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EDUCATION – QUALITY OF LIFE RELATIONSHIP: SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACH

*Stela MILICENCO,**Moldova State University*

Education in the context of contemporary society has essential functions in acquiring knowledge, the formation of competences needed to prepare young people for professional activity, etc. The correlation between the education system and other elements of the social system is based on a combination of interdisciplinary dimensions from the fields of sociology, pedagogy, economics, psychology, all of which are focused on ensuring quality of life for every citizen. In this regard, the paper „Education – Quality of Life Relationship: Sociological Approach” addresses the issue of theorizing and monitoring education as an important constituent of life quality. The idea that quality attests to the development of education as a competitive and responsive social system is advanced. The role of education system within the social system is revealed and sociological tools of evaluation of the educational system in the context of research on the quality of life dimension are analyzed.

Keywords: *education system, education, quality of life, monitoring tools, indicators, competences, survey, survey, research.*

RELAȚIA ÎNVĂȚĂMÂNT - CALITATEA VIEȚII: ABORDARE SOCIOLOGICĂ

Învățământul în contextul societății contemporane are funcții esențiale în achiziția de cunoștințe, formarea de competențe necesare pentru pregătirea tinerilor pentru activitatea profesională etc. Corelația dintre sistemul de învățământ și alte elemente ale sistemului social se bazează pe o combinație de dimensiuni interdisciplinare din domeniile de sociologie, pedagogie, economie, psihologie, toate acestea fiind concentrate pe asigurarea calității vieții pentru fiecare cetățean. În acest context, articolul „Relația învățământ - calitatea vieții: abordare sociologică” abordează aspecte privind modalitățile de teoretizare și monitorizare a învățământului în calitate de constituent important al calității vieții. Este promovată ideea potrivit căreia calitatea atestă dezvoltarea învățământului ca sistem social competitiv și capabil de a răspunde exigențelor. Este relevat rolul sistemului de învățământ în cadrul sistemului social, analizate instrumentele sociologice de evaluare a sistemului educațional în contextul cercetărilor pe dimensiunea calității vieții.

Cuvinte-cheie: *sistem de învățământ, educație, calitatea vieții, instrumente de monitorizare, indicatori, competențe, sondaj, cercetare.*

Introduction

In contemporary society, education has developed in terms of its delivery methods and the area of coverage of the population, fulfilling multiple functions regarding the acquisition of knowledge, the formation of competences, the preparation of young people for professional development, etc. Both researchers and representatives of the academic environment, as well as exponents of various occupational and political spheres frequently promote opinions regarding the value of education system, based on the premise that *education improves the quality of people's lives*. However, the quality of education system constitutes a basic indicator of the development of society, and, consequently, of the quality of life.

In this context, *education - an important constituent of the quality of life* - expresses its capacity to exercise its basic mission in the context of a constantly changing society. Namely, quality attests to the development of education as a competitive social system capable of forming graduates prepared for integration into social life and to meet demands.

In what follows, we will highlight the role of education system within the social system and analyze the tools for evaluating the education system in the context of research on the quality of life dimension.

Material and Method

The article was carried out by applying the documentation method, being subjected to analysis the publications of researchers who have theoretical and applied contributions in the field of sociology of education, quality of life, as well as good practices at national and international level in monitoring education - as a component of quality of life.

Results and Discussions

The education system represents a social system, which functions according to the principles of a social structure, being guided by social variables and reflecting the evolution of society, or, its products influence it directly and indirectly. The relationship between the social system and the education system is one of interdependence, this being ensured by the very purposes of education, which are established at the level of global social environment. This relationship determines the approach of elements of the social system as a set of entities with characteristics irreducible to those of the component parts, which can be combined and implemented through institutionalized mechanisms. These dynamic relationships express correlations of the type of functional relationships, which can be *of contradiction* - in the situation where a gap appears between the systems, which denotes a mismatch of the education system to the requirements of society, or *of reproduction* - in the situation where the education system positions itself as a promordial one and ensures the evolution of social system.

The capacity of social system to produce responses related to the requirements of contemporary society constitutes, finally, a characteristic of the unity of social system, which allows a relatively independent functioning in relation to other systems. Respectively, the social system represents a set of subsystems, each having certain internal structures with various levels of organization and coordination, as well as a coherent set of social institutions, among which we highlight the educational institutions. Among the researchers who theorized the concept of social system from a sociological perspective, we can mention V. PARETO (*who explicitly formulated the concept and developed it within a theory of society, according to which the component elements of society are mutually dependent and form the social system*) and T. PARSONS, who in his fundamental work „Social System”, published in 1951, promoted the structural-functionalist perspective. This perspective falls within the positivist tradition in sociology and approaches society as being composed, on the one hand, of various **interdependent structures** (*regular, observable patterns of behavior or organized social arrangements, which persist over time*), which tend towards equilibrium, and, on the other hand - **functions** (*ways in which different requirements of a society are satisfied*), which they serve [1, p. 78-81].

We will make brief references to established authors whose contributions complement and provide an argued vision of the role of education system in the context of social system. Researchers R. BOUDON, P. BOURDIEU, etc. promoted the concept according to which the principles of organizing the education system are determined by the mechanisms of development of the social system [2, p. 19], also referring to equality of opportunity. At the same time, E. DURKHEIM analyzes education as an objective social fact, which determines individual behavior in the socialization process and is approached from a triple perspective with reference to: **the education systems specific to each country and era** (1), **the types of education and their explanation** (2), **and the pedagogical institutions and their functioning** (3) [3, p. 76]. Supporting the idea that education fulfills, above all, a social function, E. DURKHEIM clarifies at the beginning of Chapter III entitled „Pedagogy and Sociology” of the work „Education and Sociology” the importance of sociology for the analysis of education system, mentioning that the purpose of education is to configure the social being: „... education, far from having as its sole or main object the individual and his/her interests, is above all the means by which society ceaselessly renews the conditions of its own existence ... Their totality forms the social being. To form this being in each of us, this is the purpose of education” [4, p. 67-68].

The research methodology specific to the sociology of education is determined by the desire that education is an objective social fact, and in this context the „*rules of sociological method*” can be utilized. The sociological method based on „sociological rules”, also applicable to research in the field of education sciences, imposes some requirements with reference to **independence** (1), **objectivity as a characteristic of education approached as a social fact** (2), **specificity of any social fact** (3), **and openness to research models that exist only at the level of some sciences, such as sociology** (4) [5, p. 183-189].

The connection between the education system and other elements of the social system is based on a combination of sociological, pedagogical, economic, psychological dimensions, etc., all of which are focused on ensuring the quality of life for each citizen. At the same time, the concept of quality of life is loaded with a rich axiological baggage and is subject to major influences of the social system. **What are the most appropriate ways to analyze the situation of main components of quality of life: health, environment, education, social services, family, lifestyles?** Whatever the reference point is, all research on the subject refers to the relationship between actual conditions (*living conditions*) and people's perceptions (*evaluation criteria*).

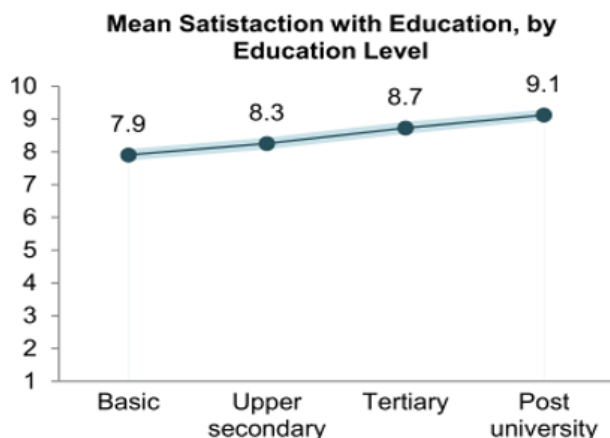
It should be noted that monitoring the education system in the context of research on the quality of life reveals the identification of measurements developed by regional and international organizations, institutions and associations with concerns regarding this chapter. In this sense, the perspective of approaching the quality of life at the European level developed by T. FAHEY and other researchers [6, p.24-36], which is based on certain principles, is instructive:

- adopting a general vision of life and overcoming the exclusive emphasis only on the standard of living, or, *the quality of life is ensured by the totality of those conditions that offer the person the possibility of harmonious development, of achieving a full life;*
- approaching the concept of quality in terms of opportunities and chances of achievement for individuals, including in the context of education system;
- monitoring the quality of life through objective/subjective, absolute/relative indicators;
- researching the attitudinal component, etc.

It is worth noting that these principles have underpinned **the most comprehensive European Quality of Life Survey (EQLS)**, which represents **a multi-dimensional quality of life monitoring tool, including in the education field**. Since its launch in 2003, the EQLS has become a valuable set of indicators that complement traditional indicators on economic growth and living standards, including more aspects of progress and, therefore, can be integrated into the decision-making process and can be taken up in the public debate at European and national levels [7]. The European Union agency carries out these surveys, collecting data from European Union member countries every five years, presenting the information in a comparative logic in thematic reports on certain dimensions of quality of life.

Inspired by this methodology, in 2023 the IMAS company carried out **the survey „Quality of Life in the Republic of Moldova”** within the framework of the „Data for Impact” (D4I) project, funded by USAID. The research sample consisted of 2027 people over the age of 18 from 149 localities. The research results on the educational dimension are of interest. Accordingly, respondents rated their satisfaction with various areas of life, including education, on a 10-point scale, where 1 is „least satisfied” and 10 - „most satisfied”. On average, the analyzed areas obtained an average score of 7.7 points, indicating a satisfaction level of 8.3 for education. It is worth noting that the level of satisfaction increases with access to a higher education level (*see Figure 1*).

Fig. 2. Level of Satisfaction with Education System in Relation to Level of Education Completed [8, p. 24].



Different concerns for education in the context of quality of life are also found at the level of the European Union, including through research by **the EUROSTAT Statistical Institute**. Accordingly, EUROSTAT promotes a series of quality of life indicators, proposing to measure progress on nine dimensions, which vary from living conditions - towards a global perspective on the quality of life: *material conditions of living standards, employment, health, education, leisure time, economic security, respect for basic rights, natural environment, global perspective on quality of life*.

The CALVERT-HENDERSON quality of life indicators represent another mechanism created in the USA, through which an attempt was made to redefine

the general quality of life using a systemic approach. A group of researchers and practitioners from various fields have systematized 12 indicators, which provide the possibility of monitoring the progress and well-being of the nation in the following aspects: *education, employment, energy resources, environment, health, human rights, income, infrastructure, national security, public safety, recreation and housing conditions*. These indicators also identify interferences with other areas, which provides a systemic overview of the social system.

It is also worth mentioning *the Human Development Index*, used for international and regional comparisons, assessing achievements in three areas of human development: longevity (*through life expectancy*), educational level (*through a combination of the literacy rate of adult population with the rate of enrollment in primary, secondary and tertiary education*) and standard of living or level of living (*based on gross domestic product per capita in US dollars at purchasing power parity*). Although the HDI cannot be considered as a tool that fully corresponds to the objectives of measuring the quality of life, the indicator nevertheless fulfills an important function, measuring the relative distance that separates each country in the world from the objectives considered to be priorities not only at present, but also in the future, in terms of a long and healthy life, access to various forms of schooling and, last but not least, a level of income that ensures a decent standard of living. At the same time, the relevance of areas estimated in the HDI should be emphasized, one of which (*educational level*) is of particular importance, and national strategic documents also promote the idea that *the quality of education determines, to a large extent, the quality of life and creates opportunities for the full realization of people's competences*. In the Human Development Report for 2023-2024 with the headline „*Breaking Deadlock: Redefining Cooperation in Polarized World*”, developed by UNDP, the Republic of Moldova ranked 86th out of 193 countries, with an HDI value of 0.763 [9, p. 275].

In a more concrete context, *the place of education in the context of quality of life studies also targets a series of specific indicators*, with reference to the degree of coverage, promotion, general level of education, etc. We will highlight the most relevant of these:

- access to various educational levels;
- schooling rate (*apparent schooling rate, specific schooling rate, transition rate*);
- internal efficiency of the education system (*promotion rate, school dropout rate, efficiency coefficient applied to a cohort*);
- share of education expenditure in GDP;
- quality of educational services;
- indicators relating to educational spaces;
- indicators relating to pedagogical equipment and learning resources, etc.

Conclusions

The topic of education in quality of life studies has an interdisciplinary character, and, in addition to sociologists, psychologists, economists, pedagogues, doctors, demographers, anthropologists and other researchers and practitioners are interested in this research. But whatever the approach, sociological research on this topic proves to be of particular significance for a better knowledge of society, and for the shaping of social policies oriented towards people and expected by them. The particularities of analysis of the education system in the context of quality of life studies offer the opportunity to explore education from a systemic and multilateral perspective.

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Data about the author:

Stela MILICENCO, PhD, Associate Professor, Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences, Sociology and Social Work, Moldova State University.

E-mail: stela.milicenco@usm.md

ORCID: 0000-0001-6996-1182

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