

Higher Education The Key in The Development of The European Union Economy

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Abstract - Higher education is a key element in the knowledge-based society, encompassing education, research and innovation. Higher education graduates manage to find a job on average twice as fast than those who have attained lower secondary education. The purpose of the article is to perform a comparative analysis of Romania-EU higher education. In this respect, the total number of students per 1000 inhabitants was followed, in conjunction with some of the most important influential factors, such as admission restrictions, population age group, and financial support for students. The degree of participation and the results obtained by the students during the study period are influenced by the capacity of the education systems in each country to meet the needs of the students, to ensure that their financial situation does not constitute a barrier to either access or for educational progress and to provide them with appropriate services to support them during the period of study.

Index Terms : higher education, student, admission restrictions, age groups, student support, school fees.

I. INTRODUCTION

Education conveys the values and traditions of each nation / society / community from one generation to the next, representing the cultural programming of future generations. It plays a decisive role in the development of the essential skills and attitudes necessary for each individual, so that he can gain his living and later on he can become economically productive. (Gabriela Puskas, 2010). The educational system in each country has its peculiarities, determined by the economic, social, political, cultural, traditions specific to each nation and by the pedagogical concepts it promotes.

Higher education is a key element in the knowledge-based economy and society, encompassing education, research and innovation, and to be effective, it must be fair for all and financially viable. Education is no longer limited to national schools, but must cross the borders of the country to penetrate a globalized world ! (The International Key to Success in Higher Education in a Globalized World, 2013). In the paper The cost of education in the university environment.

Model of calculation, Ioanăș, Tuțu Gruiescu elaborated a model which determines the costs of didactic activities and, moreover, the cost of specific "end products" (education, research, professional development, activities focusing on performing services in this domain for third parties).

Due to the great importance of higher education at global level in 1999, the European Higher Education Space (SEIS), which currently counts 47 countries, was created within the Bologna Process. Thus, there were set the foundations of higher education which serve the growing range of community and society (Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Education for Human Rights, 2010). Within the SEIS, changes have been made in the educational structures, quality assurance systems have been developed through the implementation of mobility facilitation mechanisms, thus attempting to identify problems regarding the social dimension of higher education. The most important objective of the Bologna Process is to increase the number of students and to raise the standard of higher education. Higher education was one of the lifelong learning elements of the Education and Training 2020 Education and Training strategic framework. According to this framework, the number of adults aged 25 to 64 participating in the lifelong learning process should register a significant increase of at least 15% in some EU countries by 2020.

Higher education also plays a very important role in terms of unemployment, as people with fewer qualifications find it harder to get a job, with the needs of the labor market evolving, in particular, towards an increased demand for more skilled workers. (Gabriela Puskas, 2010).

II . METHODOLOGY OF RESEARCH

In order to perform a comparative focus group analysis, in terms of the Romanian-EU education system, the research methods used were: analysis and synthesis, the induction used in the selection of the opinions of the specialists in the field on the issue studied and deduction, by the cross-cutting method, following the evolution and the measures adopted over time.

In order to achieve the proposed objectives, we have used a series of bibliographic sources comprising specialized books, accounting regulations, tax and legal regulations, studies and articles published nationally and internationally by various bodies in the field. In this regard, we have collected data from the Institute of Educational Sciences (ISE), the Ministry of Education and Research (MEC), the National Higher Education Funding Council (CNFIS), Euro-stat, the

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In this respect, the total number of students per 1000 inhabitants was followed, in conjunction with some of the most important factors of influence, such as admission restrictions, age group, and financial support for students.

III. RESEARCH RESULTS

According to the European Commission's Higher Education Strategy 2013, the increase in student numbers through Erasmus + and Horizon 2020 was encouraged, encouraging students to spend a period of time abroad as part of their professional training, which would allow acquiring of the skills needed to an international career. According Erasmus +, which was launched in January 2014, the number of exchanges of staff and students will be 4 million people by 2020. The strategy encourages the development of actions on three levels: international exchanges of students and university staff, internationalization and improvement of study programs, including digital education and cooperation, partnership and capacity building. (European Commission - Opening European Education to the World, 2013).

Analyzing the total number of students per 1000 inhabitants (Table 1), between 2001-2015 within the European Union, the population of students in higher education (ISCED 5 and 6) registered a fluctuation in their number.

Table 1. Total number of students per 1000 inhabitants 2001/2015

The country	The total number of students per 1000 inhabitants		
	2001	2011	2015
UE-27	611,74	745,52	718,05
Belgia	359,3	462,4	504,7
Bulgaria	247	285,4	298,9
Rep. Ceha	260	446,2	395,5
Danemarca	190,8	258,9	313,7
Germania	2083,9	2763,1	2977,7
Estonia	57,8	69,1	55,2
Irlanda	166,6	196,3	214,6
Grecia	478,2	660,7	677,4
Spania	1833,5	1950,5	1963,9
Franta	2031,7	2259,4	2424,1
Italia	1812,3	1967,6	1826,4
Cipru	11,9	32,1	37,1
Letonia	102,8	103,9	85,8
Lituania	135,9	187,1	140,6
Luxemburg	2,5	5,4	6,8
Ungaria	330,5	381,9	307,7
Malta	7,4	11,4	13,2
Olanda	504	780	842,6
Austria	264,7	361,8	425,9
Polonia	1775	2080,3	1665,3
Portugalia	387,7	396,3	337,5
Romania	533,2	871,8	541,6
Slovenia	91,5	107,1	85,6
Slovacia	143,9	226,3	184,3
Finlanda	279,6	308,3	302,4
Suedia	358	463,5	428,5
Regatul Unit	2067,3	2492,3	2330,3

In most countries in the European Union there have been fluctuations in countries such as Italy (1967,6 / 2011), Latvia (103,9 / 2011), Lithuania (187,1 / 2011) or Hungary (381,9 / 2011). EU, Germany, Spain, France, Austria and the Netherlands had a higher growth rate than the EU average. The largest increase has been recorded in Cyprus during this 15 year period, the number of students tripling. The same trend had countries as Germany and France, but their growth is lower compared to Cyprus. Some countries in the European Union have had an upward trend from 2001 to 2011, after which the number of students has fallen more or less, among them Estonia, Italy, Latvia, and Hungary. In Romania, the increase was considerable from 2001 to 2011, by 61.16%, followed by a drastic decrease of 62%, reaching almost the same value in 2001. The change in the total number of students in higher education has been influenced in recent years by many factors such as restrictions on admission, age group of population, financial support for students.

A. Restrictions on admission

Within the European Union, the minimum condition for ensuring access to higher education is to have a certificate of upper secondary education or equivalent. In countries such as France, Malta, Italy, Austria, Iceland and Belgium, access to higher education is unrestricted (open) based only on the certificate awarded on completion of upper secondary education or an equivalent. In contrast, due to the large number of candidates, which exceed the capacity of institutions, other admission procedures are applied in most EU countries. In Portugal, the United Kingdom, Spain and Cyprus, the number of places in higher education for all areas of university education is established at national or regional level. In some cases, prior to establishing the number of places, consultations are held with higher education institutions. In Lithuania, Latvia and Romania institutions propose the maximum number of places for each field of study, and the education authorities approve the final number to be funded from the allocated education budget. In Sweden, the Higher Education Institute (IIS) is responsible for determining the number of places for different programs, respecting the state boundaries of each institution. In Cyprus, the number of available places is negotiated between higher education institutions and government authorities.

B. The age group of the population

Is the second factor that has a rather strong influence on the number of students in each country. According to the statistics, the proportion of young people aged 20-24 and 30-34 years who have graduated from higher education has been steadily increasing since 2000. In Bulgaria, Poland and Slovakia, the population with a level of education at most in lower secondary education, needed an average of more than one year than higher education graduates to find a relevant job.

Finally, we must also mention the differences between the two sexes in terms of employment rates. In 2015, at EU level, there were 249 men who followed higher education per 1000 inhabitants aged between 20-29 years and 131 women per 1000 inhabitants. The male population is predominant in fields such as: computer science, engineering and related

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professions, transport services, and female population dominate areas such as education, veterinary medicine, health and social care.

The lack of jobs proportional to the graduation rate of the higher education units is due to the fact that there is a graduate exodus compared to the demand in some fields, while in other areas there is a deficit. Although the number of men (76.9% / 2015) graduating from higher education is higher than that of women (65.3% / 2015) in almost all academic fields, the possibility of them not having a job is lower than that of women.

C. Student support schemes

Are a last important factor that plays an important role in varying the total number of students. Higher education benefits from financial support based on the social principle: "equality and opportunity for education for all", which allows the access of an increased number of young people to this form of education. The main forms of support (Table 2) are:

- financial support to students to cover maintenance costs in the form of loans and / or scholarships;
- financial support for the payment of administrative fees and contributions to cover the costs of schooling, in the form of loans and / or scholarships, exemptions and / or reductions;
- financial assistance to students' parents, in the form of family allowances and / or tax cuts.

Table 2. Public financial support for full-time students enrolled in first qualification programs (ISCED 5) in public and / or private state-dependent institutions 2011/2015

Support to cover maintenance costs	BE	BG	CZ	DK	DE	EE	IE	EL	ES	FR	IT	CY	LV	LT	LU	HU	MT	NL	AT	PL	PT	RO	SI	SK	FI	SE	UK
Support to cover maintenance costs	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red
Support for administrative fees and or tuition fees	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red
Extended support (global)	Blue	Blue																									
The country	BE	BG	CZ	DK	DE	EE	IE	EL	ES	FR	IT	CY	LV	LT	LU	HU	MT	NL	AT	PL	PT	RO	SI	SK	FI	SE	UK

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The legend:

- All students
- Student Residents

As can be seen at the level of the European Union, only two countries, Belgium and Spain, offer students all three types of financial support. Financial support for all students to cover maintenance costs is provided in countries such as Belgium, the Czech Republic, Germany, Estonia, Greece, Spain, France, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, the Netherlands, Austria, Romania, Slovakia and Finland. On the other hand, support for parents of students enrolled in ISCED 5 programs for "first tertiary qualification" is only granted by some of the member countries. This qualification program is a model based on students' financial independence, and support for parents comes in the form of family allowances and / or tax

cuts. This program comes in overcoming direct support for students to cover maintenance costs.

In Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark and Malta admission to higher education is free or almost free, students only pay a contribution to the student organization; financial support is granted only to cover specific maintenance costs. In Croatia, Hungary, Luxembourg and Romania, students pay tuition and administrative fees, and the only state support is financial support to cover maintenance costs. In both the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, in addition to helping to cover maintenance costs, students also receive support for administrative or tuition fees. Spain also grants mobility grants to those studying in an autonomous community other than residence.

Most countries grant "general scholarships" to students studying in an autonomous community where they reside, but there are also countries that provide support to non-resident students. General scholarships are granted to cover accommodation, materials, transportation, and compensation for incompatibility between studies and the job.

In Germany, all domestic and foreign students can benefit from tax reductions or participation in loan schemes according to the applicable regulations in the country where the institution is located. In addition to BAföG's support (maintenance costs, half-reimbursable and half-repayable, interest-free), there are different federal lending schemes offered by the KfW-Bank, public bank on favorable low-interest rates. Since 2010, the merit support form, Deutschlandstipendium, has been introduced .

Parents whose children follow a form of continuing education or training in Belgium receive child allowance as a form of extended (global) support until they reach the age of 26. If a student lives apart from the family, then he / she receives the allowance directly. In Slovenia, we encounter an extended support scheme where funds are not allocated not to students but to the service providers for accommodation, transport (resident students) and the meals (all students). Both Greece and Romania provide for all students, transport subsidies, as well as discounts for all publicly funded events: museums, theaters, etc.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Permanent education has become a necessity of society, which is an important principle that tries to order a reality specific to our century. The educational level, both among young people and among adults, is the most impacting factor on the level of unemployment in each state.

The degree of participation and the results obtained by the students during the study period in higher education institutions are directly influenced by the capacity of the education systems in each country to meet the students' needs to ensure that their financial situation does not constitute a barrier either for access or for educational progress, and to provide them with appropriate services to support them during the period of study.

In order to increase the number of students, it is necessary to consider first the extension of the admission criteria so that all those who wish to complete their studies in a higher education institution even those whose financial possibilities are small, should be given the opportunity to do so regardless of the previous achievements they have obtained in the

formal education system (Key Data on Education in Europe, 2012).

Another key criterion in creating a society whose youth are well trained is the quality of education, which the state must pay special attention to. Graduates must integrate in a very short time and demonstrate professionalism in the areas in which they are trained.

Educational institutions need to use all means to stimulate students for exceptional training, for example by awarding merit scholarships in a higher value than the current one.

Also, the international collaboration in education and training should be in the attention of the state institutions. The European Union through the European Commission calls on all member states to collaborate, joint programs to increase the quality of the study act.

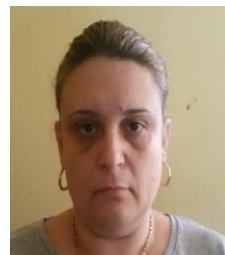
Member State authorities should be more involved in analyzing and publishing workforce needs per domain. In

this way, when enrolling in order to follow courses, students should be informed about what the field is looking for in terms of jobs.

Last but not least, an important point in the future of higher education is the Council of Europe and the Directing Committee on Higher Education and Research, which should use its position as a pan-European value-based platform to ensure that the essence of academic values is rooted in the European Higher Education Space.

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