

**THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE NATIONAL EDUCATION SYSTEM
AS A SERVICE OF PUBLIC INTEREST**

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Abstract

The legislative context, the institutional and organizational framework of education, all have an impact that reverberates across the entire society, as well as at the level of each individual. Being a national priority, due to societal benefits internationally recognized, education is regarded as a fundamental human right. This fundamental process optimizes the overall social system, following a joint involvement on the part of institutional actors and interested organizations, and has a major contribution to ensuring public accountability.

Keywords: *education system, public accountability, public service, priority, responsibility and training of the younger generation*

1. Conceptual cues

Considered a national priority, the national system of education is meant to carry out the educational ideal, based on humanistic and scientific values, on the universal values of democracy and on the aspirations of Romanian society. As an integral part of the social system, this important structure has an essential mission, aiming at maintaining and promoting the harmonious growth of people, at the level of both human individuality and national identity.

Education must be regarded as a social-cultural subsystem that works according to principles that are specific to the national legal framework, but also according to rules that belong to the European legal framework. This subsystem has to fulfill its functions in agreement with the socio-political changes foreshadowed by the 21st century, namely the new requirements deriving from Romania's status as a member of the European Union and from the broader context of globalization. In order to do this, it has to become highly competitive and able to operate effectively and efficiently within current and future society. The organization of the education structures and bodies must be addressed in a complex way, starting from the assumption that education must necessarily accomplish its goals.

Such an approach has to be based on multiple dimensions. These dimensions are: 1) the management of the entire process of education, with an emphasis on results and effectiveness; 2) the position of the 'human resources' component within the education system; 3) the social relations

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established between direct and indirect beneficiaries; 4) the ratio between staff and the employer's power of distribution. Another dimension is the political approach, because it refers to the administrative apparatus which rules and coordinates the education system and ensures the policy-making process as well as the execution of laws and policies in the field.

The aforementioned directions call attention to a new concept discussed in the scientific literature. This concept is "responsibility assumption", understood as each individual's obligation to take responsibility for his actions and the consequences of his actions. Accountability entails a reasonable, honest behavior of the individual in relation to others, which confer survival solutions to the community through personal commitment. Kanter (1968, p. 66) speaks of "cohesion commitment" as a form of emotional attachment to a group. From the evaluation of Anglo-Saxon literature, we found a pragmatic analysis of the concept of responsibility, based on attributes such as competence, effectiveness, responsibility (on whose analysis the next section of this paper concentrates).

Competence is understood and evaluated in close connection with a series of standards and targets assumed by public policies and valued by the administration. 'Standard' in accordance with Regulation 1025/2012, means 'a technical specification adopted by a recognised standardisation body (Moroianu Zlătescu, 2017, p. 69), where the decisions are taken by experts' (but the results are only advisory).

Effectiveness refers to the activities that can be characterized in terms of administrative efficiency and are able to provide value through administration. As such, the obtained results can be measured.

Liability is based on two notions: direction and control (Hyneman, 1950). The direction orients the path that is turning towards responsibility, and takes into account the control action itself which implies checking, inspection and evaluation. These values can be applied to the administration *per se*, as well as to other areas of governance or of the governmental system as a whole (Bălăşoiu, Bacchus, Ildiko, 2007, p. 11). The existence of a new approach, confirms that in public administration there is a tendency to treat the concept of accountability from the perspective of three dimensions: political, legal and administrative. These characteristics include decisions and instructions arising from the development of public policy-making that acknowledges and enables the role of the representation of social groups, the participation of citizens, in order to improve the mechanisms of participatory democracy. Concerns over the citizens' best interest find their way into the public policy process, bringing an element of novelty: that of responsibility, enhanced through the citizen's participation in the administrative decision-

making process. In this way, each individual is entrusted with a mission that is formally and legally established.

It is important to retain, that the existence and manifestation of public accountability is supported not only by the attributes mentioned above, but also by an institutional and legal framework, materialized through a contract with a clear mission (Bălăsoiu, Bacchus, Ildiko, 2007, p. 12). We believe that a way of manifesting public responsibility involves also social responsibility in relation to changes in the political, administrative and economic fields. This type of responsibility has, in its turn, two components: bureaucratic responsibility and civic responsibility. The first component requires the involvement of public authorities through developing and applying the right legislation and acquiring the necessary technological tools for the functioning and organization of the administrative process.

The meaning of civic responsibility converges with the meanings of several philosophical notions, like the notion of citizen (Latin, *civis*), or that of *Citadel* (Latin, *civitas*, with its Greek correspondent *polis*). The concept is based on two fundamental elements which illustrate the indissoluble relationship between authorities and citizens, developed on the basis of the respect for law and the human being. The upraise of civic responsibility today comes to strengthen and re-define each individual's awareness of empowerment as a consequence of his being and acting as a citizen. The citizen behaves as a powerful member of his community capable to carry out his duties and to exercise the rights conferred by that community. Thus, this concept of responsibility is justified, since it refers to the citizens' sense of obligation to defend their personal interests, strongly associated with the authorities' obligation and commitment to maintain the rule of law and to ensure the progress of the community through efficient public policies.

2. Dimensions of responsibility in the management of the national education system

The subject concerning public responsibility is one of the greatest challenges that define a changing society which tries to promote a democratic citizen able to influence the decision-making process and to respond to current social problems. It is understood, that our attention concentrates on a priority area of social life, namely the education system. This system intends to integrate new dimensions: one of them, of crucial importance, is that of positive education. Positive education is known to produce well-being by combining tradition with efficiency modernism, with consequences felt on all areas: economic, social and cultural (Vişan et al, 2018, p. 439). The education system as a priority area of social life, cannot or

should not permit failures (Rus C.M., Cârstea L.M., Petrea G.A. et al, 2018, p. 168). In this way, the administration of education should be performed through a complex set of responsibilities, from now on referred to as accountability cycle.

When we talk about accountability in public education, we take into consideration the administrative-institutional dimension and the societal and economic implications, which are very complex and closely connected. The aim is to prove that education is not only a process of transmission and accumulation of information, but also a responsible creative act, with a positive impact on every being. Through education, every individual becomes able to respond to any challenges, removing any barrier in his or her social evolution. Raising the issue of accountability in education is very important, and there are several arguments to sustain this idea. A good education system is based on public responsibility, influencing the quality and equity of social life.

The administrative institutional system, in its turn, influences very much the education system, as well as the existence and manifestation of the concept of public responsibility, through establishing and maintaining a bureaucratic accountability model and high standards of performance. The bureaucratic model refers to the compliance of the whole system of education with the legislation in force, and with a system of standards of performance which should improve and ensure an optimal education act. The application of a consistent legislation, flexible and coherent (Neacșu, Ioan, Ștefan, Rodica, Stanciu, Filip et al, 1997, p.29) is a mandatory requirement.

The main normative act in the field is the National Education Act no.1/2011 (with subsequent amendments) which requires the exercise of (...) the fundamental right to education throughout life. The main body that ensures the application of this law is the Ministry of Education, and the entire school system is subordinated to it. The law establishes the main rules and principles of the education system and the components of public accountability in education by defining and organizing the necessary framework for the educational policies and strategies. The ministry has an important role in the organization of the entire education system, and establishes which are the priorities at local, county and national levels. One of the main issues still remains the involvement of policymakers and their commitment to ensuring the quality and relevance of the education process within the broader context of the European educational reform.

In this sense, Romania, as a member of the European Union, has made efforts to adapt and adopted the Bologna system of education. At the meeting of education ministers of France, Britain, Italy and Germany, it was stated that all European society requires “a system of higher education to

give young people best opportunities to find their own area of performance". In another European ministerial statement, it was mentioned: „ Higher education should be considered a public good and is and will remain a public responsibility" (Comunicatul întâlnirii miniștrilor europeni, Praga, 2001). Following the decisions taken in the European Union area, the administration system of national education has shifted its approach, stance and decisions, making efforts to apply a reform of the entire education system. One of the directions of this reform is strengthening the relationship between the education system and local administrative authorities. Another direction intends to develop an exercise of responsibility orientated towards an education process that focuses mainly on student as customer, on the quality of education and on the increase of the motivation of beneficiaries.

Measures were also taken to ensure the standardization of jobs, by hiring qualified personnel and by obtaining and improving the material resources (Bălășoiu C. et al, 2007, p.20). A tool for monitoring the process of education is the use of indicators to measure the performance. The main goal is to ensure outstanding results that affect positively the direct beneficiaries of the education system, materialized on their integration on the labor market, but also in the successful acquisition of skills that are later translated into the improvement of the global social system. Better results have been also obtained in the case of youth with low education levels, by developing plans to improve the methods of education applied for this category.

To monitor and evaluate the quality of the education process, specialized commissions have been founded at all educational levels. An important role in this respect has ARACIP and RAQAHE, both public institutions of national interest, functioning under the Ministry of Education and established by the Government Emergency Ordinance no. 75/2005 on quality assurance of pre-university education system approved by Law no. 87/2006. This legislation establishes the following major functions for the evaluation of the education system:

- the external evaluation of the quality of education offered by schools and a complex process of authorization/accreditation /periodical evaluation of schools
- the assessment of the quality of higher education, by ARACIS that is a public institution, created to supervise the accomplishment of various objectives such as preparing students for active citizenship, a future career, gaining of a vast academic knowledge by stimulating research and innovation. Academic quality assurance becomes an institutional framework adapted to the specific process and establish a mechanism for constantly improved academic performance (www.aracis.ro).

- establishing of a specific structure dedicated to the development, design, monitoring and updating of the policies in the field of quality assurance in higher education, based on the following principles: institutional accountability, institutional diversity, cooperation with all components of the education system, focusing on results, institutional identity, internal self-evaluation, external evaluation, quality improvement, institutional transparency (www.edu.ro).

Analyzing the scope and extent of administrative and institutional accountability, we can observe a dual model of manifestation, encompassing: accreditation standards (supported by a legal-administrative framework) and performance standards (aiming at developing a culture of quality in education). Analyzing the bureaucratic model, it can be deduced that the accountability for education has multiple sides: on the one hand, responsibility for education seen as a process of knowledge, and on the other hand, the responsibility for implementing performance standards.

The institutional, societal and economic development dimensions may be analyzed in terms of: professional liability, financial liability, and highlighting the fundamental importance of permanent education deriving from the necessity of a lifelong assimilation of values and best practice models by youth and adults. The complexity of social relations within the family, as an institution, and within society is reflected in education which provides "...a way of being, a way of living, and assuming the rhythm, the size and the content of various forms of change" (Șoitu, 2016, p.7).

Professional liability focuses on human resources' education, the training and professional development, within a holistic approach, starting with the acquisition of a set of individual teaching skills and tools. The acquired knowledge cannot be only theoretical, but has to be practical, and relevant for the development of cooperation amongst the teaching staff. At the same time, it has to foster the emergence of collaborative research, achieving quality and efficiency in teaching, learning and assessment, by shifting the emphasis on acquisition of knowledge to the development of training skills (Visan et al, 2018, p. 206).

We note therefore that the professional liability is acquired through a permanent professional development, which stems from the exercise of art and science together, associated to the wisdom and knowledge of educational contexts (Iucu, 2006, p. 27). Professional liability is reflected in the art of learning to learn, which has a key role in social development, and is linked to a series of hopes regarding human rights, in general, and education in particular (Moroianu Zlătescu, 2017). Professional development is strongly connected with professional liability and promotes permanent training, in agreement with contemporary innovation and other significant discoveries in education, having a direct impact on the educational process

and on learners. Regarded as a professional tool, development of human resources in the education system values the dignity of the human being in defining and redefining the status of the profession of teacher, while providing social and economic cohesion (Visan et al, 2018, p. 211).

As already stated above, professional liability continued to restructure and ensure social relationships effectively directed towards training which meets the market economy requirements and rules. In this respect, our analysis is sustaining the idea of freely choosing the educational institution by each learner according to the vision of the young beneficiary future profession. So are those who deliberately educated young people benefit from educational programs, in relation to the abilities and skills acquired, but also the labor market.

A model in this respect was used in the national education system in the years 1960-1989, implemented through vocational schools or post-secondary vocational training at school and at work. Today, the Romanian educational community tries to revive such educational programs through the development of national educational policies, trying to establish and develop partnerships between the public institution and private companies willing to form their own labor force. Among the most important principles stands the balance which has to exist between labor demand (represented by employers and owners) and offer. This approach guides education towards the final purpose of "social satisfaction" in order to ensure equal opportunities and access without privileges and discrimination at all levels of the national education system.

A final form of liability, as mentioned above is financial liability, that plays a decisive role in valuing and providing other forms of responsibility. Considered by the Ministerial Committee on Education in Bucharest in 2012, a means to overcome any obstacle, education must benefit from public funding through the involvement of policy makers of all European states: "We must secure the highest possible level of public funding of higher education and identify new sources of funding, as investments in our future" (<http://www.ehea.info/>).

Data provided by OECD on the investment in education, shows that there is an increase in the percentage of GDP, from 5.2 in 2000 to 5.9 in 2010, suggesting the importance of investing in education, and the growing manifestation of public accountability on the part of European policymakers. The economic crisis has generated, however, austerity measures in most EU states, the GDP allocated to education was subject to a downward trend, falling to 5.5 average allocated in 2009 to 5.3 in 2011 according to Eurostat data. Thus, Romania spent for 2010 - 3.4% of GDP and in 2011 - 4.4% of GDP (www.oecd.org/education/EAG-Interim-report.pdf).

In the context of preventing a new economic crisis, the European Commission launched the document Strategy 2020, which presented the role and importance of education. According to this document, a priority should be to support the EU's economic growth potential and social sustainability: budgetary consolidation programs should prioritize growth-enhancing items "such as education and skills, research, development and innovation (...)" (https://adrvest.ro/attach_files/O%20Uniune%20a%20Inovarii.pdf).

Education is considered a national priority of public responsibility, according to art. 222, paragraph (3) of the National Education Law no.1 / 2011. Romania, as a EU member state, has adopted the international provisions on public funding, but it failed to apply them in a satisfactory manner. However, Art. (8) of this law states that education funding is supported by the state budget and own resources, to ensure the quality of education, according to the European principles and standards in this domain. In the National Pact for Education, a document that defines eight priority objectives for education in Romania for a period of five years (2008-2013), was inscribed the decision to allocate at least 6% of GDP to less than 1% for education and research, (Figure 1).

Data on the percentage of GDP allocation

Year	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Level of GPD	4,2%	4,24%	3,53%	4,13%	3,5%

(<http://www.cdep.ro/pdfs/ModernizareEducatie.pdf>)

From studies conducted by specialists (in order to analyze the process of decision and policy-making), it was found, paradoxically, that investment in education has become more important just by promoting unrealistic promises of state actors. Even though, there has been an upward trend from 2001 to 2008, this trend has changed lately and has gone downward. Financial strategies for education are poorly conceived and implemented, which has a strong negative impact on economy market and of course on the entire society. Such an attitude of policymakers towards financial responsibility in education, causes regress and inefficiency, and fails to recognize and promote education as a viable long-term investment (Figure 2).

Data on the percentage of GDP allocation

Year	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Level of GPD	2,5%	3,2%	2,7%	3%	3,1%

(<http://www.cdep.ro/pdfs/ModernizareEducatie.pdf>)

Lack of finances for education has negative effects both at undergraduate and university levels, as shown in the following analysis:

Undergraduate education	University education
-lack of investment in technology, material resources, training of teachers; - quality of educational services decreases by a lack of staff that is poorly paid; -inefficiency in performing education; -deficiencies in the professionalization of human resources in line with labor market diversification; - the dropout rate increases; -decrease of the number of high school graduates; -minimum counseling and vocational guidance.	- increase tuition fees and lower budgeted school places; - schooling deficit created by subtracting the number of students paying taxes; - insufficient employee number of students; - understaffed well qualified because of poor salaries; - increasing the dormitory fee -diminishing investment in dormitories and canteens -barriers on access, crossing and graduation; -disadvantaged groups are underrepresented due to financial barriers.

Given the analysis carried out on the responsibility of financing, we believe that current policies are deficient. The entire social system should be aware of the usefulness of the Romanian education system and understand that education reflects the progress of society. Its urgent needs can only be addressed by prompt, imperative action and by adopting coherent strategies aimed at meeting the goals of the EU 2020 Strategy, but also appropriate to Romanian social system.

3. National education system, a service of public interest

The concept of public service has taken root in a democratic society in ancient times, a general utility of the "common good" (a concept found in Aristotle's philosophical work) treated as an activity of public administration, which has ideological and political dimensions. Towards the

end of the nineteenth century we find another approach illustrated by the commitment of the State to take responsibility for the collective needs of the public, to meet the ideal of social solidarity (Jacqueline Morand-Deville, 1994).

Used in very diverse fields, the notion of public service is replete with multiple meanings that overlap and intersect and determine its place in the debate on the construction of the European Union'' (Dâmbu, 2002, p.52). In Romania, according to article 10, paragraph (1) of National Education Law no.1 /2011, education is a public service that is organized and functions according to the juridical regime established by this law. The education process may be carried out in the Romanian language, which is the official language, but also in minority languages, as well as international languages. Analyzing the legal framework elaborated to regulate the „public service - serviciu public'' in Romania, we consider that education is a public service understood as a three-dimensional construction, representing at the same time a social entity, a juridical entity with a legal status and an operator.

Public service as a social entity covers various activities of formal, non-formal and school structures, placed under the coordination of central public administration, and other public communities. Public service as a legal entity, involves the application of specific rules and derogations from the common law; condense and summarize what means particularity of administrative law (Chevallier, 1994, p.3). Its regime is established mainly by the National Education Law no.1/2011, other legislative acts, government's decisions and ordinances and orders of the ministers.

Public service as operator calls attention to the ideal of ensuring the common good, through effective management of the educational process, to ensure the training of the younger generation, as an end product of a joint endeavor of all stakeholders. Here there is an interesting element that emphasizes the idea of collective responsibility for the education system in providing the educational ideal. In the French doctrine, the concept of civil service is 'traditionally associated with the idea of a strong state tradition (État is always capitalised) and the concept of service public encompassing an extensive number of public activities (from sovereign functions to industrial and commercial public services) (Bezes, Jeannot, 2011, p.1). In a formal sense, education as a public service was characterized as an organization, a company ran by directors (Vedel, Petrescu, 2001, p.11). In the material sense, public service was considered as any activity which aimed at satisfying a public interest (Vedel, Petrescu, 2001, p.11), but in the case of education this public interest is of great value. This interest includes the full and harmonious development of the human individuality through acquisition of a system of values necessary for personal fulfillment, for the active participation in society and for social inclusion in the labor market.

Another important observation concerns the organization and management of education by private institutions or organizations. This has generated debates and disagreements on the coexistence of private education institutions, as well as on the stage or level of the education (initial and/or continuous training, primary, secondary or higher). In the Romanian scientific literature, the notion of public service is defined as any activity carried out by public authorities to satisfy a need of general interest and that it is so important it should function regularly and continuously (Negulescu, 1994, p.320).

Thus, it may be stated that the concept of public service has two meanings: the first meaning is that of a body (body with structure and legal framework) and the second meaning is that of activity (Lilac, 1994). A good example in this sense, is the Ministry of Education that functions as a body of central public administration, subordinated to the Government (cf. Article 116, paragraph (1) of the Constitution of Romania, republished). It is organized and operates on the basis of the legal provisions of article 40, paragraph (1) of the Law no.90/2001 (on the organization and functioning of the Romanian Government and ministries, as amended and supplemented), of Government Decision No. 44/2016 (on the organization and functioning of the Ministry of National Education and Research). The Ministry is the organizer of the national system of education and supports training for all citizens, to ensure their inclusion on the labor market and develop the competitiveness of national economy and the entire society. The Ministry of Education ensures the execution of government's policies and programs in education, guaranteeing the right to education, training, research and scientific innovation to all Romanian citizens. To achieve these objectives, the ministry fulfills several functions, according to art. 4 of HGnr.44 /2016, namely:

- strategy function, by which it implements the government's program in the field of education;
- function of management, which ensures the implementation of educational policies as well as allocating, monitoring and assessment of resources;
- function of representation, as state authority on behalf of Government which performs activities of monitoring and control of the compliance with the rules applied in the area of the educational process;
- function of communication with other structures at the central and local level of government and civil society;
- function of international cooperation which ensures international agreements in its areas of activity as well as promoting new agreements;
- function of evaluation, coordination and supervision of the implementation of policies in education

-function of regulation and synthesis, which ensures the development of the normative and methodological, functional, operational, institutional and financial framework necessary to achieve strategic objectives in its areas of activity.

In as far as the second meaning of public service is concerned, namely 'public service as an activity', this second sense is closely linked to the idea of general interest. It is important to point out that public authorities are those to decide when and in what way they will satisfy this interest (Dâmbu, p. 59). Mention must be made of the conditions that must be fulfilled cumulatively for the existence of a public service, namely: a body founded by the state, county or another organization to meet the requirements of members of society, through acts of authority; its activity unfolds in realization of state authority; it is invested with responsibilities, powers and competencies to meet public/general interests; it is a legal entity with rights and obligations, and their financial means are either provided through budget support, or from its own funds (V. Investigation Center, 1993).

A preliminary conclusion highlights the importance of considering the educational system as a service of public interest given its fundamental role in the progress of society.

4. Conclusions

The study is meant to pave the way to a pragmatic analysis of the concept of public accountability in the national education system, which may lead to new directions of research in the field. The main objective of this article was to call attention to the importance of values and principles like responsibility and common/public interest that have to be integrated and applied in the national educational system of Romania.

Noting that the development of Romanian society can be achieved only through the support of a culture of quality in education, our study also intended to emphasize the importance of the process of learning throughout life, also known as "lifelong learning". Our main concern regards the very low level of investment in education existing in our country, seriously affected by the economic crisis of 2008.

Being a very complex concept, public accountability stresses important connections between citizens' involvement and participation in the decision-making process and, for instance, strategies and legal norms that increase their motivation and creates means that ensure their involvement.

In this respect we need collective and lasting determination, to ensure the preservation of cultural identity, fundamental human values requiring information storage, greater and better communication and regular

assessment of skills. Implementing a quality national education system will have beneficial consequences for the whole society and will secure the future for the generations to come.

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