Strategic Planning for Effective School Governance in Romania

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Abstract - In educational setting, learning communities work to enhance curriculum and instruction, and focus on students. Present paper presents the framework for a strategic plan necessary for efficient school governance in Romania. Following a comprehensive analysis of the schooling environment which identifies the determinants of the lack of performance of the romanian students, we formulate strategic objectives and directives necessary for good governance of Romanian school.

Keywords: school governance, learning communities

I. INTRODUCTION

School governance includes all the principles, models and practices that enable a school board to effective direct the working of the school. School governing bodies have taken out more responsibilities and their role has become more important as school have gained increasing autonomy.[1] The governing body complements and enhances school leadership by ensuring that all statutory duties are met, appointing the headteacher and holding them accountable for the impact of the school's work on improving the outcomes for all pupils[2]. School governance means efficiency, a holistic approach people-centered and performance oriented creating sustainable growth and promoting harmonization through informed decision making, accountability and ownership.

Starting with the 1970s there has been a plethora of studies focusing on effective school governance and on defining the outcomes desirable in shaping the "concept of school as community" [3]. As Kubiak (2003) shows, more recent literature on communities of learning in education explicitly operates with concepts of strategic management following the framework of strategic planning. [4] Thus, the existing studies shows that effective schools need to conduct an environmental scanning as the schooling environment steers everywhere educational processes influencing the educational governance. School governance implies defining the vision and strategic objective of the school and developing adequate programs necessary to build and effective learning community. All these require that schools leaders and governors make use of the concepts and methodology of strategic management. Moreover adequate managerial skills are required to optimize the use of limited resources and produce high quality education opening the school to the civil society.[5]

In what follows I will therefore present a strategic plan necessary to build effective school governance in Romania. The environmental scanning identifies the determinants of the lack of performance of romanian students, testing two hypothesis. First hypothesis is that the lack of results is attributable to poor resources in the system. The second hypothesis is that the lack of performance is attributable to inadequate steering mechanisms in the system.

II. THE FRAMEWORK OF STRATEGIC PLANNING

School governance implies defining the vision, specific objectives and strategies, conducting comprehensive analysis of the school's internal and external environment and implementing programs to operationalize the defined strategies. All these are concepts specific to strategic management. Obviously an adequate understanding of the basic model of strategic management and its concepts is necessary in order for the school governors and leaders to apply them in developing and building an effective learning community.

There is a consensus in the existing literature that the process of strategic management (known also as strategic planning) consists of the following elements:

- Environmental scanning: The process of strategic management begins with a comprehensive scan of the environment of the organization called strategic diagnosis.
- Mission statement: A mission statement defines the purpose of the organization, succinctly describing why the organization exists.
- Identifying strategic objectives: While mission statement tends to address questions concerning the
of education has to address three broad issues: resources, participation and results of the education.

- Romanian context

The educational attainment depends on the development level of each country. Thereby a rich country can more easily afford to buy more education for its citizens. [6] One way to do this is by the level of direct education expenditure. Public education expenditure per student, public education expenditure as percentage of gross national income or public education expenditure as percentage of total governmental expenditure could therefore influence the characteristics of the educational systems. In addition, economic environment of schooling we have also to control for GDP per capita because education is costly and an ambitious educational policy is costly and governments might choose to subsidize education. [7] Besides economic context of schooling, demographic, cultural, religious and ethnic issues as well as increasingly worrying phenomenon such as immigration tend to shape the structure and functioning of educational systems. In addition, EU efforts to create the most competitive economy in the world have shaped the Member states’ educational systems. All these influences made up the external environment of schooling. They corroborate to further determine steering and monitoring mechanisms which constitute the internal environment of schooling. We begin our analysis of the external environment of Romanian schooling by analyzing the economic aspects which impact on schooling attainment. There are huge economic discrepancies between Romania and the EU15. Romania has a GDP of 4200 Euro per inhabitant while the GDP per capita is 23000 for EU 27 and 27000 for EU15. At EU level only Bulgaria has a lower real GDP per capita (3500 Euro per inhabitant). General level of development directly determines the level of social exclusion. Romania reports in 2010 the highest relative proportion of people at risk of poverty at EU level (41.5% as compared to 23.4% at EU27 level or 14.4 in Czech Republic, 15.0 in Sweden or 14.9 in Norway). [8]

Political features and policies often corroborate with economic policies to condition education. In particular the existing literature underlines a relationship between type of welfare system and educational policy. Countries with state provision of welfare tended to have also broader goals for compulsory education (SGOLC Report on School Governance). In Romania the government has begun a comprehensive attack on the social state — actual president of the Republic has publicly announced the end of Romanian social state. This ideology has been articulated in economic policies and measures.

The existing literature on school governance underlines the role of religion and cultural diversity in the shaping of national educational systems. Private schools have been traditionally more developed in Catholic and countries that are heterogeneous from a cultural perspective. Romania is an orthodox country with some religious diversity especially in the western

III. STRATEGIC PLAN NECESSARY FOR SCHOOL GOVERNANCE IN ROMANIA

In 2006 OECD has conducted a study for assessing international student attainment (PISA). According to PISA, the performance of romanian students is well below OECD average, as shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1. Performance of Romanian Educational System

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Mean Readings</th>
<th>Mean Mathematics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Score</td>
<td>Score</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>395.93</td>
<td>414.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>459.71</td>
<td>459.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>468.52</td>
<td>461.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OECD Average</td>
<td>491.79</td>
<td>497.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>506.75</td>
<td>530.65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: OECD, PISA, 2006

We will conduct a comprehensive analysis of Romanian environment of educational system, aiming at identifying the determinants of the performance – or lack of performance – of romanian students. According to the literature on strategic management, the environment of Romanian education has two major components: external environment and internal environment. The external environment is the general context of educational system. Analysis of the internal environment

- Broadly defined objectives, which explicitly state the organization’s reason for being, strategic objectives are development of long-range plans necessary to achieve the desired outcome. The procedural approach to environmental scanning is necessary to gradual adjustment of habits and routines to the ongoing changes in the environment that is to identify adequate strategic objectives and relevant strategies to achieve the proposed objectives.

- Strategy Implementation: is the translation of chosen strategy into organizational action so as to achieve strategic objectives. Organizational structure allocates special value developing tasks and roles to the employees and states how these tasks and roles can be correlated in order to maximize competitive advantage.

- Evaluation, control and feedback: The organizational structure is not sufficient in itself to motivate employees. An organizational control system is also required. This control system equips managers with motivational incentives for employees as well as feedback on employees and organizational performance.
part of the country and this is expected to influence its schooling realities.

Socio-demographic and ethnic issues are also affecting the functioning of any educational system. Population has decreased by over 1 million people from 1992 with a prognosis of almost 2 million decreasing by 2020. According to the Green Book Regarding Demography in Romania (2006) the young population (0-14 years old) has decreased from 22.7 percent (in 1992) to 15.9 percent (in 2005). It is expected that population would decrease further on, namely by 1.8 million until 2020, especially regarding the young groups of population (10-24 years old). The demographic decline can be explained both through the natural negative surplus and through the negative surplus of the external migration. [9].

Although Romania is facing similar socio-demographic problems to those at European level, there are also issues specific to the actual Romanian context. In particular there has been lately increasing awareness in Romanian mass-media about the downside effects that the partial opening of western labor market to Romanians has on children left at home. Romanian Association for Social Alternatives recognizes that the prolonged absence of one or both parents may be associated with a series of problems, including educational neglect, proposing a methodology aimed at offering children left behind by parents that have chosen to work abroad adequate social, psychological and juridical assistance.

- Internal schooling environment

The economic structures, socio-demographic policies and developments and political ideology and orientation constitute the external environment of schooling, providing the general framework of educational process. Besides external environment, analysis of the school environment has to address the current situation in the educational system. This constitutes the so called internal schooling environment and has three components: resources, the main steering mechanism of good school governance and the current results in educational system.

Although it is generally accepted that education generates social net benefits and consequently governments might choose to simply “buy” more schooling for their citizens, investing more in education, this is not the case in Romania today since, after a general increasing trend reaching in 2007 a maximum of 4.25 percent of the public expenditure on education (as compared to 4.98 at EU27 level or 7.83 for Denmark), situation has deteriorated. Today is estimated that no more than 3 percent of the public expenditures are allocated to education. It is obvious that the ongoing reform of social policies in general and education in particular relies on costs reductions even with the price of shutting down schools and hospitals, regardless of the impact on local communities.

Unfortunately for Romania there is no available data concerning public education expenditure per student, public education expenditure as percentage of gross national income or public education expenditure as percentage of total governmental expenditure. Nevertheless the 2006 OECD PISA study provides an index of the quality of the school’s educational resources. A comparative situation is presented in Tables 2 and 3.

### TABLE 2. Quality of schools' educational resources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Mean Index</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OECD Average</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>-0.74</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: OECD, PISA, 2006

### TABLE 3. Availability and quality of human resources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country Name</th>
<th>Mean Index</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>-0.34</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OECD Average</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>-0.61</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: OECD, PISA, 2006

We see that PISA data confirms that Romanian education lacks adequate resources. This was anticipated by the precedent analysis of the general environment of Romanian Educational system. Lacking resources it is hard to get good results. Obviously we can assume that lack of resources do influence the outcome of Romanian educational system. Thereby we have found evidence supporting the hypothesis that lack of resources negatively impact the performance in the system. We continue the analysis of the determinants of schooling performance with an analysis of the possible impact of steering mechanism of good governance on schooling performance. In Romania centralization and decentralization are two essential pillars of reforming and restructuring the education. In Romania subsidies and transfers do exists even for private schools there by privatization can only partially transfer budgeting issues from national level to local level, alleviating the burden of central budget. The question is whether privatization is associated with schooling outcomes. Table 4 shows the difference in performance between private and public schools in selected countries.

Although data for Romania is not available for this issue, we can see in Table 4 that at OECD level, in average, private schools have obtained poorer results then public ones. This is also true for Netherlands and Greece although Italy seems to be an exception. Being an orthodox country Romania seems to have more in common with Greece. Although we do not have direct data we can infer from above analysis that privatization of Romanian school is not likely to improve
performance. To the contrary it is indirect evidence that shows that privatization will lead to poorer outcomes of Romanian schools.

**TABLE 4.** Difference in performance between private and public schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country Name</th>
<th>Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>-76.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>17.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>-2.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OECD Average</td>
<td>-24.93</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: OECD, PISA, 2006

School policies and practices are also expected to affect schooling performance. OECD PISA study presents data concerning school admittance policies, assessment policies and practices and approaches to school management. Data on admittance policies is shows that academic record plays a central role in admittance in Romanian schools. From this perspective Romania is far better situated than average OECD countries. Student’s residence, parent’s endorsement and attendance of other family member of that school also determine the admittance policies but there are no significant differences between Romania and Netherlands. The only admittance policy where Romania differs significantly from the other countries is a higher weight of student need or desire for a special program. We can infer that if there is ‘a special need of the student ‘that particular need has to be proved by existing records not by ‘student desire for that program’.

Analysis of PISA database also reveals that in Romania the responsibility for staffing decision belongs to national or local authorities (96%) whereas the school governing board comes second in importance (38%). We see that from this perspective in Romania the school’s governing board plays less important role then in Netherlands (66%) but more important than in OECD (average 33.80%) or Greece (2.16%) or Italy (2.88%). Situation is somewhat similar for budgeting decisions. In Romania the school’s governing board plays the most important role in budgeting decisions while local authorities comes second and things are the same for all countries in the analysis.

According to PISA database, in decisions regarding educational content national and regional authorities do have the first word in all the countries in the analysis and this is also true for decisions regarding assessment practices. So it seems that Romania is not different from countries with far better schooling outcomes in terms of those involved in decisions in education.

Yet it might be the case that Romania is different from other in the way decisions are used or, in other words, in terms of the criteria upon which decisions are taken. Indeed, PISA database shows that Romanian authorities have chosen not to report if allocating institutional resources is based on school’s performance. Neither they have chosen to report if they use school performance in evaluating the principal’s performance. Lack of reporting is indirect evidence that resource allocation is not based on school’s performance and also the principal is not hold accountable for schooling performance. Yet Romanian authorities are tracking very carefully the schooling performance over time and the information on schooling performance is made public.

**IV. CONCLUSIONS**

In the light of the previous detailed analysis of Romanian environment of schooling we identify students, parents, teachers, schools’ governing bodies and local authorities as the stakeholders which have to be considered in our strategic effort to build good governance. Obviously Romanian schools lack quality resources. Recognizing the strategic importance of education in Romania will lead to finally allocating the financial resources while creating the incentives necessary to increase the quality of human resources in Romanian Education. Simply increasing the funding for education would not resolve the problems of inadequate human resources in the system. Adequate funds and incentive should address targeted toward increasing the quality of teachers in the system. A second strategic direction necessary for good governance of Romanian school should target a better management of the resources allocated to Romanian education. In this respect developing the managerial skills of managers is important although not sufficient. Yet finding the programs that will operationalize this strategy is not the object of present paper.

**REFERENCES**


