

COMPULSORY LEARNING ROMANIA IN EUROPEAN CONTEXT

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Although in many respects, the EU imposes a unitary global policy (European Aquis) in compulsory education it gives freedom to the member countries in implementing their policies in national testing of pupils in monitoring schools and education systems.

Currently national tests play a very important role in the development of educational policies, their results are analyzed in order to establish measures to reduce disparities between the levels of knowledge or improving vocational training of teachers.

The results of these tests are used for many purposes including monitoring of standards, student progress from year to year, providing feedback to students and parents, guidance of teachers' work. However, normally there should be a direct and proportional connection between the results of the assessment and the budget given to each educational institution, the funding being the evaluation result. It should work as a stimulant in obtaining superior results. This link, although it seems to be implied, was difficult to be proved as long as the test results are not made public, nor is it confirmed by the implemented educational policies.

Following comparisons made over time between Canada, the U.S. and EU countries it was found that the results of national tests in Europe are not used as a tool for empowerment, involving sanctions or rewards and subsequently to influence the allocation of resources.

Keywords: *education system, national tests, student assessment, compulsory education, evaluating schools.*

Codes JEL: *H52, I24, I28*

1. Introduction

National testing of pupils became very important as a means of measuring and monitoring the quality of teaching, as well as for the structure of European educational systems.

National testing of pupils, is defined as "the national administration of standardized tests and examinations established at the centre" being one of the tools used to measure and monitor the performance of individual students, schools and not least of the national education system. National tests "evolve according to the national policy agenda, with structural contexts and often in conjunction with other forms of assessment" (National Testing of Pupils in Europe: Objectives, Organization and Use of Results, 2009).

Summative tests or " learning assessment " is usually performed at the end of each quarter, school year or education level and it is used by teachers to report the acquisitions to parents and pupils themselves or to take decisions that may affect their school career (Harlen , W. , Assessment of Learning , 2007.) The results of these tests are used for many purposes including monitoring of standards , student progress from year to year, providing feedback to students and parents , teachers' activity guidance and last but not least granting certificates of graduation. (National Testing of Pupils in Europe: Objectives , Organization and Use of Results , 2009) . Currently national tests play a very important role in the development of educational policies, their results are analyzed in order to establish measures to reduce disparities between the levels of knowledge or improving vocational life long training of teachers.

In other words, national tests were introduced so that they function as a "mirror" for schools and teachers in order to improve performance at their own initiative. (Thélot C., Évaluer l'École, Études 2002). Often, they are limited to two basic subjects, which are the language in which the teaching is performed and mathematics supplemented in some

countries with science and / or a foreign language. (National Testing of Pupils in Europe: Objectives, Organization and Use of Results, 2009)

In Sweden the national tests were introduced in 1962 being used for comparing classes results with a national standard, in Ireland ten years later the "read English", and in France in 1977 after the educational reform. In Romania, the national examinations were initiated in 1995 to test students in primary education.

One of the notable achievements made by OECD in education is the PISA project implementation (Program for International Student Assessment) in order to monitor educational skills, making them comparable both between participating countries and over time. (PISA in Romania: how public institutions (do not) use the scientific expertise, 2010). The results of international research on the development and maintenance of education at the highest level were influenced by other programs such as PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study) and TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study), which intensified the debate on education systems in Europe.

2 . Research Methodology

In order to achieve the main objective there were used the following **research methods**: analysis and synthesis, induction, used in the selection of experts' opinions in the field on issues studied and inference, by cross method, following the evolution of the measures adopted over time.

To achieve the objectives we used a series of bibliographical sources consisting of books, studies and articles published in various national and international bodies in the field.

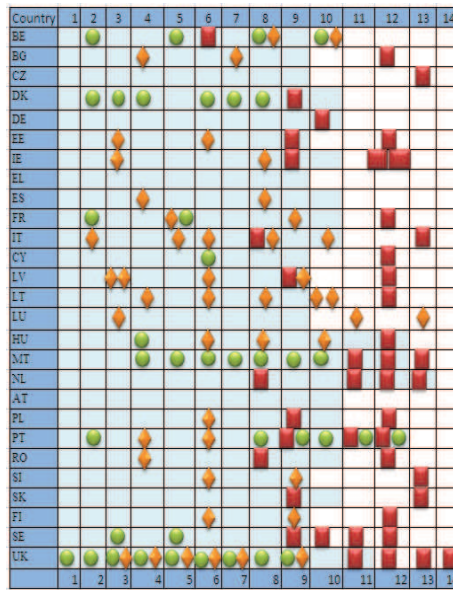
In this regard, we collected data from Institution of Education Sciences (IES), Ministry of Education and Research (MER), Eurostat, Education Audiovisual & Culture Executive Agency (EACEA), Eurydice, in order to make a comparative analysis of the focus group type in terms of the principles of EU education system 2010/2011. To achieve the goal, we tried to juxtapose the national evaluation results and funding of public and private educational institutions, trying to make out how they interact.

3. Results of research

3.1. National Testing

Although in many respects, the EU imposes a unitary global (European Aquis) in compulsory education member countries are being given freedom in implementing their policies in national testing of pupils in monitoring schools and education systems. Table 1 presents the countries national test types and classes who receive them in the 2010-2011 school year.

Table 1 : Types of national tests and classes who received them, 2010/2011



Legend:

- Identifying the needs of individual learning
- A decision to be made as to the school of students
- ◆ Monitoring schools and/or of the system of education
- Background: compulsory education

Made by the authors: source Education , Audiovisual & Culture Executive Agency (Eurydice).

Both compulsory education and the frequency with which students take national tests vary greatly in the Europe Union. In countries such as Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Greece, Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania compulsory education is nine classes, while in the Netherlands compulsory education is thirteen classes. Completion of compulsory education in some countries is done entirely while in other countries is done in two successive levels (primary and secondary). In Bulgaria education has a unique structure; students are required to have a certificate of graduation from primary school (four years / national test) in order to enroll in the fifth grade. This certificate is obtained in Greece, Belgium, Cyprus, Lithuania, Poland-based on activities during the year.

In France, Italy, Malta, Ireland, Portugal, Spain and Romania fourth graders are required to pass the class to get through the fifth grade. In Austria, Germany, Luxembourg, the transition to lower secondary education is realized by decision of the class or the school board.

National testing (standardized tests and examinations set centrally) of students is an evaluation method widely used in the European Union. National tests are used both to assess students and to monitor schools and school systems. In the European Union there are three types of national tests, but in most countries at least one national test reflects the students' standards and represents an important point in making decisions about their schooling.

First national test conducted at EU level is the most important, largely reflecting the achievements of pupils at the end of an educational phase. It is mandatory for all students; only the exam period differs at the end of sixth grade in Belgium, eight in Italy, the

Netherlands and Romania, or more often at the end of secondary education. The second national test aims to assess and monitor the schools, the evaluation of the education system. It is usually mandatory, but in some Member States, it is optional or done on samples. With the help of the third type of national test one can identify specific learning needs of students, being conducted in 12 countries, in some being mandatory, and in others is optional.

The number of national tests taken in the Member states such as Norway, the United Kingdom, Malta and Denmark is very high. They are made almost every grade of compulsory education. In contrast, there are countries such as Cyprus, Belgium, Spain, and Slovakia with only two tests or Germany with a single national test. In Norway, Portugal, Lithuania, Latvia, France and Ireland educational system is more demanding and national tests are carried out by two of the same class. The only types of tests organized in Belgium, Spain, Luxembourg and Ireland are to monitor schools and / or the educational system.

In the United Kingdom, Slovakia, the Netherlands, Germany, Czech Republic all national tests aimed at providing the necessary information to make decisions about the student's school. National tests taken at the level of these countries are made in later stages of schooling (at the end of primary, lower secondary and upper secondary education).

Austria has implemented in the school year 2012/2013, 2 national tests: Bildungsstandards mandatory for all students in grades IV and VIII, and since the school year 2013/2014 new final tests entered the in secondary education. Also, since the school year 2013/2014 in Romania it has been introduced a new set of national tests mandatory for all students in Grades II, IV and VI.

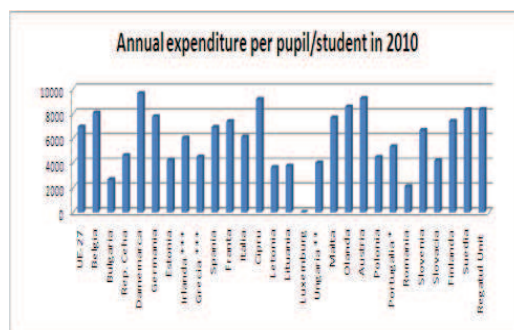
In Italy, Portugal, Slovakia and Cyprus are tested only 2 subjects second language of instruction and mathematics. In Germany, Slovenia, Austria, Iceland and Norway a foreign language is added. In Luxembourg we test the two official languages (German and French) and mathematics and in Italy sciences and English as a Foreign Language. In other countries in the European Union it is tested a larger number of subjects either by adding substantial numbers every year, or by rotation of disciplines at some tests. Denmark and Malta are the countries with the highest number of national tests to a large number of subjects.

In Malta in the primary education students take the exam in five disciplines such as the two official state languages, Maltese and English, mathematics, religion and social studies. In the five annual examinations held in secondary education students are tested in ten subjects: Maltese, English, mathematics, religion, social studies, science and a range of compulsory and optional subjects: art, science, languages and humanities.

3.2. Annual expenditure per pupil / student

Annual expenditure per pupil / student in public / private institutions, include staff costs, current expenses and capital expenditures, measure how much is spent per pupil / student by central, regional and local governments, households and other private entities. Public expenditure on education level differs from one country to another because they are influenced by the structural differences between education systems, including the duration of each level of education, total duration of compulsory education participation rates in post-compulsory education.

Indicator increased in the last decade in almost all European countries reaching in nominal terms, the value of 6900.1 / EUR PPS (purchasing power standard) in the EU-27 in 2010, compared to 5074.0 in 2001. However, due to the financial crisis of 2008, several states have been forced to reduce total annual unit cost per pupil / student (Estonia, Croatia, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania and Sweden). In most countries the share is stable or it registers an upward trend, especially in the Nordic countries (Figure 1).



*data available in 2009

** data available in 2006

***available in 2005

Made by the authors Source : Eurostat

Expenditure per pupil / student increases generally with the increasing of level of education, being in higher secondary education than in primary education, however, there are exceptions, in some countries (Italy, Latvia, Slovenia and Iceland) are noted minor differences between levels of education, higher education unit cost being comparable to that of primary education.

4. Conclusion

Normally there should be a direct and proportional connection between the results of the assessment and the budget given to educational institutions, funding being the result of evaluation. It should work as a stimulant in obtaining superior results. This link, although it seems to be implied, it proved difficult as long as the test results are not made public, and the implemented educational policies do not confirm it.

Following comparisons made over time between Canada, the U.S. and European Union countries it was found that the results of national tests in Europe are not used as a tool for empowerment to involve sanctions or rewards and subsequently to influence the allocation of resources, as it does in the American states.

In the European Union countries such as Belgium, Spain and Slovenia centralized public schools results in national tests due to official documents prohibiting this, so as not to perform comparative rankings between schools. In Poland, Sweden, the Netherlands, Malta, United Kingdom and Romania national tests are centralized at school level being subsequently considered by the authorities in the assessment or audit of schools, but obviously not for their financing.

In the United Kingdom, Hungary and Romania schools are required to include the collective results of national tests and publish the information on their website. Schools that have registered low results on standardized tests at ISCED level 1, in Portugal, are required to prepare a set of corrective measures with deadlines. They may also propose additional aid for children with poor results. In the Netherlands, schools have a high degree of autonomy in terms of student assessment, often using intermediate tests in order to evaluate the progress of students. One such test is the test for admission Entreetoets which gives an insight into the progress and outcomes of education in terms of language, arithmetic / mathematics and cognitive skills.

According to the classification made by "Person", Finland ranks first in the world in education among developed countries in all segments of the educational system starting from kindergarten up to university. In the National Assessment there are no criteria of hierarchy for children, no marks lists only appreciation (admitted rejected), there are no

bad schools or good schools. In the Finnish education system children receive the same quality regardless of school or social level.

Compulsory education is nine years for all children, including those with special needs or children of immigrants. Finland is registering a huge factor in terms of completion of compulsory education (99% of children), and 86% of young people complete their upper secondary education (two years of high school) until age 25, although they are not forced to do so. Finland is the only country where all teachers have master degree of three years, 100% subsidized by the state. This is one of the few European countries where they can make a direct correlation between national test results and financing of educational institutions.

In the education system in Romania there can be implemented and processed principles of the Finnish education system that led to a quality education and to being first in the world in the PISA tests (Reading, Science and Mathematics). Some of these principles, which can be implemented in our country too, regard primarily the financial stimulation and teacher training, vocational education through counseling services. Clearly, *the financial aspect is the most pressing and the delay in resolving it leads each day closer to a total failure.* (Gabriela Puskas, 2010)

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