools with a religious character (M. Glenn, professor at Boston University).

Evaluation of schools improves the quality of schools. Extending the right to choose a school and competition leads to better school results. In Italy, the choice is not considered as fundamental and private schools suffer because of that. Public perceptions are oriented such as: public schools are state monopolies, and private schools are schools for rich people, thus reproducing social stratification. However, parts of Italy are moving towards this level by school bonus offer - 72% of receivers come from poor families. In addition, parents are required to bring the child to the school district, but those living in the neighbourhood have priority. Italian government gives people the right to organize schools, but they receive no subsidy. Participation of parents in Italy is limited, since they are only consulted and cannot make decisions (Mrs Ribolzi, member of the Italian Agency for the Evaluation of Universities).

Parents are primarily responsible for their children's education and their potential involvement in schools is important. The innovative role of IPPE project as a learning science basically consists in the preconditions of participation of parents in school. This projects quality improvement in the schools as training whose need parents in partnership with teachers (M. Theiner, president of the European Students' Parents Association).

A common note to all participants' interventions is that parents' participation in compulsory education is of paramount importance and that the tools developed by the IPPE pilot project could contribute

significantly to improving the monitoring of educational policies and governance in education. In this context, we have in view also the UNESCO considerations which rank participation of parents in inclusive education centres - community participation and equality are real indicators of quality of education. As such, we can talk about an emerging intercultural project with a common thematic based approach.

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