

**MANAGING EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGES. THE
SCIENCE AND ART OF MANAGING WELFARE IN AN
ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT**

GRĂDINARU Cătălin¹, MARINESCU Paul², TOMA Sorin-George³,
University of Bucharest

Abstract:

Education is one of the pillars a country's development relies on. Welfare is an intrinsically related concept to education and, therefore, the pressing question arises regarding the role of higher education in creating and inducing this state of mind, body and spirit not only on its students but also on how it is carried out towards and throughout society in itself. Education is an economic and social development agent for a country and should be analysed in accordance the actual dynamic and sometimes turbulent environment.

The purpose of our work is to highlight the importance that education plays in enhancing welfare, and the challenges posed by nowadays society. Our research is based on literature review.

Key words: Education, welfare, challenges

JEL classification: I20, I21, I23, I30

1. Introduction

Education, especially higher education, does not only represent, today, a simple key of access inside elites' club, but a condition for crossing an essential threshold of becoming. It has become a way towards cognition and a superior welfare (or higher level of well-being), intellectual security and civic

¹ *Teaching assistant, Faculty of Administration and Business, University of Bucharest, Bucharest, Romania, grdinarubusiness@gmail.com*

² *Professor, Faculty of Administration and Business, University of Bucharest, Bucharest, Romania, paulmarinescu1@gmail.com*

³ *Professor, Faculty of Administration and Business, University of Bucharest, Bucharest, Romania, tomagsorin62@yahoo.com*

condition. It was once, in an age of enlightenment and primary cognitive revolutions, that a certain kind of intellectual propelled based on a kind of civic elite platform, from where horizons were opened towards boundless encyclopedic knowledge, with vast value-systems anchored in superior scientific knowledge. It is here and from here that the epistemic gates were opened beyond which everything had to be known and reconstructed through experiments and different other means, ways beautifully described by Aristotle and Kant (Kant, I., 1969), and Heidegger. The academy transformed both elites and the means for their development into elites for public usefulness into epistemic and pragmatic elites. They used algorithm-based processed to understand the universe, used pragmatism and empirical research to promote new cognitive horizons based on creating new supports for identifying, monitoring and managing endogenous and exogenous educational challenges. Innovation and creation have become tools for generating intellectual potential - the only intangible potential on Earth - and its transformation into intellectual capital and complex mechanism for generating welfare, but also for the identification, evaluation and settlement of immense educational challenges that have changed and shaped the world, resulting, at the same time, from changing its fundamentals.

2. Condition and welfare. The meaning of welfare

Welfare is a state of well-being, a positive condition for existence and it represents an ideal of humans and human society, expressed both by value systems grouped into huge heritages and interests that generate action, shape knowledge and push the world forward to its most superior stage: cognitive welfare, the epistemic society. Beyond its essential condition - to be a state of good - welfare is one of four components of any human society: welfare, freedom, security and justice. All these components are built through people's efforts and the ways they understand their becoming horizons.

All these imply knowledge. All educational levels serve and regenerate this concept - education - both in its common (mutual) form, primary and secondary, and in its higher form, the one that is most responsible for generating intellectual potential and added value in the cognitive space.

All human activities incorporating the economic, political, legal, social, cultural, etc., poles used to generate wealth, freedom, security and justice, are passed through the synergic filter of education, using the

metamorphosis of becoming through education. Education (using educability) is the only mean that transforms people from creature into beings that form other beings, which turns man himself into a cognitive and creative capacity, who understands and manages the connection and ascension into the “universal climb”.

A question is always asked whether education contributes decisively to economic growth (elisabetastanciulescu.ro) and if it, in all its forms and components - formal, informal and non-formal, systematic and permanent - is the main investment in human capital. Of course, the answer is affirmative. There is, of course, a huge reservoir of human potential and its transformation into intellectual potential and, finally, into intellectual capital is the engine of knowledge, of economic, social and intellectual development and growth. The possible correlation that exists between the stock of human capital and economic development can be used to identify, define and configure effective educational policies for long periods of time.

Of course, the demographic component plays a decisive role in generating educated human potential and, accordingly, in increasing the stock of human capital. The brain-drain phenomena and the discrepancies between different power poles across the world does not favour common welfare, but it is rather focused in particular and highly already developed regions. One of the outcomes (combined with different state and international institution's policies) is welfare asymmetry, sometimes really steep from a social, cultural, religious and economic standpoint, difficult to overcome for decades even. With this in mind, an optimum ratio between return on educational investments and sustainable growth should be meticulously planned and put into action. Sometimes, from the investments in education made in certain countries the benefitted other countries, usually those that have a high GDP per capita. Allowing the illusion of welfare through short-term and immediate economic results to dwell over policy making may create tensions that might escalate into significant conflicts and increase states of insecurity amongst citizens. In this reality, international and national projects occur in order to induce a certain state of equilibrium.

Education is the engine of economic and social development and should be the focus of sustained policies aimed at its rational, well-balanced and beneficial spread across the worlds. It is education that offers a somewhat homogenous perspective towards good in a heterogenic society.

It is true that research over the past few years has highlighted the fact that education can become an effective tool for the welfare increase of individuals. But this is not enough. Defining a possible relationship between education and growth of individuals' and their families' welfare focuses on three key dimensions: employment, income and economic security. It is obvious that educational systems can define, in a cause and effect manner, the way welfare is influenced. Qualification certificates do not always have an overwhelming influence on economic achievements, because there are other factors that can influence economic welfare.

An important role in increasing the welfare of individuals and groups is played by the contexts in which they develop. We have to consider how, in the course of working life, the educational system has undergone numerous changes and the diversity of trajectories required individuals to adapt to new determinations. If it were only that, the situation may be manageable, especially through flexible adaptive systems and procedures. Nowadays uncertainties found throughout this risky and unstable environment make it harder for the individual to keep up the pace with changes, both from within himself and in relation to the outside world. The temptation of employing people from early stages of development has led to shortening study periods, sometimes implying skipping some development steps and towards flexible work schedules. Does this imply that we simply push forward and at a fast pace progress or do we risk future struggles? How should one act in order to have an improved life quality?

Market demand for different majors massively influences, in turn the solid profitability diplomas have in various fields. Moreover, wages are not decisively linked to and governed by the quality of education. Neoliberal policies that reduce state intervention in economy sometimes lead to the weakening of employee protection and job security. Selling competencies across a global market imposes a fierce competition even with dramatic social stratifications. A problem occurs when judging whether the placement on the labour market is influenced by the quality of qualifications acquired or by the individual's ability to "sell" himself. It seems that nowadays, the individual is no more the most precious capital he used to be, but is increasingly becoming a commodity. It looks like the superior man is sought after in terms of profitable commodities rather than for his role as a creator, a man of the people. If this is the case, then his role limits to producing for consumption and consuming for production.

It is therefore important to know whether cognitive performance tests identify the most efficient people from the economic field and if economic performance is reflected in the welfare of those who produce it. And we also need to know if higher education generates an intellectual skilled for everything or a professional (handyman) with a single duty.

3. The dynamics of educational challenges and some solving horizons.

Human society in all its forms and formulas is dynamic and complex. Dynamics is generally the multitude of challenges and complexity of the answers. It is almost impossible to formulate and argue apodictic judgments in the field of educational challenges. What is necessary and sufficient in this area has many facets and many horizons of expectation. In fact, the largest, most complex and difficult challenges are particular for the educational systems and higher educational systems.

A possible interpretation of the SWOT analysis on the educational system (Table 1) could provide useful insight and constitute itself as a support for a better management system. It may also help support optimizing the ratio between supply and demand, between strengths, weaknesses, dynamic opportunities and obviously complex challenges.

Such an analysis will outline, of course, the great diversity of interactions and interdeterminations and bring to the forefront the need for flexibility in the strategic planning of educational processes. This type of flexibility does not necessarily mean uncertainty and fumbling, nor voluntarism and arbitrariness (each policymaker usually reconfigures the educational system at all levels, without a truly serious impact study and broad and predictable horizons), but the necessity of a rigorous construction and, at the same time, able to adapt to the complex requirements of the market and of the generation that particular cognition so as to ensure the stability and efficacy of educational processuality within the new type of society

There certainly are educational challenges globally, regionally and nationally, but also cross-border challenges, challenges posed by networks, the relentless dynamics of the cybernetization and robotization of the society, dangers, threats and economic risks, political, social, military, green, cyber risks and so on. All these are found in all stages of organizing and conducting educational processes and the manager must take them into account.

Of course, we could identify challenges in higher education systems after many criteria, but the most important of these challenges could be:

- financial challenges;
- technological challenges;
- social challenges;
- economic challenges;
- political challenges;
- cultural challenges;
- the challenges of globalization.

Table 1: A possible SWOT analysis support of interactions and strategic interdeterminations within the higher educational system

	EDUCATIONAL VALUES	EDUCATIONAL INTERESTS
ENDOGENOUS	<p style="text-align: center;">STRENGTHS, VALUES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What are the strengths of the higher education system? - What are the main components of the strategic culture of higher education systems and processes? - What are the academic values that underpin strategic management of higher education? - What could be the basis for the strategic planning of the higher educational processes? - What are the intersection points and solid structures of traditional educational values and those generated by modern society? 	<p style="text-align: center;">WEAKNESSES, VULNERABILITIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What are the weaknesses of the higher education systems and processes? - What are or can be the sensitivities of the higher educational system? - What are the vulnerabilities of the higher education systems and processes? - How do they manifest themselves in educational risk evaluation? - Which are the sensitivity areas of the interactions between labor market requirements and educational offer? - Which are or can be the inadequacies in time horizons in designing higher educational strategies?
EXOGENOUS	<p style="text-align: center;">OPPORTUNITIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Which are or may be the opportunities in the higher educational system? - What ways are there in order to achieve the goals and objectives of strategic planning in higher education? - How can they be capitalized? 	<p style="text-align: center;">CHALLENGES, THREATS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What are the main challenges for educational systems and processes? - How are they found within the configuration and evaluation of educational risk defined by the intersection between vulnerabilities and threats? - How do challenges configure themselves into threats?

Source: Author's contribution

Financial challenges are perhaps the most acute and frequent even in the field of higher education, which is par excellence one of professional, social and cultural summum. They are not limited to the financial benefits of a profession, nor the processes' costs of higher education, but serve the financial component of the functioning of society, the impact of finances on the state, well-being and becoming. Some of these challenges are limited to various ways of financing higher education and lifelong professional education; others concern the actual costs of a person's access to higher education type etc.

The assumptions regarding the allocation of 6% of GDP towards education have never been respected, the real situation of such allocations even registering drastic reductions. Hence, the lack of care for the educational systems and processes, decision-making factors' irresponsibility and extremely serious economic, social and cultural effects on the intellectual potential and development of future generations.

Technological challenges are also, in their turn, highly diversified and complex .High-tech and information technology are directly related to educational performance and its effect in all the other plans. The most complex of these challenges is the unprecedented development of communicative networks, the Internet and, obviously, the educational network. They have allowed furthering the integration of educational processes and, on this basis, of performance. Heavy investments have been made in these networks – basically, there is no educational institution in Romania that does not benefit from the network (high-tech and IT), fact which radically changed the configuration of education, real-time access to education thus creating a new component of these processes, the e-learning component. Of course, these technological and informational challenges don't always have positive effects. Computers may weaken the brain and make it lazy, lessens the need of memorizing and learning and, in certain situations, even supports superficiality. Therefore, high-tech and IT challenges should require proper control and management. This can be achieved, for example, by creating higher educational networks for large universities centers, on categories of universities and even nationwide. These networks allow intra – and inter-university communication in real time and, on this ground, interdisciplinary and performance enhancement.

Social challenges are those that actually provide the connection between educational processes and social dynamics. Higher education requires a certain type of social commitment from those who have access to it, and society must have sufficient absorption capacity for this level of education. Sometimes, due to imbalances and to some type of society saturation with graduates from higher education, the social absorption at the academic level diminishes and the effects of this process create great vulnerabilities. One of these vulnerabilities is represented by the increasing number of unemployed people with higher education and another one resides in the brain-drain phenomena, a process that severely damages the level of culture and the quality of Romanian intellectual elite.

Economic challenges are at the core of all educational type challenges. After all, each of us is preparing to pursue a profession, especially in the economic environment, the main field of activity that produces material and financial added value. Statistics show that Romanian economy not only is not able to absorb the highly qualified workforce, but is so weak and unstable that it generates increasingly more negative challenges, actually not in the attraction of the highly qualified workforce, but in its rejection. Such challenges are currently in a state in which it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to manage them, and especially to use them in order to achieve progress and not regress.

Political challenges, unfortunately, have some negative performance impact in generating endogenous conflictuality. They should be considered qualitative horizons and constitute themselves as one of the promoting pillars in facilitating performance.

Cultural challenges in Romania are not at the highest level. It's fundamental concept is value and sometimes falls into the background in favor of excessive pragmatism and easy gain. Europeanization sometimes throws those that are not truly anchored in national values and it may display itself as a cultural vortex.

The challenges of globalization are actually the most over-wordy, more difficult to identify and understand and, therefore, extremely fluid and dangerous. Globalization is a natural process that keeps human society and civilization moving towards a higher level of knowledge – to the knowledge society -, but such a shift does not take place in a linear manner and in a strictly determined way, but in a complex way, with drops and returns, with outstanding achievements and failures, with particularities and specificities

difficult to identify and assess. Global challenges are, on one hand, stimulants for the cognitive processes, for identifying calling horizons and, on the other hand, inhibitory and even bringing insecurity, through ignorance or false knowledge of coordinates of such developments. Globalization penetrates especially at higher levels of education and operates beneficial openings for understanding development, but also hasty generalizations which depersonalize universities and make them great disservices.

4. Conclusions

All these challenges and others that we have not dealt here make the management of higher education extremely difficult. Their coordinates are numerous and extremely diverse. For instance, in the relationship between the needs of the labor market and the systems and processes of university education there are many facets of a fluid reality difficult to put into templates. It is possible that the labor market has ancient, not modernized components that stifles educational processes, or new components that have not yet been understood enough in the academic environment. It is important that all interacting components involved in the creation and improvement of human potential to interact in an appropriate and effective way in resolving all challenges, so that performance would not only be possible, but achievable too.

5. References

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