

Chapter 14

Rural Romanian Education: Issues of the Reform and Foreign Language Teaching

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents an overview of the Romanian rural education system with an emphasis on the projects implemented in the rural areas, foreign language teaching being a major part of these projects in this sector which, among other shortcomings, is affected by a serious shortage of qualified teaching staff. It examines the recent developments in the educational rural process highlighting the education policies adopted by the Romanian government as part of the intergration program in the European Union. As well as describing the present state of this educational component, it proposes a number of solutions to the identified issues that could be put into practice for the benefit of the system.

INTRODUCTION

Within the context of the Romanian education reformation in the last decades required by the integration of our educational system into Europe, a thorough analysis of its implementation and effectiveness is required. The purpose of this chapter is to evaluate the outcomes of certain projects whose aim was to improve the quality of the rural education which represents one of the major components of our national education. As the European integration has been a target of all

reforms applied to all policies, economic, political, educational and cultural, foreign language teaching plays a main part in this process. Consequently, our main objective lies in examining the current state of the rural education, particularly of foreign language teaching, started from the analysis of the projects and studies dedicated to this field.

Therefore, the chapter will be structured as follows:

- A general overview of the present state of the Romanian rural education;

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-7521-6.ch014

- A selection of the most important projects implemented in the system, strictly aiming at rural education;
- Some solutions to the problems that were identified by our analysis.

Special mention should be made of the fact that in our country all educational levels (pre-school, primary and secondary) follow the National Curriculum conceived by the National Council for Curriculum and approved by the Ministry of Education, without making the distinction between the urban and rural regions of the country. This common framework as regards the subjects and their contents is justified by the requirements of modern education which has to provide students with general competences and skills meant to correspond to the present society's development.

BACKGROUND

As the reformation of the Romanian educational system is concerned, it constitutes the objective of a coherent and unitary policy guided by the Ministry of National Education. As stated in the introductory note to "The Strategy of Pre-academic Educational Development during 2001 and 2004", "The systemic, effective and coherent reform that generates an added value to the educational process which aims at the personal and professional development of each pupil and student who will be the future citizens of our country" (2002) represents the mission of the Ministry of National Education. This, however, involves a wide collaboration of all institutions and stakeholders in order to achieve the goals of the reformation program.

One of the institutions involved in this program that should be taken into consideration is the Institute of Educational Sciences in Bucharest. It has taken part in the implementation of various projects in schools at different levels all over Romania and published a series of reports reflecting the present state of the measures adopted in the educational

field as well as their effects on the quality of the instructional process. Consequently, a group of researchers coordinated by Mihaela Jigău, achieved a clear diagnosis of the rural education, as part of the national education system, trying to identify the dysfunctions and difficulties that it has to face, highlighting their consequences on the quality of the educational system. Special mention should be made of the fact that the shortcomings identified in the rural educational sector are not only due to the intrinsic nature of the system, but also to the larger economic and social context. A generalized phenomenon that characterizes Romania is poverty generated by the transformations undergone by all the components of our society during the transition period from the inefficient centralized socialist economic and political system to the market economy and capitalism. Besides that, the latest socio-economic changes have deepened the differences between the urban and rural areas which have been reflected in all fields of life, resulting in a poorer performance of rural education. One of the most serious aspects derived from this context is weak financing of rural schools in comparison with the urban ones. As Jigău (2000, pp. 7- 8) points out, "as far as education is concerned, along with a general chronic sub-financing and a reduction of the population's request for educational services, we witness a series of negative phenomena regarding the equality of chances to education, considered from a triple perspective: equality of access, opportunities and results." Briefly speaking, all these can be summarized as follows:

- Poor infrastructure in rural areas;
- Low number of educational institutions;
- Poor logistics of schools;
- Reduction in the number of students who graduate compulsory education;
- Decline in the number of students enrolled in high schools;
- Insufficient number of qualified teachers in rural schools. For instance in the academic

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