THE STUDY REGARDING DIFFERENT APPROACHES OF THE QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEMS IN EDUCATION

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Abstract:
One of the key indicators of any society is represented by the assurance of some domestic policies with a high quality level. At the same time, an important role is given to the education system of each state; hence, at the level of each provider of education services, there is a continuous preoccupation in regards to improving the quality of the entire educational system. Therefore, some legislative and institutional basis were established, which were meant to carry up this process, such as to respond to the dynamics of the societies, even through the implementation of a management system of the quality assurance, starting with the need of respecting the principles of a quality culture, including the level of internal processes of the providing entities of education services. The paper points out the importance of the quality assurance system, at the school level, beginning with the theoretical dimensions.

Key words:
Quality in education, quality management, quality culture, changing factors, quality assurance system.

JEL Classification:
I29, I28, I20.

Section 1: Introduction

The paper sets out an analysis and a presentation of the theoretical dimensions of the quality and the quality assurance systems. It tends to carry out theoretical delimitations of the multi-dimensional concept of the quality and of the quality assurance system of the schools, together with its factors such as the essential features of the models of the quality assurance system at the national and international level. The paper has four sections: The Introduction, The Reference Elements, and The Perspectives of the Quality Assurance in the Schools and Its Factors, The Conclusions. The paper is aimed to draw the attention of the importance of implementing the management of quality assurance in schools.

The quality of the products or the services is given by their core properties, which highlights the level to which a need is satisfied. The quality can be analyzed from the perspective of: the utility degree, the demands' compliance, the set of specific properties according to International Standards - ISO 9001: 2008, the measure of the utility of the products and services with the same destination. Regardless of the social-economic fields, when analyzing, it is taken into account those characteristics which award the quality to any product or service and allow the differentiation among the similar categories with the same destination.

Given these circumstances, the education is a key sector, which gives the possibility to co-exist a broad set of approaches in regards to the quality assurance system of the education and the education process. Numerous
researches show that the significant role in the management of quality is entitled to the providing institutions. These researches start with different versions of defining the quality and end up showing the same impact of the institutional framework on the quality of all processes. The author William Edwards Demming states “the consumer is the most important link of the production line. The quality needs to be focused on satisfying the consumer’s needs – in the present and in the future.” (Demming E., 1998, p.15)

Section 2: The Reference elements
A wide set of factors hall-mark the quality in the education field. The schools blend the theoretical and practical keys to ensure the obtaining of the anticipated performances and results. According to the author Şerban Iosifescu the analysis of the quality in education needs to be done in reference to: “the values promoted in the society and at the level of the school; the education policies and the strategies given at the national, regional and local level; the given situation defined by the contextual factors, the culture and the traditions; the evolution of the quality concept”. (Iosifescu E., 2001, p.12)

The necessity of the existence of the national quality assurance system is being supported by institutional, administrative and managerial arguments, which frame it as a system which ensures and promotes the tools and the instruments for improving the quality in the education, with a direct effect on the pupils’ results. At the highest stake, the implementation of such a system determines an increase of the performance quality of the actors from the school community, up to the level of the direct beneficiaries – the pupils.

The functions of the national quality assurance system point the following (Claudiu I., 2012, www.sar.org.ro):
- The evaluation of the education services should be done, while emphasizing their finality and it follows the model inputs – process - outputs, in order to mark out the obtained results, on the long run.
- The identification of the school contribution to the progress and the performances of the pupils, which mean establishing the extent to which an added-value contribution identified in the pupils’ results was created through the paideutics demarche, detached from the education influence and the family contribution.
- The implementation of the schools benchmarking, together with summarizing and publishing the schools specific data and background, in a very transparent formula.
- The promotion of the parents-community partnership, in order to make the school more efficient and to improve the quality of the provided services with benefits for the direct and indirect beneficiaries.
- The intervention in favor of the education adapted to the school profile and population.
- The promotion of the social inclusion and the identification of the adequate intervention tools for this endeavor.

While implementing a quality assurance system, many obstacles can interfere. They have their origins in the institutional context and relate to different natures, such as the theoretical, the cultural or the material one, while turning into
factors which influence the implementation of the system to a lower or higher level. Beginning with their natures the factors can be presented and exemplified as follows:

- **The theoretical factors** – the lack of opportunities and offers in regards to the training, the quality management skills acquisition for the human resources from the educational sector; the difference in the perception of the system evaluators, who identify the quality with finding and pointing out errors or problems and imposing sanctions without taking into account the need to have a pro-active behavior of all the actors involved, from those who evaluate, to those who finance and to the ministry and its regional representatives; at the policy level the lack of the objectives assignment for each educational level, of the correlation between the strategies and the curriculums and of the proper informing process of the involved actors, in regards to the education policy aims;

- **The cultural factors** – the lack of motivation (awards, distinctions, financial or material rewards) of the human resources involved in the quality assurance system, who tend to sense this responsibility as an extra heavy task to those already stated in their job descriptions; the fragile existence of the quality culture, because the quality management is not seen as a consistent priority and the organization resistance is high to changes; the shy implication of the local and central institutions in regards to providing the optimum conditions for implementing the quality assurance system and the inability to bring in the center of attention the beneficiaries of the education services;

- **The material factors** - the limited resources available for the process of the quality assurance in the education, the impossibility to attract and access auxiliary financing which could supplement the financing designed for the implementation of the quality assurance system in the education sector; the impossibility to leverage the tools and instruments offered by the management of the quality, in some specific situations.

As the society and its needs are in a perpetual change, from the perspective of the change as a process, the most important lesson for the school is to achieve the implementation of the quality assurance system, given the natural and fair conditions for the change and the consistency dealt with by the school.

From this perspective the dimensions of an efficient management foresees: “the strategies, the projects and the plans for different time frames, the efficient leadership in relation to the members of the school community, (...) the clients’ satisfaction, who benefit from the results of the education, the employee satisfaction, the results obtained by the school organization, the school impact on the community and the society” (Rădulescu E., 2002, p.94).

The quality assurance process among others requires an efficient management and a change in the mentality of the actors involved, which is the main premise of a solid quality culture. A real quality culture can be implemented and consolidated, when the practices of the evaluation from the quality field are perceived in the right way and the evaluation is not considered to be a sanction tool, but a very powerful instrument for the development of the school.
organizations. The compliance and the conformation to the law are not the sufficient conditions for the implementation of the quality assurance system. Through the internalization of the idea to view the quality as a need, the organization ensures a supportive attitude for the actors of the school community, in regards to the strategies, the legal framework and the specific methodology. The quality policies can be strong enforcements and motivators for human resources involved in the implementation, for the direct and indirect beneficiaries and for the stakeholders.

Section 3: Some Quality Assurance Perspectives for the education

In the report “School and Quality” (1989) The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) underlines that “there is no simple prescription of the ingredients necessary to achieve high quality in education; many factors interact – students and their backgrounds, staff and their skills, schools and their structure and ethos, curricula and social expectations’ (OECD, 1989, p.27).

The quality of the school performance can be analyzed from multiple perspectives:

- The quality of the processes, which take place in the school. In order to align these processes to the specific quality standards, the preoccupation for quality improving should be reflected down to the level of the data management tools and of the evaluation and classification instruments, used by the organization in the processes of managing the available resources.
- The quality of the education services and their adequacy level to the demands of the beneficiaries;
- The quality of the organization, together with everything that defines it: the organizational culture, management style, the strategies, the structure and resources.

A quality assurance system designed for the educational sector to be efficient proves its efficiency through its effects and impacts on the provided education services, the obtained results and the school community as a whole, while surpassing its aim of being a simple quality handle in the hands of the specific employees involved in the quality assurance process.

As an example of good practice, Finland defined its quality assurance system through its legislative framework, designed strategically by the Ministry of Education and Culture by abolishing the school and textbook inspections, while introducing new principles like to govern based on support funding and information, and to attract and stimulate the volunteering in the education process (Finish National Board of Education, 2015). As the decentralization was one of the main objectives, the schools have their autonomy for the curriculum projection and the process of organizing the education services. At the macro level, there is an important collaboration between the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Finish National Council for Education in the area of elaborating the policies for the development of the education, the content of the education, the didactic methodology for the primary and secondary school level, together with the adult life learning level.
In regards to the general competencies aimed to be acquired by the pupils, the national objectives for the educational field are being attributed to the Government, while the Ministry of Education and Culture has the role to configure the strategic development strategies for the national education. “The national quality assurance system in vocational education and training (VET) comprises of The National Council for Vocational Education and Training, the quality management for the VET providers, the external evaluation of the VET, using the some mechanism accepted by the social partners. Each school can choose its own quality management and self-evaluation process. In Finland the education process is decentralized and the school inspection bodies do not exist” (Iosifescu, 2013, p.46). The evaluation endeavor of the schools is determined by applying the fundamental strategy based on the principles such as: transparency, trust, innovation, excellence, active and open attitude towards quality.

In France, the institutional roles are well established for the educational sector and attributed to the Ministry of Education. Its competencies are to elaborate the education policies, to create the specific frameworks for some learning programs, to configure the educational and VET strategies. After 1980, the French centralized system allows the local authorities to get involved in the administration of the schools, which represents an important step forward. The VET and the career development of the teachers is managed by the Superior Council for Evaluation, while the school evaluation institutions are responsible for monitoring and controlling the quality demarche of the education. Some important initiatives taken for improvement while generating a positive impact in the educational sector are: the introduction of the quality standards on a large scale, the appointment of some specialized organizations with an important role in providing statistics and data analysis, together with organizing the evaluation endeavors for the educational and quality policies.

The quality assurance process is a preoccupation at the national and regional level. The Quality Charta was elaborated, which foresees the quality of the VET services, the support for the apprentices and trainees to access jobs in accordance with the competencies acquired. The conclusion about the French quality policy is that it promotes the results-oriented culture, together with the conformation to the quality standards.

In Austria, the schools having a limited autonomy can implement a local curriculum adapted to the specific needs of the community and carry out a partial decentralized financial management. We can talk about a comprehensive quality management in the Austrian schools, while the key role in the quality assurance system is played by the General Directorate for education and VET. This institution elaborated the Qualitäts Initiative BerufsBildung (QIBB) - The VET Quality Initiative – which ensures the implementation of the General European Framework for quality assurance in education and VET.

“The promoted quality management system has its scope of protecting and developing systematically the quality in the education and in the administrative services. The system is implemented at the level of the pedagogical activities (for example the initiation, the support and the facility of the education processes, which are relevant from the social point of view) and at the level of administrative activities (for example the creation, the assurance and the development of the
specific conditions and the framework needed for the teaching-learning). The process of development follows a continuous circle with the four stages: the planning, the implementation, the monitoring and the evaluation, and at the end the evaluation and the reporting." (Iosifescu S., 2013, p. 43)

An important action needs to be highlighted – the continuous preoccupation to train and develop professionally the managers, as it has a tremendous impact on the quality assurance process, beginning with the initial training and up the VET training. Hence a new profile is configured and it has the right competencies for the quality assurance process.

As the French model, the Austrian one is results orientated. Yearly, each school prepares and publishes a report on the quality of the provided education services.

It is very interesting to observe that besides the national standards which ensure the framework for the external evaluation, each school organizes its internal evaluation, while having the freedom to choose its domains to be evaluated. The results are used to elaborate a plan which will state the strategic objectives to be followed. Thus the school will have the right to be supported in the creation of the development strategies by the superior forum of management, which will conduct a managerial and performance analysis of the school.

The implication of all the actors involved in the quality assurance process is pointed out, which translates into the internalization of the quality culture while the implementation of the quality assurance together with the evaluation do not receive the title of bureaucracy components. A common practice in the internal evaluation is the colleague evaluation, through which the external evaluators will support the development of the school and the organizational quality, using their suggestions. This type of evaluation contributes to the experience and professional exchange among the human resources involved.

In Romania, the national quality assurance system for the educational sector is framed by the National Education Law together with some specific laws for the quality assurance and management processes. The institution responsible for developing the national strategies, policies and trends for the educational sector is the Ministry of Education. The actors involved in quality assurance process are the Ministry of Education ensuring the legislative support, the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance on the Pre-university Education, responsible for elaborating the quality standards and the external evaluation of the schools, which materializes in giving/revoking their authorization or accreditation, when fulfilling/not fulfilling the quality standards. The Agency plays a strategic role in initiating, (re)designing and submitting to the Ministry of Education for promulgation the specific methodologies, evaluation indicators and quality standards. The dissemination of good practices and the publishing of annual reports and statistics, system analysis, manuals and brochures on the quality assurance in education, are important tasks performed by the Agency with a high impact on the quality assurance process and the quality and education policy.

At the school level the quality assurance process is being handled by the Commission for the Quality Evaluation and Assurance. Its main task is to manage the internal evaluation of the school, in accordance with the quality standards designed by the Agency. On the annual basis, after finalizing the evaluation the Commission publishes the results in a report and frames the improvement plans.
for the areas where it is needed. In the evaluation process the Commission uses specific tools, instruments and procedures personalized according to the background and the community of the school.

**Section 4: Conclusions**

The quality assurance system can fulfill its objectives only if it disposes the necessary instruments, tools and legal framework. We learned that the European experiences in terms of quality in the education services field are diverse from many points of view, even though they have the same basis - the legal framework, which sets up the national quality assurance systems.

Given the national, regional and local background, we consider that the diversity of the systems is defined by the differences which occur in: the set of instruments used and personalized by the school (in some systems enforced by the law), the level of centralization or decentralization of the educational system, the extent to which the local community is engaged in the everyday life of the school, the type of evaluation used in the process of the quality assurance (internal, external, per-review), the levels to which the quality culture is being promoted and internalized, the usage of the quality evaluation models which are pupil-centered, to enforce the actions to improve the quality while impacting the results.

From the exemplified experiences of the countries, we learned that the human resources plays the most important role in the quality assurance system and they have a special treatment in terms of training and development in the quality culture for building and consolidating the school as an organization based on quality. From the four countries, we believe Finland is more steps forward as the other countries, as they found and promoted a very important principle in the educational field, which is the volunteering. Why choosing and involving volunteers in the education? The answer is very simple, because when an individual is able to perform and carry out activities without being paid, that means his/her dedication to the cause is highest. The person will give everything and make the biggest effort to get the best results and this kind of human resources should be engaged in the education, for the achieving the highest level of quality in regards to the beneficiaries needs and the pupils’ acquisition of competencies. Also the French system has a very important component - the institution which manages the career, the training and the development of the human resources from the educational field.

Finish authorities understood that quality in education means funding and financial resources, therefore the quality assurance system has its basis on attracting financial resources to enhance the potential and to improve the quality of the education services to the level of excellence.

Only investing into the education and health of the nation, a country can prepare its people for a better tomorrow, to ensure that its labor market follows the right trend and its potentially talented people are transformed into future qualified employees and entrepreneurs who will be prepared to carry on the future of a nation.
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