SCHOOL CURRICULUM MONITORING:
SOCIOLOGICAL RESEARCH ASPECTS

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Monitoring is an important tool in managerial activity, the results of which contribute to improving the implementation and achieving the expected results of intervention. The school curriculum as an educational policy document needs to be continuously monitored and evaluated, so that it meets the needs of labor market, but also of the key actors of the educational process.

In this context, the article focuses on the sociological research aspects of school curriculum monitoring. The author presents certain concepts regarding monitoring and the advantages of monitoring the school curriculum, emphasizing the relevance for students, teachers, school managers and policy makers. At the same time, the research methodology applied in the New Zealand study (2008-2009) is presented. Based on the principles of monitoring, the author presents a vision of the sociological research matrix of school curriculum monitoring.

***Keywords*:** *monitoring, school curriculum, research methods applied in monitoring.*

MONITORIZAREA CURRICULUMULUI ȘCOLAR:
ASPECTE ALE CERCETĂRII SOCIOLOGICE

Monitorizarea reprezintă un instrument important în activitatea managerială, rezultatele căreia contribuie la îmbunătățirea implementării și atingerea rezultatelor scontate ale intervenției. Curriculum școlar în calitate de document de politică educațională necesită a fi continuu monitorizat și evaluat, astfel încât acesta să răspundă nevoilor pieții muncii, dar și a actorilor-cheie ai procesului educațional.

În acest context, articolul se concentrează pe aspectele cercetării sociologice ale monitorizării curriculumului școlar. Autorul prezintă câteva concepte privind monitorizarea și avantajele monitorizării curriculum-ului școlar, subliniind relevanța pentru elevi, profesori, manageri școli și factori de decizie politică. Totodată, este prezentată metodologia de cercetare aplicată în studiul Noua Zeelandă (2008-2009). Pe baza principiilor monitorizării, autorul prezintă o viziune asupra matricei de cercetare sociologică a monitorizării curriculumului școlar.

Cuvinte-cheie: *monitorizare, programa școlară, metode de cercetare aplicate în monitorizare.*

Introduction

The process of developing and implementing public policies could be influenced by the results of monitoring and evaluation exercises, allowing the identification of gaps and the establishment of measures to improve either the public policy document or the implementation process. School curriculum essentially represents a component part of an educational policy document, which guides the teaching staff in achieving educational objectives. In this context, the application of school curriculum monitoring tools is a necessity and an important stage in the continuous development of curriculum [1, p. 42].

Research Methods

The study was conducted by applying the documentary method, being subjected to analysis the folowing issues:

- the provisions of normative framework in the field of education, to highlight the regulated aspects regarding the monitoring of school curriculum;

- the national and internațional bibliographic resources regarding sociological research of the curriculum monitoring process;

- the good practices at the international level.

Results and Discussions

Monitoring is a management tool, the purpose of which is to contribute to the improvement and performance of any interventions and to obtain expected results, the application of which allows for informed decision-making, ensures the transparency of intervention and decision-making processes, increases the responsibility of those who implement policies or projects or provide various services [2, p. 11].

The concept of monitoring presents a series of particularities that can be seen from the following definitions:

- the systematic collection of data on specified indicators, in order to provide management and the main stakeholders of an ongoing development intervention, indications on the degree of progress and achievement of objectives and progress in the use of allocated funds (OECD-DAC, 2002);

- the permanent activity of determining the progress of an activity in relation to the planned results, i.e. whether the activities are carried out according to the developed plan (2006) [3, p. 11];

- the continuous process by which stakeholders obtain regular feedback on the progress made in achieving their goals and objectives (UNDP, 2009);

- the systematic and continuous collection, analysis and use of information for the purpose of management and decision-making, with the aim of achieving the efficient performance and effectiveness of an operation (European Commission).

The main defining elements, from a sociological perspective of monitoring, refer to: (1) systematic collection of data, (2) determining the evolution of a phenomenon/process, (3) support in decision-making. Thus, monitoring is a continuous process of informing the leader of an activity and the stakeholders with reference to the results achieved in relation to the planned ones. The information given is achieved through data collected in a certain way, based on specific indicators that being systematically analyzed allow the determination of real performance. In this sense, monitoring is carried out continuously during the activity, which involves routine observation and recording of activities carried out in accordance with pre-established indicators, with the purpose of introducing corrections, streamlining the use of resources, achieving planned objectives, mitigating negative consequences and identifying opportunities to ensure sustainability. In other words, monitoring is associated with an „early warning system”, in case an activity is not carried out according to the established plan.

Under these conditions, monitoring must be a component part of the educational process, including the development and implementation of the school curriculum. Curriculum monitoring is a process of collecting information to evaluate the effectiveness of the curriculum and to ensure that the programs are well-intentioned, implemented and achieve the objectives [4, p. 24]. Curriculum monitoring provides evidence on the level of achievement of educational objectives, in order to facilitate future decisions. In this context, it is important to develop appropriate strategies for monitoring the implementation of the school curriculum, having a role in supporting and motivating teaching staff.

In Musango K.K.'s view, curriculum monitoring involves a number of advantages, including [5, p. 98-99]:

- *providing real-time feedback,* making it possible to identify progress achieved in curriculum implementation. By combining curriculum monitoring and evaluation, it is possible to establish its efficiency and the way it responds to students' needs, leading to the introduction of changes in cases where poor efficiency is attested. By carefully monitoring curriculum implementation, school managers can identify whether the expected learning goals and objectives are sufficiently achieved by students. Thus, it is possible to establish at an early stage the gaps between the designed curriculum and the one practically applied by teachers;

- *individualized adaptation of support,* monitoring helping to adjust strategies so that the curriculum helps to meet the needs of students depending on the level of study and class, which could be influenced also due to learning abilities and differences;

- *equitable allocation of resources,* by addressing inequalities, which in education refers to differential access to educational services, including quality services. In this way, through monitoring, those inequalities are identified and subsequently addressed through the curriculum. At the same time, through monitoring and evaluation, its impact on student learning outcomes and the need to continue allocating resources for educational programs that lead to positive results are established;

- *verification of the structure and design of curriculum,* through monitoring providing information on its structure and relevance. As a result of monitoring, the design of curriculum is improved by identifying defective aspects. At the same time, monitoring will help identify the practicality of curriculum, which signifies its ability to integrate aspects of real life;

- *identification of areas for improvement,* in a practical way, monitoring and evaluating the curriculum can contribute to identifying weaknesses and the need for improvement, leading to targeted interventions to establish directed improvements. The result will contribute to the efficiency of education system, which will empower participants in the educational act and contribute to positive change in society;

- *ensuring the sustainability of curriculum,* by allocating the necessary resources to ensure the smooth running of the educational process, for example the necessary infrastructure, human capital and learning resources. In this case, political decision-makers or school managers will be interested in identifying and recruiting qualified human resources and financial resources necessary to cover the need for teaching materials. At the same time, through monitoring, information can be obtained regarding the correspondence of professional qualifications of teachers with the discipline taught, including the identification of needs for continuous training of teachers and their development, ultimately adjusting their educational strategies. By providing support through training and guidance to teachers, better school results will be achieved.

The curriculum monitoring exercise is part of curriculum management, this process being carried out by the management of educational institution – the school – through various mechanisms and through certain committees. Thus, curriculum monitoring, from a sociological perspective, is a participatory process, which would involve the relevant actors in the educational process: the school, the students and the family. In this context, sociological research and theory will guide the development and revision of curriculum, ensuring that it reflects diverse perspectives and addresses the problems effectively. In this context, curriculum monitoring will contribute to the integration of stakeholders' views, essential in all phases of curriculum development. For example, a curriculum could be externally evaluated, finding that it does not satisfy all the needs of students. However, outside of participatory monitoring, it will not be possible to adjust this curriculum to the needs of students.

By integrating the participatory approach in the monitoring and evaluation of curriculum, there is a responsibility of all stakeholders for the changes proposed to achieve the objectives. In this case, the sociological research will focus on how students, parents and teachers were involved in the process of designing, evaluating and monitoring the curriculum, how their opinions were integrated into the curriculum and their impact.

It should be noted that curriculum monitoring ensures a clear and precise communication of the situation, providing relevant information on the impact, progress, performance, implementation challenges and areas for improvement of curriculum, providing the opportunity for stakeholders to know the current situation and take the necessary measures for continuous improvement. Monitoring can be carried out both internally – by a specialized committee at the institution level, and externally – by independent evaluators, from outside the educational institution. It is important that at least the internal evaluation is carried out at the institutional level.

A study analyzed within the research refers to „*Monitoring and Evaluating Curriculum Implementation. Final Report on Evaluation of Curriculum Implementation in New Zealand 2008-2009*" [6]. The applied research methodology was developed based on two research questions: (1) What progress has been made in the first two years of implementation of the New Zealand Curriculum? And (2) What factors explain the degree of progress in implementing the New Zealand Curriculum? The applied methodological approach consisted of collecting data through four online and paper-based opinion surveys, on stratified samples of approximately 5000 teachers from over 400 schools. The study was conducted in 2 waves: August-November 2008 and October-November 2009. The quantitative data were complemented by 26 focus group sessions with the participation of 247 people (from different types of schools and with various roles – school managers, teachers, principals). In 2008, online interviews and focus groups were conducted with 58 curriculum experts, identified with the support of the New Zealand Ministry of Education, and the results helped the research team to clarify key areas for research.

The research framework comprised four elements: support encounters, receptivity, understanding and practice, referred to as the SERUP model. Each element was associated with a set of research indicators, including:

- *support activities* - the extent to which teachers have received different types of support (including from people in and outside their schools, printed publications and online materials) and the perception of value and quality of this support;

- *receptivity* - the extent to which teachers appreciate the curriculum, their confidence in implementing it in their own school context and the degree to which they perceive implementation as feasible;

- *understanding* - the extent to which teachers understand the key elements of new curriculum;

- *practice* - teaching practices in response to the new curriculum and the extent to which they reflect the intentions of new curriculum [6, p. 12-13].

It should be noted that this study was conducted without analyzing the opinions of school activities' beneficiaries – students and their parents, focusing rather on teachers and managers.

Starting from the principles of monitoring, which are important for ensuring that school programs are effectively implemented and achieve the projected results, sociological research on school curriculum monitoring should focus on the aspects presented in Figure 1. Sociological research could include a mixed research methodology, by applying ***the documentary analysis method***, being subject to analysis of guides, normative acts, reports of authorities/schools regarding the integration of curriculum monitoring, ***the survey method*** among teachers and students, ***the focus group method***, with the participation of teachers, parents, student councils, ***the individual interview method***, with representatives of the relevant ministry, the National Agency for Curriculum and Evaluation, and curriculum experts.

Figure 1. Matrix of Sociological Research on School Curriculum Monitoring.
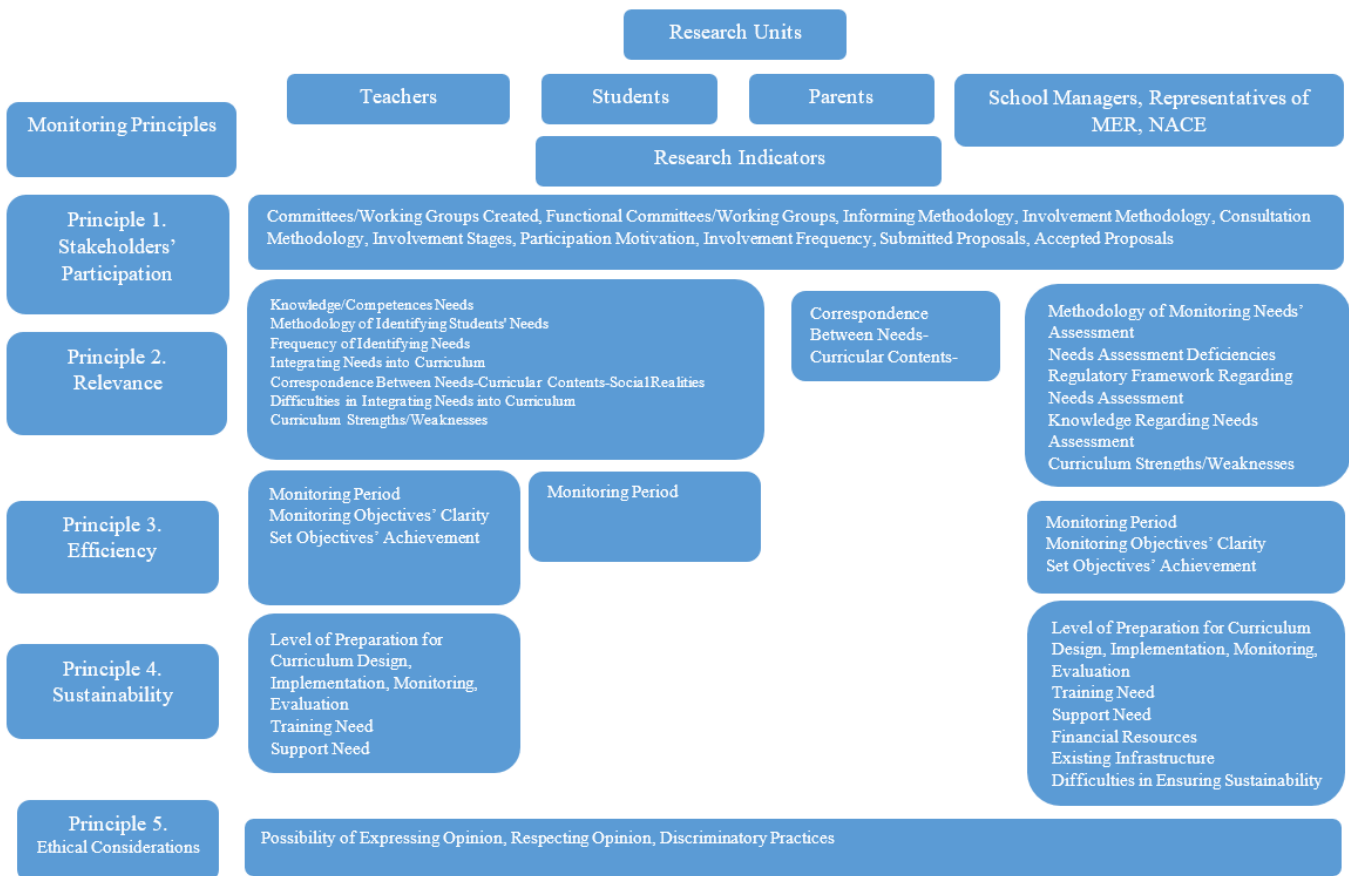
Conclusions

The analysis carried out shows that monitoring curriculum is not reflected in the national regulatory

framework, especially in the Education Code [7], but elements of monitoring can be found regarding the monitoring of educational institutions, which could also include the type of monitoring targeted by the research. The Ministry of Education and Research approved by order no. 1511/2023 *the Methodology for Monitoring the Implementation of Curriculum in School Discipline „Education for Society”*, which aims to contextualize the particularities of didactic approach to the discipline and the conditions for applying the Reference Framework for Competences for Democratic Culture in the school environment [8, p. 3]. The methodology is based on a series of principles, including validity, reliability, respect for human dignity, equity, transparency and applicability. The methodology establishes the aspects of internal and external monitoring, with an emphasis on the responsibilities of teaching staff, the administration of educational institution, and the persons responsible for monitoring. A series of tools are also provided, such as an observation sheet (4 sheets) and a questionnaire addressed to students.

Monitoring as a distinct stage in the implementation process of new school curriculum, launched by the Ministry of Education and Research in 2024 [9] is not found, but it is mentioned that the new school curriculum as a student-centered one, which will include „activities to monitor individual progress and student well-being” [9, p. 5]. The implementation of new school curriculum needs to be monitored and evaluated during implementation, in order to identify gaps in implementation and to draw new interventions to ensure that it is applied uniformly and contributes to the formation of key competences set.

By applying sociological research methodology, complementary to pedagogical research, relevant data will be obtained for policymakers and curriculum developers to ensure that the needs and experiences of students, teachers, parents, and school managers are reflected and relevant for future decision-making.

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