**Educated Romania – an Integral Part of the Administrative Space
in the 21ˢᵗ Century**

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ABSTRACT

Education is the primary element of a country's well-being, so it should be based on sound moral principles, it is a public good that all citizens should benefit from in a qualitative way, harmonized with technological and social realities and in which the best specialists should be involved.

A country's progress depends to a large extent on education, the key factor in which it should be invested in heavily because it differentiates between success and failure on an increasingly competitive market.

"Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of another, always at the same time as an end and never simply as a means." - ***Humanity Formulation of the Categorical Imperative – Immanuel Kant***

KEYWORDS: *education, integrity, ethics and morality, administrative space.*

1.Introduction

The "Educated Romania" Project is an integral part of the administrative space in the 21ˢᵗ century, and it can be considered the most significant project, but especially necessary at this moment.

According to the *Memorandum on the implementation of the "Educated Romania" Project and on the approval of priorities in the reform of the National Education System*, the Romanian

Government has assumed the national education strategic objectives, thus accelerating the process of carrying out the reform of the Romanian education[1].

It has been subject to the largest and longest-running public consultation in education, starting in 2016, being the subject of a series of debates on the Romania's strategic options for its own education system, attended by NGOs, schools and universities, teachers, parents, pupils, students, experts, employers, representatives of the private sector, civil society, and citizens.

2.Analysis at internal level

The creation of a European Education Area by adopting in February 2021 the "Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030)"[2] provided conditions for the improvement of education system quality in the Member States. The strategic objectives and targets set by the "Educated Romania" Project fall within the scope of this European Area.

Therefore, the European Commission adopted on 30 September 2020 two initiatives aimed at strengthening the contribution of education to the recovery of the European Union in full crisis and helping build a green and digital Europe[3].

The European Education Area is underpinned by six dimensions: quality, inclusion and gender equality, green and digital transitions, teachers, higher education, and a stronger Europe in the world. It is based on decades of European cooperation in education.

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[1]*Memorandum on the implementation of the "Educated Romania" Project and on the approval of priorities in the reform of the National Education System, available online on the site https://www.edu.ro/sites/default/files/_fi%C8%99iere/Romania%20Educata/Memorandum%20Romania%20Educata%202021.pdf*

[2]Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030), *available online on the site* https://www.ilegis.ro/eurolegis/ro/index/act/76464

[3]European Commission press release, *Creating a European Education Area by 2025 and resetting education and training for the digital age*, Brussels, 30 September 2020, available online on the site https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/ro/IP_17_452

While moving towards the achievement of the European Education Area by 2025, the main goal of European cooperation in education and training should be to support the further development of education and training systems in the Member States which are aimed at ensuring:

• the personal, social and professional fulfilment of all citizens, whilst promoting democratic values, equality, social cohesion, active citizenship, and intercultural dialogue;

• sustainable economic prosperity, the green and digital transitions, and employability.

Specifically, during the next decade, the strategic framework shall address the following five strategic priorities:

• improving quality, equity, inclusion and success for all in education and training;

• making lifelong learning and mobility a reality for all;

• enhancing competences and motivation in the education profession;

• reinforcing European higher education;

• supporting the green and digital transitions in and through education and training.

According to the data of Eurostat and "Education and Training Monitor", Romania has not reached significant targets in education assumed for 2020, such as the early school leaving rate and adult participation in lifelong learning courses.

Consequently, it is required to operationalize the "Educated Romania" Project by implementing the following strategic targets:

• Ensuring the quality of early education by developing a network of nurseries, kindergartens and other early childhood and preschool education services, updating the occupational standards necessary for initial education and continuous training of the teaching and care staff; permanent adaptation of the curriculum and use of the most modern pedagogical approaches used worldwide in early education in order to ensure the conditions for the gradual generalization of the inclusion of more and more children in early childhood and preschool education in Romania.

• Enhancing the quality of the pre-university education in Romania by improving school infrastructure, adapting the skills-focused curriculum to the needs of the labour market, implementing some integrated measures to reduce school dropout and early school leaving, training teachers to focus the teaching and assessment process on the student's needs, improving the results of exams,

competitions, national and international competitions, and international standardized tests in the context of digitalization of education at all levels.

- Ensuring the quality of university education by increasing university autonomy and responsibility against the background of academic transparency, ethics and integrity and by supporting the equitable access of all students to quality learning courses correlated with the needs of the labour market.

The main pillar of the Romanian educational system involves its adaptation to external changes and future trends which means its correlation with international recommendations and practices in firm compliance with the principles of ethics and integrity by all members of the educational community.

Among the goals assumed in the "Educated Romania" Project aimed at higher education, it is also included the integration in the pre-university education curriculum of some training modules providing for learning of basic rules on academic writing, citing sources correctly, and compliance with some basic principles concerning academic ethics.

Thus, considering the provisions of the Government Decision No. 583/2016 approving the National Anti-Corruption Strategy for 2016-2020, the sets of performance indicators, risks associated with objectives and measures of the strategy and verification sources, inventory of the institutional transparency and corruption prevention measures, evaluation indicators, and standard publication of information of public interest, commencing with the academic year 2018-2019, according to the Order of the Ministry of National Education, the Academic Integrity and Ethics Course was introduced as a compulsory subject in the Master and PhD study cycles, and as an option in the Bachelor's cycle.

The overall objective of this course is to improve the degree of knowledge and application of an ethical conduct and operationalization of academic integrity in the Romanian university education by acquiring concepts, methods, tools and procedures for assessing compliance with academic integrity at all levels (didactic, administrative, scientific, etc.).

Looking around at the evolution of society in general and young people in particular, we consider it appropriate to extend the compulsory courses of ethics, morality and integrity within all cycles of academic studies, and even within primary school, middle school and high school.

Morality and ethics are known to be different phenomena, but they cannot be completely separated. In contemporary philosophy, ethics is seen as a science of morality, so that the object of ethics is morality.

Ethics is considered the science of behaviour, and morality is the totality of the means we use to live in a human way.

Ethics tries to answer questions with universally valid answers: *What is moral to do? / Do we have to be moral? / Why should we behave ethically? / Are you happy if you live morally? / Are we born moral? / Can we become moral?* are questions whose answers differ depending on each individual.

Ethics is a theoretical discipline with a double character, i.e. philosophical and scientific. The word philosopher derives from the Greek "philo" which means love and "sophia" meaning wisdom, "philosophy" meaning "the love of wisdom". The scientific character is based on the principles of science.

"Morality includes all the ideas, concepts, theories, feelings of people which express their appreciation of what is good or bad, honest or dishonest, etc. in their relationships; such appreciations are expressed in different principles, norms, rules and habits that regulate the behaviour of people in society, in family, in personal life, their attitude towards each other, towards society, towards the class to which they belong and towards other classes"[4].

"Social norms and normative systems usually appear not from outside, but from the field of human existence that they express and to whose genesis and development they participate directly. Therefore, they can be neither formulated nor changed at will, whether they are norms of correct thinking, speaking or morality. (…) The rules of morality appear as a regulator of social life"[5].

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[4]*Behaviors, attitudes, ideals, Collection of materials on moral and civic education topics*, 1968, Bucharest, Romania: Political Publishing.
[5]Bellu, N., 1989, *Morality in human existence*, Bucharest, Romania: Political Publishing, p. 122.

„To the common understanding, moral values represent standards of the good we assume, whether individually or at a community level. They shape together the space in which we shall answer the questions such as „What kind of people or society do we want to be?"[6]

The concept of integrity is still the subject of many discussions, not being well defined, but it is known that it involves consistent actions, a system of values and principles, methods and measures, all deriving from the character of a person.

One cannot speak about integrity without ethics, morality, responsibility, courage, honesty, commitment and will. Inconsistency, hypocrisy, or falsity are at the opposite pole.

A person without integrity shall never have the capacity to understand its usefulness in society, or he shall insufficiently understand it. When makes a mistake, the person of integrity acknowledges his mistake and guilt, being fully responsible for his deeds which he firmly assumes.

Ethics, morality, and integrity are sensitive but essential topics that should be mastered by each of us. It would be ideal to study at school since primary school a discipline providing the basis of an educated Romania and putting in place notions such as ethics, morality, integrity, and conscience.

Unfortunately, Romania ranks third place in Europe in terms of the time that our children spend at school, i.e. 11 years. However, our academic results do not reflect the same level of performance, as shown by Eurostat or the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) studies.

Specifically, the school dropout rate in Romania is still the highest in the European Union, ranking third in the European Union (18.5%).

Also, we are in the last place in terms of the results of the PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) test; it is an international comparative study initiated by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in order to measure the development of basic skills of 15-16-year-old students at the end of the compulsory education in three main areas: *reading, mathematics and science*[7].

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[6]Socaciu, E., Vica, C., Mihailov, E., Gibea, T., Mureșan, V. and Constantinescu, M., 2018, *Ethics and academic integrity*, Bucharest, Romania: University Publishing, p. 16.
[7]Study available online on the site https://www.ise.ro/pisa-2018-2021

The programme is internationally scheduled until 2024. Romania had been participating in the OECD – PISA International Programme since 2000 (as a PISA+ country). The PISA test is held every three years and shows the level of 15-16 year old students in mathematics, science and reading. It aims to the way the students are prepared for adult life, not being a classic exam, which aims to notice if the information in the curriculum has been mastered.

The last PISA test was conducted in 2018 when Romania acquired the weakest score in the last nine years. The results showed that just over 50% of the Romanian students are able to use the knowledge learned at school in everyday life.

The PISA assessment focuses on the skills needed for personal and social life or for integration on the labour market – in other words, it focuses not necessarily on what students know, but on the application of knowledge in concrete life events.

At the first participation, in 2000 (being in the group of PISA + countries), Romania ranked 34th out of 42 in the hierarchy of participating countries, it ranked 47th out of 57 participating countries at PISA 2006, it ranked 49th out of 65 of participating countries at PISA 2009, it ranked 45th out of 65 participating countries at PISA 2012, slightly in progress compared to the previous cycles, and it ranked 48th out of 72 participating countries in 2015.

Currently, Romania ranks 47th out of 79 countries with a functional illiteracy rate of 44%.

As a conclusion of the statistics, the education experts show that the relatively large number of years spent at school by children in a compulsory, somehow forced, imposed and not optional way – as a result of own decision, only emphasizing the inefficiency of the Romanian educational system which is based on quantity rather than quality (years, grades, exams, qualifications and diplomas accumulate, but the results are disastrous).

The PISA 2021 assessment has been postponed until 2022 when students should focus on mathematics with an additional test of creative thinking.

The PISA 2024 assessment has been postponed until 2025 when the tests shall focus on science, and it shall include a new foreign language assessment. The tests shall also include the innovative field of learning in the digital world in order to measure the ability of students to engage in self-regulated learning while using digital tools.

Andreas Schleicher, the Director for Education of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) within a conference held in late January in Bucharest, as part of the "Educated Romania" Project created a tumultuous picture of the problems education faces in Romania[8].

He argues that there is no change in students' ability to master the skills of the 21st century.

• The main challenges addressed were as follows:

The goal is to move from helping a few people succeed to making sure that all students are successful. And equity is not just about resources, it's about understanding the reasons why students learn differently and accepting such diversity.

It could be said that in the 20th century democracy was about the right to be equal to others. In the 21st century, democracy is about the right to be different. We need to understand why students need to learn differently.

In the past, success came from things you could easily teach and test. Now, those things shall be taken over by computers. The key to success lies in the ability to think in a complex way. This is a fundamental challenge for Romania. You don't need to teach even more in the same way as before, but to educate different skills.

Change needs high-skilled teachers who not only convey the generally recognized thinking of the moment, but also encourage young people to put it into question.

We need to look at the organization of work. The best professionals do not like to work in "factories". Most education systems are still designed according to the factory model, offering a very low perspective of career advancement. That is why we place so much emphasis, in our remarks, on the importance of providing ways of advancing for teachers.

Improving the teaching profession means, on the one hand, attracting very good people towards it. I believe that this way the teaching process would improve by 3-5% - I think that most of them who are to teach are already in schools. On the other hand, the biggest challenge is not to attract people, but to change and improve the performance of those individuals already working in the field.

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[8]Document available online on the site https://www.edupedu.ro/invatamantul-romanesc-vazut-prin-ochi-internationali-o-descriere-nemiloasa-de-la-seful-educatiei-oecd-ce-fac-sistemele-cele-mai-performante-ale-lumii-iar-in-romania-se-face-cel-mult-pe-hartie/

The enthusiasm of the teachers is crucial. During the last PISA assessment, students who said that they had inspired, enthusiastic teachers had much stronger relationships with those teachers – this was one of the elements that predicted the best learning outcomes in almost all countries.

One of the very interesting findings of the latest PISA assessments was that the disciplinary environment in the school predicts very well the student's life satisfaction. You would say that, for the student, the quality of life depends on the family, on the environments where they grow up. But school plays a huge role in how young people perceive their lives. School is the place they feel they belong to, where they are friends, and which makes sense. The students who agreed with these things were much happier with their own lives".

Students should cooperate in the learning process as teaching does not only mean the delivery of instructive content, but also the active presence of the student.

The professionalism of teachers is an essential element of education progress, and it is structured on three levels. The first level is what the teacher knows about the subject he/she teaches and how students learn his/her subject.

On another level is the professional autonomy, the space the teacher has, the right to initiative, and specifically how the initiative is received by the system.

Last but not least, the emphasis should be on cooperation within the school. Most successful systems learn in the culture of cooperation.

Within high-performance education systems, teachers learn together, observe each other during classes, give feedback, share common activities, but specifically, have a much stronger sense of ownership over their practice, and also professional satisfaction.

A defining item which is not related to human resource (students and teachers) is represented by the development of leadership in school and we do not refer here only to school, but to the ability to lead at any level of the education system to the administrative apparatus.

A real obstacle to the reform of education is related to the conservative leadership, to leaders who do not have the capacity to see into the future and who are not transparent, both in the relationship with teachers and in the sense of the reform.

All the issues existing today in the Romanian education system could have been solved in whole or in part if, over time, the great teachers, the practitioners of this country had been consulted and taken into consideration.

Since 1998, a group of teachers has conducted a study on the Romanian education, and most of the conclusions reached are among the today's recommendations. The study has been prepared with the support of the Open Society Foundation.

"The learning process is seen as focusing on the development of intellectual abilities, leaving aside other type of abilities. For example, the capacity examination with which the middle school ends consists of tests of mathematics, history, geography, Romanian literature – but none that aims at the young person's ability to know his/her own person or the society in which he/she is to integrate. He/she has to know systems of quadratic equations, but not to know how his/her liver works, or where to go if his/her rights are violated.

The links of school with the local community are seen as marginal.

The Romanian school rejects the concept of a general education of medium or higher level as a basis for the possibility of lifelong learning. Instead of building skills, the emphasis is on the knowledge transfer.

The connection between school and the graduate's job is ignored. According to the law, education structures are rigid, difficult to comply with the requirements of the labour market, while economy, administration, health, etc. need very different forms of professional training"[9].

A quality education in Romania requires implementation of a new system in which students can choose the subjects they want to study. Specifically, this would be changing that all students expect.

The elimination of subjects that are not important for what students want to do in the future and school curricula designed by each teacher would be the basis for a successful education.

In this respect, the Ministry of Education approved commencing with the academic year 2021-2022 the operation of six pilot schools according to the principles of reforming the education system included in the "Educated Romania" Project.

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[9]Miroiu, A. (coordinator), Pași. V. G. and Miroiu, M., 1998, *Romanian education today - Diagnostic study*, Iași, Romania: Polirom Publishing, p. 121.

Therefore, students and teachers within the six pilot schools shall have a teaching-learning-assessment process closer to the wishes and needs of each community and closer to the requirements and demands of a modern education, a 21st century education, actually focused per student.

One of them is the Gheorghe Lazar National College in Bucharest.

The most significant component considered in piloting projects is the change in the curricula, curricular models and framework plans which are to be adapted by schools according to the needs of the community and the existing human and material resources.

Design shall be allowed by areas of learning, not by disciplines, and shall really focus on the development of some relevant competences, but in strict compliance with the curricular goals specific to each cycle and the competences in the graduate training profiles.

Teaching-learning models shall be piloted in a blended learning system with alternative teaching with physical and online presence, at regular intervals, and new models of narrative assessment, instead of the grade-based assessment that shall reduce the pressure of assessment on students, mainly in the primary cycle.

Furthermore, the semester theses shall be replaced by a semester portfolio of the student, based on clear assessment criteria that have been presented to each student at the beginning of the semester.

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Blended learning teaching-learning models will be piloted, with alternative teaching with physical and online presence, at regular intervals, and new models of narrative assessment, instead of the one based on grades, which will reduce the pressure of assessment on students, especially in the primary cycle.

Also, the semester theses will be replaced with a semester portfolio of the student, based on clear evaluation criteria that were presented to each student at the beginning of the semester.

At the high school level, the reorganization of the subject in the 12th grade shall be piloted so that, in the second semester, students can focus on the subjects they need for the baccalaureate and college exams.

This gives the student the right to choose the subjects to which he is inclined, a model that can be extended later throughout the high school cycle.

3.Conclusions
Concepts of the school of the future

The student shall be able to learn sustainably if he steps outside his comfort zone, to follow his long-term tasks by envisioning a possible future that results from the work he is doing, to process all the requirements and to develop the four elements of thinking: reasoning, creativity, synthesis, and evaluation.

Today's students need the following means of stimulating performance:

• concrete description of active listening, attention and sitting posture at desk, followed by praise for stable behaviour or self-control – the so-called positive discipline;

• at least one element of novelty should be in the classroom every day, something that gets students attention and surprise, and keeps them exciting – teaching aids or teacher's strategy;

• questions to feed their "ego": What do you think? / What makes you believe that? / How would you proceed? / What did you like the most? / What kind of answer do you think is the best? / What can you tell me?

• movement during class lessons keeping the students engaged and excited about lessons and helping them retain the content more. Moving, regrouping, and changing roles moments should be incorporated in the organization of classes;

• self-assessment – all assessment criteria should be set up in advance, clearly and transparently for the purpose of student's self-grading. Surprise tests, punishment quizzes or pop quizzes are perceived as unfair, especially when they come a as a sanction for a colleague making a mistake;

• joint agreement upon the objectives to be reached during classes. What I know / What I don't know / What I would like to know;

• the existence of connections between the information acquired in all fields of activity or knowledge so as not to bore students with Stella thinking (in the network);

• today's children need emotions, strong feelings in order to retain information;

• students need strong leaders – democratic but firm teachers able to support their emotions and set up a rigorous working plan, what is and what is not allowed during the class;

• less information is needed, but more work and thinking strategies are needed. Technology should be integrated into the learning process. Tablets and computers should not be missing from the desk commencing with the 4th grade;

• to learn through a role play putting themselves into the characters' shoes. The student needs positive models and empathy;

• to learn also outside the classroom – visits, trips, institutions; mobility and diversity are required.

In order to put all these ideas into practice, teachers should take into consideration the six concepts of 21st century education.

1. Collaboration

Children should learn in teams, they should have social roles and collaborate in order to achieve the common goal which is the sum of efforts, talents and skills of each member of the group, gaining more value.

2. Critical thinking

Students should filter, select and synthetize the information/content found in various media in a form to make sense for them and that can be applied to their daily lives.

3. Creativity

Students must be able to find new solutions to solve a problem utilizing the knowledge they have already acquired.

4. Communication

Communication is the skill of presenting information in a clear, concise, and meaningful way. A student who communicates efficiently is a student prepared for life.

5. Culture/Citizenship

It is important for a student to be in touch with everything than surrounds them – both culture and community. Citizenship and culture and equally important for student's training in order to develop intercultural and civic competence.

6.   Character education - Connectivity

Social connectivity combined with technology and the ability of students to become responsible and active citizens are other goals of the 21st century School.

In conclusion, today's education should start from the recognition of the student's cognitive predispositions and should take into consideration the society in which he lives and guide him to research paths.

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