

**THE ROMANIAN HIGH SCHOOL EDUCATION
AT THE END OF THE 19TH CENTURY
AND THE BEGINNING OF THE 20TH CENTURY
EVOLUTION AND STATISTICS**

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Abstract

According to the study of the Romanian education legislation, the primordial goal was to highlight the evolution of the reforms and of the Romanian education organization based on the Public Instruction Law in december 1864, pointing out the period between 1896 and 1910, but also emphasizing subsequent consequences of Haret legislation, within the evolution of Romania under the auspices of the social and economic context and within the internal and international policies.

If the census of 1859 and 1860 did not provide a special literacy related column, the most optimistic approximations could not exceed 10% of the total population. As for the 1899 census the percentage increased to 22% and for the 1912 census to about 40%. Therefore, Romania was at the bottom of a possible European classification concerning the literacy, but made visible efforts to reduce the gap compared to the developed countries.

Thus, the general population census published by the Ministry of estates under the care of chief of general statistics, Leonida Colescu, estimated that Romanian population raised to 5,956,000 people by the end of the year, all of which 4,694,288 persons were older than 7 years. This census found an overall percentage of 78% illiterate, and for the rural population the percentage raised up to 84.4%.

The outcome of all efforts made by the Romanian authorities and by the Romanian school representatives would be visible through the august 1909 census of the literates, when the total country population was of 6,771,772 inhabitants, and the reviewed number was of 5,047,342, thus arising that 74.5% of the country population were reviewed.

In conclusion it can be noticed that every education reform aims at overcoming some

development crises of the society, the final purpose of the reforms consisting in the national union, the compliance with the demands of social and economic development and promotion of the national and universal values.

Keywords: literacy; census; statistics; evolution; education; reforms; legislation; Spiru Haret.

Introduction

Analysing the evolution of the Romanian educational system, in which the idea of the social function of education was often emphasized, of the individual's desire to be socially integrated as an essential condition of success, but also a correspondence between the social structures, the pedagogical action can be understood as an organized process of socialisation, based on the understanding of the society's imperfection, while school becomes a pillar of cohesion and social mobility with immediate consequences in the progress of the society (Iacob, 1998).

Through the analysis of the legislation of the educational system in Romania, our objective was to reveal the evolution of the reforms and their impact on the organization the the Romanian educational system in essential times in history. Starting from *The Law of Public Instruction* from December 1864, then stopping at the period from 1896 to 1910, but also at the the time of the great reforms that Spiru Haret made, we want to emphasize the consequences of Haret's legislation, in the social, economic context, internal and international political context to which the Romanian state related. In other words, our research constitutes a retrospective, a relaying into context and an analysis of the legislative support of the education's reforms (Diac, 2004).

We must mention the essential role that is given to the principles that were at the base of the process of education's reform that took shape in the legislative plan. (Manolache, 1893). Those principles refer not only to Spiru Haret's quality of founding father of Romanian educational system, but also the contribution of the "school minister" in solving the educational problems and those of policy of education. These principles emphasized, first of all, the major differences that existed between the activity of the "school minister" compared with the concerns of other figures of the education system of the time, whose results are far from the level of Haret's actions (Cristea, 2001).

Without a doubt, Haret's legislation mostly reflects the pedagogical, sociological and social-political ideas, supported by the scientific accomplishments, the didactic activity and the one in the Ministry of Education of the man Spiru Haret. *The Haret Moment* stays in the extension of the duration

of the secondary education from 7 to 8 years, but also the differentiation between the lower and superior education. Thus, high school becomes a cycle of special studies, so that not everybody can go to high school, for this the young man had to have a level of studies and to be capable of get through the years of study. (*The Antology of the Education Laws from Romania*, 2004.)

The progress of the Romanian education system, triggered by the economical and social development of the country, was owed also to the pedagogic press that becomes an essential component. We see an important growth in the number of pedagogical magazines, but mostly an improvement of their content and an extension of the number of contributors. At the border between centuries, but especially in the first half of the XXth century there are published a series of prestigious publications of the time like: *The Pedagogic Magazine* (1891 – 1898, 1902 – editor Constantin Dimitrescu – Iași), *Romanian Culture* (1903-1911) and *The General Magazine of Education* (1905 – editor Spiru Haret). These publications were destined to the development of the education and to training the teachers and they were a fundamental means of manifestation of the Romanian pedagogical thinking. (Iacob, 1998)

For all this period we notice an evolution of the educational system from all the point of view. If in the 1878-1879 school year there were 62 secondary schools in the whole country, from which 6 were high schools and 19 were gymnasiums alongside seminaries, normal schools, commercial and conservatory schools, with a total of 8118 pupils, at the end of the 1885-1886 school year the number of pupils increases significantly. On the other hand we notice that between 1890 and 1900 a lot of gymnasiums were given high school status. For the years 1905-1906 the number of pupils enrolled in secondary schools reaches the amount of 22499 (16573 boys and 5926 girls). The statistical data show an objective situation, as we can see a high percentage of repeats, especially among the high schoolers, the number being around 19%. (*The Statistics of the Private Education for the school year 1896 – 1897*, 1898)

Through our research we discover that secondary schools were frequented by pupils that came mostly from the urban environment, being a percent of 66% for high schools and 71% for gymnasiums. On the other hand, the number of pupils that came from the countryside constituted a high percentage (94%) for the normal schools and for those elementary – agricultural.

The organizational effort in the field of education was recorded through the census of 1899. Thus it was established the existence of 24 gymnasiums, 19 high schools for boys, 9 secondary schools for girls for the Ist degree and 2 for the IInd degree, 5 seminaries and 2 military high schools. Regarding the number of pupils from the public and private secondary schools, the statistics show a total of 24585 pupils enrolled for the 1896-1897 school year, from which 16322 passed. For the same school year, in private schools, there were 3778 pupils enrolled, from which 2703 passed.

If for the census from 1859-186 there was no column for literacy, the most optimistic approximations cannot exceed 10% from the total of population. At the census from 1899 this aspect was considered and the percentage was 22%, and in 1912 this percentage was approximately 40%. But Romania was situated at the lower half of an European classification regarding literacy and it was visibly struggling to reduce this inequality. Trying to avoid extremes, we took into consideration statistics that maybe best suggest the characteristics and the parameters of the social and economic development of Romania. (Colescu, 1905)

With the help of *The general census of the population of Romania from 1899* published by the Ministry of Estates under the care of the general statistics superior, Leonida Colescu, we can notice an estimation of the population of Romania of 5956000 inhabitants (445322 foreigners), total from which 4694288 people were older than 7 years old. This census shows a general rate of illiterates of 78%, while for the rural population this percent goes to 84.8%, showing a low literacy for this environment. The census showed major differences between the urban and the rural population regarding literacy. The difference lays mostly in the awareness of the advantages education has, the schools from the towns were often appreciated and frequented, so that from 100 pupils aged 7 to 14 years old, 65 of them knew how to read and write.

At the beginning of the XXth century we notice a growth of the number of people that were literate in the urban environment, including for adult population, with the mention that mostly men were literate, their percentage being of 78%, while the number of literate women was barely 56%. (Arghirescu, 1911). The results are even worse when we look at the rural population. In the countryside the percentage of illiterates is scary: 77.4%, that means that from 100 people from the countryside (7 years and up) only 15 of them knew how to read and write, for the adult population the percentage reaching alarming numbers that were between 12 and 13%, in the best cases. (Ionescu, 1909)

In the forms used for the 1899 census there was mentioned, broadly, the number of literate people, approximately 1032609, while the illiterates were 3649473. The final results of the census were published in 1903. An obvious conclusion was the inequality of the literates between the urban and rural population, the former being clearly superior to the latter. The numbers regarding the whole country showed the cruel reality: from 100 inhabitants (without difference between sexes and environments) from 7 years up, only 22 were literates, while the rest of 78 were illiterates.

If we look at the numbers regarding the males, we notice that among the men literacy was more common so that the rate of literates was 32.8% in the entire country, the number of illiterates being 67.2%. For women literacy was lower, only 10.9% of them knew how to read and write, 89.1% being illiterate. This big difference between the literacy of the sexes was due to the fact that male education

was always a priority for the Ministry of Instruction. (Rădulescu, 1911).

The results of the efforts made by the Romanian authorities and by the representatives of the Romanian schools would be visible in time. Thus, *The Census of the literates* from August 1909 showed a total of 6771772 inhabitants, from which a number of 5047342 inhabitants was reviewed, meaning 74,5% from Romania's population, a percent that is smaller by 3.6% compared with the one from 1899. Despite this fact, in a 10 year period, we can notice a decrease in the number of illiterates. (Ionescu, 1909) But still the number of literates in Romania at the end of the first decade of the XXth century was low. The census, made at the order of Spiru Haret, showed that from 5047342 people that were 7 years and older, only 1986982 were literates, meaning 39.4% from the total population (1424994 men and 561988 women), while 3060360 people, meaning 60.6%, were illiterates. (Râșcanu, 1906)

By analyzing the problematic of the evolution of the Romanian educational system we discover, without any surprise, that Haret's legislation was a turning point in an era opened by the Law from 1864. Our study oscillates between 1864 and 1912 and we can say that, despite all the difficulties of the time, the period was an auspicious one in the history of Romanian education. Based on the progress of the culture and of the educational institutions, and the disputes of ideas in which figures with different political views were involved there were published many papers that presented and debated the problem and the evolution of the Romanian education system.

Thus, in the making of this paper besides the writings of the era, like Haret's *Reports*, Leonida Colescu's *Census*, Petru Râșcanu's research or Maiorescu's *Speeches* we used contemporary studies belonging to important figures interested in the history of the education and in the lives of its reformers, from which we can mention Dinu Constantin, Aurelian Bondrea, Marin Nicolescu, Stanciu Stoian, historians that contributed through their research at the knowledge of the problem enounced in our title.

In order to finish our research we took into account many articles of the public opinion, renowned newspapers that were involved and took an active part in all that is happening in the educational system through the publishing of all that is worth mentioning. We can emphasize the activity of "The Official Monitor", "The Event" from Iași, "The Time" from Bucharest, as well as the specialty magazines like "The General Magazine of Education". Whole series of Yearbooks were published, either regarding the general situation of the educational system or dedicated to important educational institutions, but also monographs edited by famous teachers. All the information from these papers and studies, but also from a variety of papers with documentary value belonging to the Archives from Iași and to the National Archives contributed to the making of this paper, whose subject is intriguing due to the innovations that were made during a difficult period, especially through the complexity of a man like Spiru Haret.

2. Methodological aspects

The subject of our research is an innovative one from the perspective of the Romanian historiography. There are precursors that researched the situation of the educational system in the XXth century, but this paper is different due to the personal way of approaching the problem. The difference comes from the typology of the sources and their placement in a larger context. If the anterior publications on this subject are particular studies, monographs that focus on certain segments of the Romanian educational system or they have a general overlook on this area, this paper is a comparative study that shows the evolution of the educational system in its complexity.

The research of the legislation regarding the evolution of the Romanian educational system and the analysis of the actors that define the activity in this field imposed the approach of the scientific endeavor through the use of the general valid methods, no matter the historical subject which was chosen. Thus, based on the documentary material and on the bibliography, we had in mind the use of the diachronic analysis of the Romanian educational system and of the evolution of the Romanian teachers. Besides, other methods of historical research, such as the document analysis and the case study, have played an important part in our research in order to present and explain the events. In the same measure, the comparative analysis has allowed us to have a better understanding of the elements that imposed a certain way in the historical evolution of the Romanian educational system.

Thus, we started from the premise of the knowledge of the research's stage in order to see if the problems have been solved or not, if there are sources that are used mistakenly and maybe to correct these errors. Our attention was also drawn on the newly appeared sources in order to establish what it is written and how can we replenish, elements that are important starting points.

The theoretical support of our paper was established in order to render completely the objectives of our research, achieving them in the process of elaboration. For this we have selected a bibliographic material consisting of volumes that refer to the evolution of the Romanian educational system, a series of scientific articles that were presented at international conferences, and other papers that had a similar subject. The difficulty given by the ordering and the systematization of the huge bibliographical material from the interwar time or by the putting of the results into a coherent paradigm called for very diverse work instruments and approach methods. So, from a methodological point of view, the paper is situated at the border between analysis and monograph, being given the fact that we made a short incursion in the space of the Romanian education, the interdependency between it and the socio-economic evolution, the school public and the relation between the school and the political power. On the other hand, we can say that this paper represents an inquiry of the profile of the Romanian education at the beginning of

the XXth century. Through the use of social history methods we are trying to establish the way in which the social status and the relationships it involves the ascending into the teaching career, then the status and the recognition of the teacher shaped the educational path of those involved.

Through the use of the deductive method and the one of synthesis we achieved the systematization of the general information regarding the evolution of the Romanian educational system; we tried to intertwine the chronological criteria with the thematic one. All this alongside the comparative study gave our paper originality and uniqueness. Following the accuracy principle, the monographic analysis and the statistical method used at the level of different periods in the evolution of the educational system, especially in relation to Romania's attempt to align itself at the European level and to compete in this area, all these are important elements in the making of this paper.

In history's retrospective the legislation imposed during Spiru Haret's ministry is the necessary basis for a modern education of European origin. Thus, Romania succeeds around 1910 to be on an ascending trend regarding the organization of the educational system, trying by any means to reduce illiteracy that placed us at the back of the European classification.

In these conditions Haret's work was continued in the following years, as proof *Istrati Law* from 1910 claimed the development of the superior education and what was called *peregrinatio cademica*. *Arion Law* brings advanced propositions in reformer style, the most important being that the secondary and superior cycles were declared free of charge. In 1924 Dr. Constantin Angelescu introduced the extension of the free compulsory primary education to 7 years, alongside the foundation of the schools for minorities, with mother tongue teaching, innovations that were supported in the following years, despite the Communist party that came to power. (Dimirescu – Iași, 1969)

Conclusion

In conclusion we can notice that each educational reform aims at the surpassing of a crisis in the development of the society, the reforms having as goal the adaptation to the requirements of the social and economic development, as well as the promotion of the national and universal values. With all the innovations imposed by Spiru Haret, the post Haret period was a transition one that, even though it did not have remarkable contributions, it was important for the understanding of the path from the passing of a law, that innovated the Romanian's educational system, up to the actual implementation. This process took place in the difficult context of the First World War, and at its end the Romanian educational system had the task of consolidating the country's unity through the promotion of a unitary school.

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