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STRUCTURAL TRANSFORMATIONS OF THE EDUCATION SYSTEM IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA IN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBAL EDUCATIONAL TRENDS

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The paper analyses the role of education as an economic determinant of sustainable development, based on statistical data on the education system of the Republic of Moldova for the period 2004 - 2023. The study highlights structural transformations driven by demographic, economic, and institutional factors, correlated with the gradual alignment to the standards of the European Education Area. Grounded in the concepts of the economics of education and human capital theory, the research demonstrates the multiplicative effects of educational investments on productivity and social inclusion. The international comparative analysis reveals differences in educational efficiency and governance. The results indicate progress in access to early and vocational education but also persistent challenges related to quality and economic relevance. The conclusion emphasizes the need for an integrated educational policy aimed at developing competitive and digital human capital, essential for sustainable development and European integration.
Keywords: *education; human capital; sustainable development; economic competitiveness; educational policies.*

TRANSFORMĂRILE STRUCTURALE ALE SISTEMULUI DE ÎNVĂȚĂMÂNT DIN REPUBLICA MOLDOVA ÎN CONTEXTUL TENDINȚELOR EDUCAȚIONALE GLOBALE

Lucrarea analizează rolul educației ca determinant economic al dezvoltării durabile, pe baza datelor statistice privind sistemul de învățământ al Republicii Moldova în perioada 2004-2023. Studiul evidențiază transformările structurale generate de factori demografici, economici și instituționali, corelate cu alinierea la standardele Spațiului European al Educației. Fundamentată pe conceptele economiei educației și ale capitalului uman, cercetarea demonstrează efectele multiplicative ale investițiilor în educație asupra productivității și incluziunii sociale. Analiza comparativă internațională evidențiază diferențele de eficiență și guvernanță educațională. Rezultatele indică progrese în accesul la educație timpurie și profesională, dar și provocări privind calitatea și relevanța economică. Concluzia subliniază necesitatea unei politici educaționale integrate, orientate spre formarea capitalului uman competitiv și digital, esențial pentru dezvoltarea durabilă și integrarea europeană.
Cuvinte-cheie: *educație, capital uman; dezvoltare durabilă; competitivitate economică; politici educaționale.*

Introduction

In the knowledge-based economy of the twenty-first century, education is no longer perceived merely as a social process of transmitting information, but rather as a strategic factor of sustainable economic development. The population's level of education, the quality of human capital, and the adaptability of the educational system to labour market demands have become fundamental pillars of a nation's competitiveness [1, 2]. In this context, the evaluation of the education system is fundamentally connected to the economic analysis of a nation, owing to a profound structural interdependence between the two domains: investments in education directly influence labor productivity, innovation capacity, and social cohesion, while, conversely, economic performance determines the quality and accessibility of education.

From 2004 to 2023, the economy and education system of the Republic of Moldova changed a lot. This took a long time, and it got harder as the population grew. There are a lot fewer schools now because there aren't as many kids who are old enough to go to school, people are moving away, and the education system is always short on money [4]. According to the National Bureau of Statistics, there are a lot fewer schools now than there were 20 years ago, especially at the basic, secondary, and university levels. This is because there are fewer people and improvements that help institutions work better [5]. These changes show that

the education system is changing from being enormous but not particularly useful to being smaller, more useful, and more adapted to the needs of society and the economy.

This restructuring of the education system should not just be seen as a response to the population problem, but also as an important part of a larger effort to modernize institutions as a whole. Moldovan officials have also asked for changes that would bring the country up to European standards, make education more digital, and improve the quality of professional training. This strategy for reform includes changes to the curriculum, making the vocational education and training system better, and making colleges and universities stronger. also, there is also dispute about how beneficial spending on education is for the economy, especially when it comes to whether the system can teach skills that are useful in an economy that is driven by innovation and technology [2].

In a worldwide environment characterized by competition for skilled human resources, the comparative analysis of educational systems has emerged as a crucial approach for identifying best practices and establishing national strategic objectives [6-8]. Germany, the UK, France, the US, Japan, and China all have various ways of teaching that can help us see how education can help the economy flourish. Germany, for example, offers a unique dual system that combines classroom instruction with work in businesses. This makes it easier for young people to find work. The UK and the US want schools to be flexible and focus on how well students do, whereas Japan and China want schools to be rigid, fair, and good with technology.

On the other hand, the education system in the Republic of Moldova has its own problems. These include differences across cities and villages, unequal access to modern infrastructure, differences in the quality of human resources, and a continual gap between what graduates can accomplish and what businesses need. These difficulties cannot be examined in isolation; they must be contextualized within the broader economic framework, characterized by an emerging economy dominated by traditional sectors and a significant reliance on external remittances.

Within this framework, education represents not only a domain of social policy but a true economic investment. According to the human capital theory formulated by economists Gary S. Becker and Theodore W. Schultz, educational attainment increases individual productivity and adds value at the macroeconomic level. Therefore, understanding the role of education in the development of the Republic of Moldova requires analysing the relationship between the structure of the educational system and economic performance, between training policies and labour market demands, as well as between invested resources and the outcomes achieved [9-11].

Moreover, the process of European integration requires the Republic of Moldova to align its educational standards with those of the European Education Area, which promotes the principles of quality, equity, and academic mobility [12]. Consequently, the present research aims not only to evaluate internal transformations but also to assess the compatibility of the Moldovan educational model with global trends. An essential aspect of this analysis is the identification of imbalances between the economic efficiency of the system and the objectives of social sustainability, as education remains a decisive factor in fostering inclusion, social cohesion, poverty reduction, and the formation of a competitive labour force.

Materials and methods

The empirical basis of this research consists of official statistical data provided by the National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova (NBS) for the period 2004 - 2023, supplemented by reports and documents issued by the Ministry of Education and Research, UNESCO, OECD, and Eurostat. The information reflects the educational situation at the beginning of each academic year, excluding data from the districts located east of the Dniester River and from the municipality of Bender. The main indicators analysed include the number of educational institutions by category, the percentage dynamics of structural changes, the urban - rural distribution, the student - teacher ratio, and several educational performance indicators.

To complement the quantitative dimension, qualitative data were also used, derived from educational legislation, national strategic documents, and comparative studies on educational models from Germany, the United Kingdom, France, the United States, Japan, and China.

From a methodological perspective, the study relies on an integrated set of methods: the analytical - sta-

tistical method, used for time series analysis, percentage calculations, and interpretation of structural trends; the international comparative method, applied to examine differences and similarities among educational models, governance structures, and education - labour market correlations; the deductive and theoretical synthesis method, grounded in human capital theory [9,10] and the economics of education, to explain the relationship between educational investments and economic growth and the graphical and tabular method, employed for visual representation and comparative interpretation of the results.

The general methodological framework is based on the principles of systemic analysis, treating education as a central element of both economic and social development. Institutional changes within the educational network were interpreted through their impact on productivity, employment, and competitiveness. The international comparative analysis made it possible to identify effective models of educational policy - decentralized systems (Germany, the USA), oriented toward economic efficiency, and centralized systems (France, Japan, China), focused on coherence and quality.

Among the limitations of the study are the use of aggregated national data and the absence of detailed economic indicators (such as public expenditure per student or employment insertion rates). Nevertheless, the combination of quantitative statistical analysis and qualitative document analysis provides a solid foundation for drawing relevant and scientifically substantiated conclusions regarding the efficiency and sustainability of the educational system in the Republic of Moldova.

Results and discussions

The education system of the Republic of Moldova represents a coherent framework of interrelated levels and educational cycles designed to ensure the continuous development of the individual throughout life [13-15]. Its organization is regulated in accordance with the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) [16], which enables the compatibility of national study programs with European and international educational frameworks.

Each educational level contributes to the development of cognitive, professional, and civic competencies, reflecting the strategic objectives of the national education system - accessibility, quality, relevance, and efficiency.The transition from one level to another is conceived as a progressive process, providing opportunities for educational mobility and professional integration in line with labour market requirements and the principles of lifelong learning.

The structure presented below highlights the main levels and cycles of the educational system in the Republic of Moldova, ranging from early childhood education to doctoral studies, and describes for each level its purpose, duration, and formative orientation.

Table 1. Structure of the Education System in the Republic of Moldova According to ISCED-2011

ISCED Level	Level Name	Cycle of Studies / Program Name	General Description and Objectives
Level 0	Early Childhood Education	Kindergarten/Nursery	Intended for children aged 3–6/7 years. Ensures physical, cognitive, and socio-emotional development and prepares them for school.
Level 1	Primary Education	Grades I–IV	Represents the foundation for literacy, numeracy, and basic social and civic skills. Duration: 4 years, for children aged 6–10.
Level 2	Lower Secondary Education – Cycle I	Gymnasium Education (Grades V–IX)	Continues the general education process, developing core academic competencies, critical thinking, and early career orientation.
Level 3	Upper Secondary Education – Cycle II	a) Lyceum Education (Grades X–XII) b) Secondary Technical and Vocational Education	Lyceum provides theoretical profiles (real, humanistic, artistic, technological). Vocational technical education focuses on developing practical skills and basic qualifications.

Level 4	Post-Secondary Technical and Vocational Education	Colleges and Post-Secondary Professional Schools	Provides advanced technical and vocational training. Graduates obtain qualifications for technician and mid-level specialist positions.
Level 5	Post-Secondary Non-Tertiary Technical and Vocational Education	Complementary Training Programs	Intermediate programs between vocational and higher education, aimed at applied specializations.
Level 6	Higher Education – Cycle I	Bachelor's Degree Studies	Duration: 3–4 years. Objective: to develop professional competencies and obtain a bachelor's degree in various fields (sciences, economics, medicine, etc.).
Level 7	Higher Education – Cycle II	Master's Degree Studies	Duration: 1–2 years. Ensures deepening of knowledge and development of analytical and advanced research skills in a specialized field.
Level 8	Higher Education – Cycle III	Doctoral Studies	Duration: 3–4 years. Focused on scientific research and innovation. Confers the academic title of "Doctor."

Source: *Elaborated by the authors based on* [16]

According to the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED-2011), the Republic of Moldova's educational system is organized in a way that makes sense, is progressive, and is consistent with other European educational systems. From early childhood education to higher education, the level hierarchy guarantees the development of human capital and the continuation of the learning process while offering real chances for professional and educational mobility.

The presented structure highlights a phased and integrated approach to education, where each level serves a specific formative purpose. Early childhood education supports the development of cognitive and socio-emotional abilities; primary and lower secondary education lay the foundations of essential competencies; and upper secondary education prepares young people either for transition to higher education or for integration into the labour market.

In order to meet the demands of a knowledge-based economy, technical vocational and higher education are crucial components in the development of professional and scientific competencies. The three cycles of higher education - bachelor's, master's, and doctoral studies - improve compatibility with the European Higher Education Area and make it easier for degrees to be recognized internationally.

At the same time, the existence of adult education and lifelong learning programs demonstrates the system's orientation toward the principle of „learning throughout life", serving as an essential tool for adaptation to socio-economic and technological changes.

Overall, the educational structure of the Republic of Moldova reflects a balance between tradition and modernization, between domestic development needs and European integration processes. It provides the institutional foundation necessary for building a competitive human capital, capable of contributing to economic growth, innovation, and social sustainability.

Technical vocational and higher education are important for developing professional and scientific skills that are needed in a knowledge-based economy. The three levels of higher education - bachelor's, master's, and doctoral - make it simpler for degrees to be recognized around the world and make it easier for people to study in the European Higher Education Area. Official data provided by the National Bureau of Statistics enable a detailed analysis by category of institutions: early childhood education institutions (ET); primary and general secondary education institutions (PSG); secondary technical and vocational education institutions (PTS); post-secondary technical and vocational education institutions (PTPs); higher education institutions (SP).

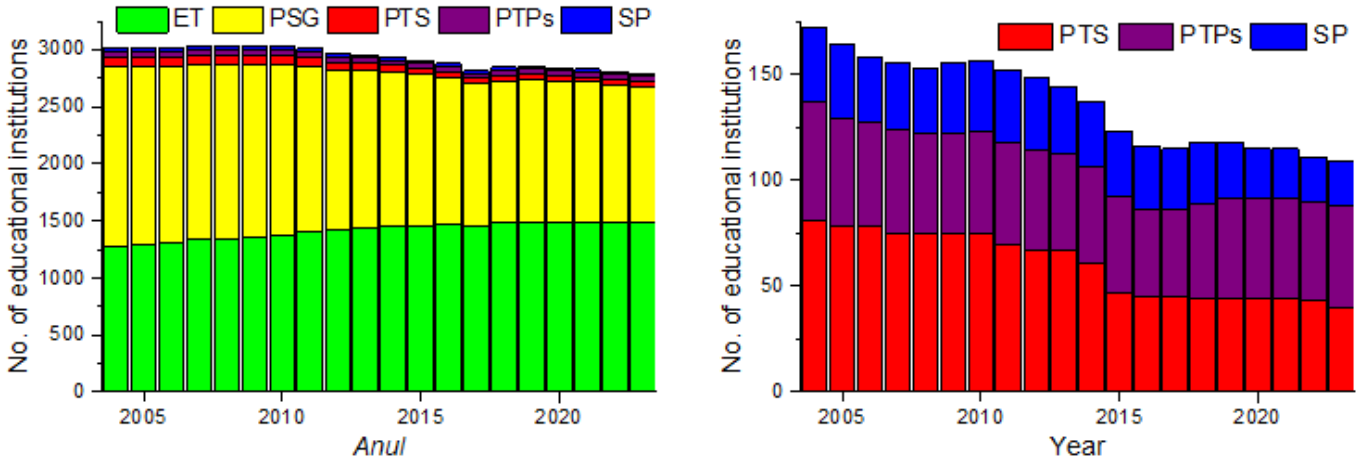

Fig. 1. Evolution of the number of educational institutions in the Republic of Moldova during the Period 2004 - 2023, as of September 1

Source: *Elaborated by the author based on NBS* [5].

The evolution of the total number of educational institutions in the Republic of Moldova during the period 2004-2023 (Fig. 1) reveals a general downward trend, reflecting a deep structural rationalization of the educational network. The reduction in the number of primary, lower secondary, and higher education institutions is correlated with demographic decline, external migration, and the institutional optimization policies promoted by the national authorities. In contrast, the early childhood education sector has experienced moderate yet steady growth, resulting from increased investment in preschool infrastructure and the prioritization of early childhood inclusion.

Overall, a transition can be observed from an extensive but inefficient educational system to a more concentrated and adaptable one, aligned with current societal and economic needs. This structural transformation reflects, on the one hand, the negative impact of demographic decline and migration, and on the other, the positive effects of modernization efforts, institutional optimization, and alignment with European quality standards in education.

The recent evolution of the Moldovan education system during 2019-2023 indicates a phase of numerical stabilization of educational institutions and the consolidation of structural reforms initiated in previous years. The analysis highlights current trends across all educational cycles, providing a comparative perspective on development directions, institutional adaptation processes, and the impact of demographic changes on the structure of the school and university network.

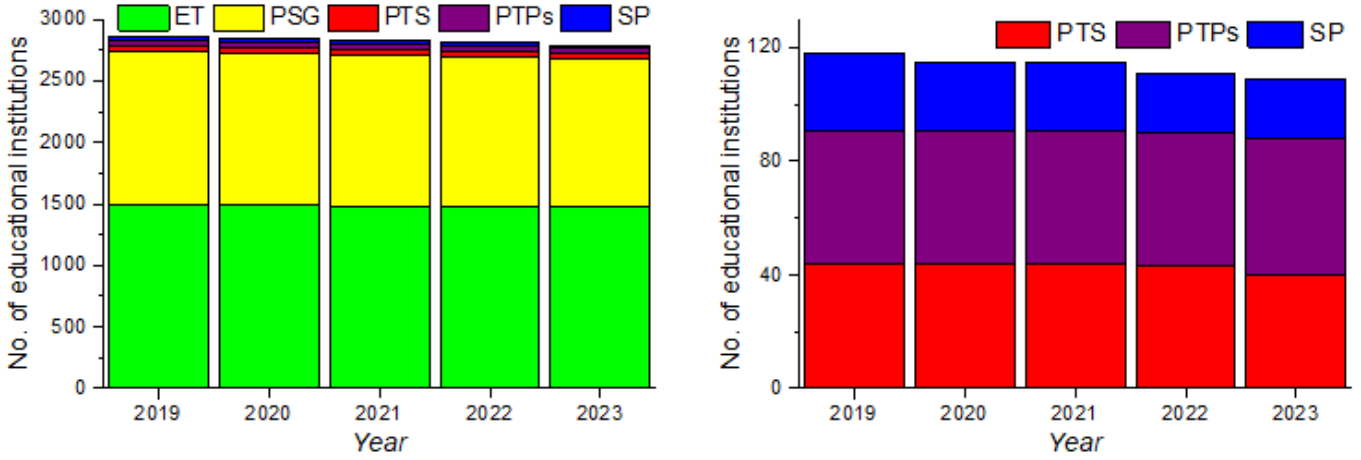

Fig. 2. Evolution of the number of educational institutions in the Republic of Moldova during the Period 2019-2023, as of September 1

Source: *Elaborated by the author based on NBS* [5]

The recent dynamics of the education system in the Republic of Moldova during the period 2019-2023 highlight a gradual stabilization of the institutional network, following an extended process of restructuring and optimization. During this period, the number of early childhood education institutions has remained almost constant, reflecting the sustainability of investments in preschool infrastructure. In contrast, primary and general secondary education institutions continue to experience a slight decline, which mirrors the persistence of negative demographic factors and the ongoing internal and external migration of young families.

In the case of technical and vocational education, a slight increase observed in 2023 indicates the beginning of a revitalization process in vocational training, correlated with the growing demand for technical skills in the labour market. Higher education, however, continues to follow a downward trend, influenced by student migration and university consolidation reforms.

Overall, the analysed data confirm a state of dynamic equilibrium within the system, where numerical stabilization coexists with qualitative transformations aimed at efficiency, economic relevance, and adaptation to European educational trends.

Table 2. Comparative analysis of changes in the number of educational institutions during the period 2004-2023

Type of institution	Number of institutions by academic year			Percentage change in the number of institutions			General observations for the period 2004–2023
	2004/ 2005	2019/ 2020	2023/ 2024	2004/05 2019/20	2019/20 2023/24	2004/05 2023/24	
Early childhood education	1269	1486	1479	+17,10	-0,47	+16,55	Moderate and steady growth, with a slight decline during the period 2019–2023.
Primary and General Secon-dary Education	1577	1255	1201	-20,42	-4,30	-23,84	Significant decrease, particularly in rural areas.
Secondary technical vocational education	81	44	40	-45,68	-9,09	-50,62	Major decline, due to institutional restructuring and mergers.
Post-secondary technical vocational education	56	47	48	-16,07	+2,13	-14,29	Notable decrease, with a slight increase during 2019–2023
Higher education	35	27	21	-22,86	-22,22	-40,00	Sharp decline, influenced by reforms and external migration.
Total institutions	3018	2859	2789	-5,27	-2,45	-7,59	Overall reduction is relatively modest, but accompanied by significant redistributions between levels.

Source: *Elaborated by the author based on NBS* [5]

The structural evolution of the network of educational institutions in the Republic of Moldova over the past two decades reveals significant percentage changes across the main educational cycles. The system’s dynamics are uneven, characterized by moderate growth in early childhood education and a pronounced decline in technical vocational and higher education. These transformations reflect the cumulative impact of demographic decline, migration, and structural reforms aimed at resource efficiency, quality improvement, and the adaptation of institutions to new socio-economic realities.

The evolutionary trends can be further analysed graphically, based on the percentage changes in the number of educational institutions recorded between 2004 and 2023, in order to more clearly highlight the directions of growth and decline across different educational levels. This visual representation facilitates the comparative interpretation of institutional dynamics and enables their correlation with the demographic, economic, and policy factors that have shaped the development of the education system. Thus, the graphical

analysis provides an integrated perspective on the process of structural transformation within the educational network of the Republic of Moldova.

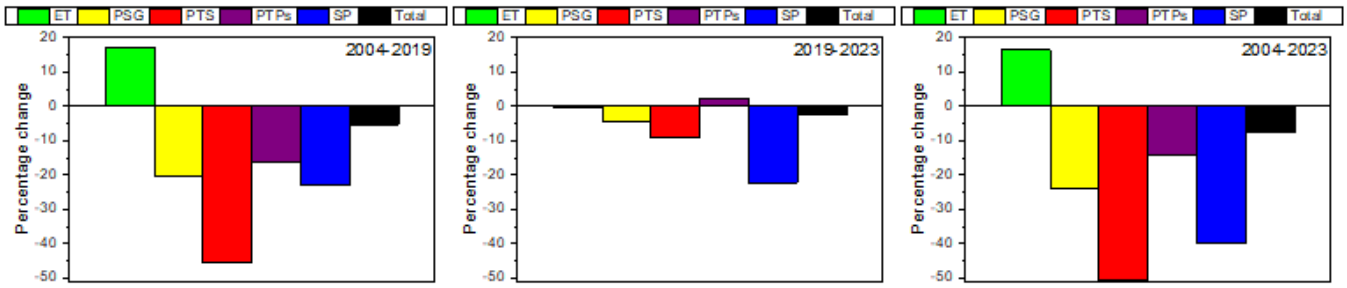

Fig. 3. Percentage change in the number of educational institutions during the period 2004–2023
Source: *Elaborated by the author based on the data from Table 2.*

The comparative analysis of changes in the number of educational institutions in the Republic of Moldova during the period 2004-2023 reveals significant structural transformations, closely correlated with demographic dynamics, educational reforms, and institutional rationalization processes.

First, early childhood education experienced moderate and steady growth, reflecting the expansion of access to kindergartens and nurseries, particularly in rural areas. This positive evolution (+16.55%) confirms the focus of educational policies on the inclusion of young children and the expansion of preschool infrastructure, even though the period 2019–2023 recorded a slight stagnation.

In contrast, primary and general secondary education underwent a sharp decline (−23.84%), driven by demographic decline and youth migration. The process of merging small schools and reorganizing the educational network aimed to optimize costs and adapt to the shrinking student population, especially in rural localities.

For secondary technical vocational education, data show a drastic reduction (−50.62%), associated with structural reforms, college mergers, and a declining demand for traditional vocational training. However, in the post-secondary vocational segment, the decline was less pronounced (−14.29%), followed by a slight recovery after 2019 (+2.13%), suggesting a gradual adaptation to labor market requirements and a reorientation of young people toward applied specializations.

In higher education, things are even more complicated. The number of schools dropped by 40%, especially after 2010. This drop is due to both students moving to other schools and the university consolidation reforms that were meant to improve quality and efficiency.

Over the course of two decades, the total number of schools and colleges dropped by about 7.6%. This shows that the education system was being rationalized in a controlled way. This cut isn't a sign of a decline; it's a planned response to the Republic of Moldova's social, demographic, and economic realities. The redistribution of institutions across different levels of education and the trends toward modernization show that the system is moving from being large but ineffective to one that is more focused on quality, fairness, and sustainability.

It is very important to compare the education systems of the Republic of Moldova with those of countries with strong educational traditions, such as Germany, the UK, France, the US, Japan, and China. This will help us understand how educational policies can help people develop their skills and make the economy more competitive. The Republic of Moldova must make the most of relevant international experiences by adapting successful models to its own social and economic situation. This kind of comparison helps us find the best ways to improve the quality, fairness, and long-term viability of the national education system.

The educational systems of different countries, such as the Republic of Moldova, Germany, the United Kingdom, France, the United States, Japan, and China, exhibit significant structural and functional diversity, each shaped by specific historical, cultural, economic, and political factors. The comparative study of these models provides a comprehensive perspective on how each country organizes its educational process, establishing distinct priorities regarding access, quality, and educational outcomes. This analysis highlights the main structural, methodological, and managerial features, emphasizing the strengths, challenges, and development directions of each education system.

Table 3. Comparison of the educational systems of the Republic of Moldova and other countries

Country	Structure of the educational system	Type of governance	Evaluation system	Strengths	Main challenges
Republic of Moldova	Early childhood, primary, lower secondary, upper secondary, higher education, and adult learning	Centralized (Ministry of Education and Research)	National examinations; Baccalaureate required for university admission	Universal accessibility; ongoing curricular reforms	Regional inequalities; limited resources in rural areas
Germany	Preschool, primary, lower and upper secondary, dual vocational education, higher education	Decentralized (16 federal states)	Continuous assessment; *Abitur* at the end of secondary education	High-performing dual system; strong labor market integration	Differences among federal states; unequal access to higher education
United Kingdom	Early childhood, primary, secondary (lower and upper), higher education	Decentralized (England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland)	GCSE and A-Level examinations	Flexible curriculum; world-renowned higher education	Regional disparities; high university tuition fees
France	Early childhood, primary, lower and upper secondary, higher education	Centralized (Ministry of National Education)	National examinations; Baccalaureate	Unified curriculum; high quality standards	Over-centralization; high academic pressure
United States	Early childhood, primary, lower and upper secondary, higher education (colleges and universities)	Decentralized (state and local autonomy)	SAT and ACT examinations; internal assessments	Curricular flexibility; educational diversity	Unequal funding; disparities in access to quality education
Japan	Early childhood, primary, lower and upper secondary, higher education	Centralized (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology – MEXT)	National examinations; periodic testing	Academic discipline and excellence; strong moral values	Educational stress; excessive competitiveness
China	Early childhood, primary (6 years), lower secondary (3 years), upper secondary (3 years), higher education	Centralized (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China)	National examinations; *Gaokao* for university admission	High academic performance; merit-based system	Excessive student pressure; pronounced urban–rural disparities

Source: *Elaborated by the authors*

In the Republic of Moldova, the educational system is structured into six levels: early childhood education, primary, lower secondary, upper secondary, higher education, and adult education. Education is compulsory until the completion of lower secondary school, while higher education is offered by universities,

academies, and specialized institutions. Although education is universal and accessible, regional disparities persist, alongside challenges related to financial resources and rural infrastructure. The system is centrally coordinated by the Ministry of Education and Research, which establishes educational policies, while district and municipal education departments implement measures locally under the supervision of school inspectorates.

In Germany, the education system is characterized by a decentralized organization and a clearly defined structure across levels. After preschool education (*Kindergarten*), pupils attend primary school (*Grundschule*), after which, based on performance, they may continue at *Hauptschule*, *Realschule*, or *Gymnasium*. A distinctive feature of the German system is its dual vocational education, which combines theoretical instruction at school with practical training in enterprises. This approach facilitates the rapid integration of young people into the labour market. General coordination is ensured by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF), but each federal state (*Land*) has its own ministry of education, responsible for the implementation of policies and the evaluation of school performance.

In the United Kingdom, education is divided into four stages: early childhood, primary, secondary, and higher education. Although preschool education is not mandatory, participation in nursery programs is almost universal. Secondary education is divided into middle school and high school, with A-Level examinations at the end of upper secondary school serving as the main criterion for admission to elite universities. The British education system is decentralized, with administrative autonomy granted to England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. The Department for Education (DfE) coordinates general policy, while Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education) monitors school quality through regular inspections.

The French school system is very centralized and has strict rules. It includes preschool (école maternelle), primary school, lower and upper secondary school, and college. Children must go to school until they are 16 years old, and all schools must teach the same things. The last step in upper secondary school is the Baccalauréat exam, which is needed to get into college. The Ministry of National Education makes all the rules for schools, and academic rectorates are in charge of making sure those rules are followed at the regional level.

There isn't a lot of central control over the education system in the United States (USA). Every state can set up and run its own schools. Most kids start school when they are three years old and stay in school until they are 18. Then they go to college or university. The American system is different because it has flexible curricula and lots of different ways to learn. This lets students follow their own interests and get better at making friends. But there are still big differences in how easy it is for people to get a good education, mostly because of how much money the communities have. The U.S. Department of Education is in charge of planning and paying for big projects at the federal level. On the other hand, local schools are run by state education departments.

Japan's education system is strict, centralized, and based on performance. It covers preschool, elementary school, middle school, high school, and college. The system puts a lot of pressure on students to be disciplined, do well in school, and build their character. There is always testing going on, and the national university entrance exams are very hard to pass. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) sets national standards for education and makes sure that regional education offices follow them.

In China, the education system is highly centralized and hierarchical, grounded in the meritocratic principle of academic performance. Its structure includes early childhood education, primary education (6 years), lower secondary (3 years), upper secondary (3 years), and higher education. The Gaokao examination is the central element of the evaluation system and determines university admission, decisively shaping students' professional trajectories. The Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China defines national policies and standards, while provincial education bureaus oversee their implementation and monitoring.

The educational curriculum reflects the philosophy and objectives of each national system. In the Republic of Moldova, the curriculum is centralized, comprising mandatory subjects for all educational levels, while assessment is carried out through periodic examinations and the Baccalaureate exam, which is the most important requirement for getting into college. In Germany, both ongoing evaluations and final exams are used to grade students. Students get the Abitur diploma at the end of high school, which lets them go to college. The dual education system makes sure that people are always being tested on their job skills at work.

The UK uses standardized tests like the GCSE at the end of lower secondary school and the A-Levels at the end of upper secondary school to decide who can go to the best universities. The curriculum is flexible, so it can be changed to meet the needs and interests of each student. Everyone in France has to take the same strict test. The national Baccalaureate is the last test. It is hard and shows how well someone can think in theory and how well they do in school.

In the United States, assessment is diverse, with standardized tests such as the SAT and ACT used for university admission. The focus is placed on the development of critical, social, and creative skills rather than rote memorization. In Japan, evaluation is highly competitive, and performance in university entrance examinations plays a decisive role in determining one's future professional trajectory. In China, the evaluation system is centered on rigorous national examinations, among which the Gaokao holds decisive importance. Continuous assessment of students supports a culture of performance and academic competitiveness.

The comparative analysis highlights two major models of educational governance: centralized systems (France, Japan, China, Republic of Moldova) and decentralized systems (Germany, the United Kingdom, the United States). Centralized models ensure unity, coherence, and quality control, whereas decentralized models provide flexibility, local autonomy, and adaptability to labor market demands.

The main goal of all of these systems is to make the workforce more flexible and competitive. But they do it in different ways. Countries with strong economies always put money into new ways of teaching, going digital, and training teachers. The Republic of Moldova, on the other hand, is slowly coming together by adapting useful parts of international models to its own social and economic situation.

The Republic of Moldova can learn a lot from what other countries have done to make their schools better. These experiences can help the country get closer to an education system that is fair, competitive, and based on skills, which is what a knowledge-based economy needs.

Conclusions

The analysis of the structural transformations within the educational system of the Republic of Moldova during the period 2004 - 2023 highlights a profound transition from an extensive model, based on institutional expansion and volume, toward a more compact system oriented toward quality, efficiency, and economic relevance. The observed developments reflect the gradual adaptation of national education to the requirements of a market economy, demographic pressures, and the standards of the European Education Area.

Structurally, the reduction in the number of educational institutions, particularly at the primary, lower secondary, and higher education levels, has been determined by the decline in the school-age population, external migration, and institutional modernization reforms. At the same time, the early childhood education sector has experienced steady growth, confirming the consolidation of inclusion policies and universal access to preschool education. The technical and vocational education sector is showing signs of revitalization, driven by the alignment of educational offerings with labor market needs, while the university system is undergoing restructuring aimed at optimizing resources and improving the quality of study programs.

A comparison between the Moldovan educational system and international models – Germany, the United Kingdom, France, the United States, Japan, and China – confirms that the Republic of Moldova is in a phase of gradual convergence toward European best practices. However, disparities persist in areas such as equity, infrastructure quality, digital competence, and the alignment of vocational training with the real economy. Centralized models (France, Japan, China) demonstrate the importance of coherence and uniform regulation, while decentralized models (Germany, the USA, the UK) illustrate the benefits of flexibility and local adaptation.

Based on the research findings, the following main conclusions are formulated:

- education remains a strategic determinant of sustainable development, and investments in human capital generate multiplier effects on productivity, innovation, and social cohesion;
- structural reforms in the Moldovan education system have contributed to the optimization of the institutional network, but their impact on the quality and attractiveness of education remains uneven;
- demographic decline and migration continue to represent the primary constraints on the system, affecting the balance between educational supply and demand;

- technical and vocational education is emerging as a strategic priority, requiring a stronger focus on digital, technological, and entrepreneurial competences;
- alignment with the European education area must be supported by investments in digitalization, teacher training, and the internationalization of higher education.

To strengthen and modernize the national education system, the following strategic directions are recommended:

- reorganize educational policies with a unified perspective on education, economy, and innovation, considering education as a fundamental component of economic and social advancement.
- increase investment in educational and digital infrastructure, particularly in rural areas, to reduce territorial disparities and ensure equitable access to modern learning resources;
- consolidate technical and vocational education by expanding partnerships with the business sector and promoting the dual training model, adapted to the economic context of the Republic of Moldova;
- ensure continuous professional development of teaching staff through training programs focused on digital competences, innovative pedagogies, and modern educational management;
- stimulate research and innovation in higher education to create direct links between education, research, and the economy, strengthening universities' roles as drivers of progress;
- promote academic mobility and international cooperation to achieve full integration into the European higher education area and facilitate the transfer of best practices:
- implement continuous monitoring of educational policy effectiveness by introducing performance indicators and conducting periodic evaluations of their impact on human capital and labour market dynamics.

In conclusion, education must be treated as a priority investment in national development, capable of sustaining economic competitiveness and ensuring a sustainable transition toward a knowledge-based economy. The consolidation of the Moldovan educational system requires a combination of institutional reforms, curricular innovation, managerial accountability, and international cooperation, all aimed at developing a flexible, creative, and globally competitive human capital.

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