

TENDENCIES, DEVELOPMENTS AND STEPS TOWARD INCLUSION IN THE EDUCATION OF HUNGARY

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Abstract

The present study deals with certain milestones, key steps of education process in Hungary, which leads to a modern and democratic educational sector. The study keeps the public education segment in main focus, with outlooks to changes of vocational education and training, and to steps toward inclusion. Observing the process of education focusing on the individual, it is obvious that education holds a number of key tasks regarding the social welfare, in all of the life-stages of the individual.

Key words: *Hungary education system, competency based education methodology, VET, system of special education, integration.*

Introduction

In Hungary since the change of political system, an important change has taken place in the field of education from early childhood education to higher education, in educational administration, both in the content and in the field of pedagogical practices.

Hungary, like other post-communist countries, rethought and found itself as a part of a new system. This new system works with other power relations and other operational mechanisms, so it generates new challenges for the former Eastern Block countries. The democratic transformation of the country demanded radical changes in almost every area of life. Of course, no exception is the area of education either.

The basic task of education process is to bring up a child, assuring and creating the environment of healthy and full value development according to individual needs and abilities. At the institutional level, the task is to afford education which develops the skills and competencies helping in adult life: independent personality with flexibility, capability to learn and adapt effective coping strategies. If education has success in this role, it can contribute to founding the social welfare of the individual.

Object of the study: To observe essential changes in Hungarian education system since 2000 in the context of common strategies of the EU education policy.

Aim of the study: To set up changes in methodology and attitudes in Hungarian education system since 2000 in the context of common strategies of the EU education policy.

Methods of the study:

Analysis of theoretical issues and document analysis were used collecting research data.

Empiric indicators were presented and discussed using the method of description.

Trends of decentralization

The governance and regulation of education system have changed by the decentralization process from the eighties. This process has many reasons. First of all, the start of the reform of the governmental and executive/administrative system, which is associated with an essential decentralization change in the western European countries. The changes were not in balance: in some sectors the reform was effective but other sectors were slightly concerned by the effectiveness of reforms (Halász, 2002a). The second reason and need of the reform is the growing complexity of the post-modern society. The roots of this complexity are the quantitative expansion and the insider differentiation (Halász, 2002b). Other significant reason that is common for Hungary is evolvement of decentralized education system. It was one of the significant changes after the end of the regime in the 80s. The process of decentralization was needed because the governance of the education system could not treat the structural problems and it caused defeats in that time.

The complexity of the system – what increased more by influence of the decentralization – closed out the opportunity of a simple recentralization.

Meanwhile – rather in spontaneous and not so conscious way – the government was aimed to control the whole system in spite of the complexity and decentralization. The main governmental assignments, principles of regulations, framework, and funding system were delegated to the local authorities, but at the same time it formed two-stairs educational governance: general educational policy and – mainly local – maintainers.

In 1993 the Public Education Act was published, and its modified version of 1999 shows the effort especially to control decentralized education system.

The main alterations in this sector are the following:

- The reinforcement of assessment and measurement functions.
- The increase of capacities of local and central management (with financially supported training, for example)
- Development of teachers' training oriented towards the local needs
- Mediation services that are able to solve local problems
- Establishment of the Commissioner Office for Educational Rights
- Assurance of the quality activities at national and institutional level, as well.
- Development and implementation of communication links among the sectors and divisions. (Halász, 2002).

It means that specific feature of the Hungarian education system of this period could be defined as a model to the complexity and the local differentiation of education process and at the same time the mentioned aspects were applied into special education as well. It leads to the evolvement of wide range of the control tools. Nevertheless, it cannot ensure the level of education control, what is expected by the society (Halász, 2002).

The changes of professional attitudes, creation of basic documents, and definitions

With the change of social system new demands and challenges associated with the practice performance of education system were formulated. The most striving segments in public education were the primary and secondary schools: indisputable outdated nature of attitudes and methodology in schools and child-centered educational methodology and

attitude in the pre-school education. There was a huge gap between the pre-school and school education. The need for the reform of public education was expressed at all levels of the profession, and the educational governance took many steps in this direction.

As a result, a reforming process has started, organized from the top and linked to this specificity, and it had some disadvantages. In 1993, the Public Education Act was published, and as a superior source of law lays down the frames of operations and the professional work in public educational institutes. As an important initial measure for the educational institutions the act provides to create their own pedagogical programme, as a general document, which has to contain the educational principles and goals of the school and also has to contain the detailed educational activities, local curricula, etc.

The pedagogical programme is developed by the teaching staff of the institution maintaining valid governmental agreements. In the beginning this task was difficult for the teachers and institutions, but it was useful for a conscious and systematic self-definition and pedagogical thinking generated in this way. In 1996 The National Core Curriculum (NCC) was published. The NCC is a progressive basic document, in many ways far beyond the reality of its present time. The core curriculum defines the basic standards, softens the requirements, and gives a space for creative solutions. The nature of core curriculum is a significant reaction to the previous over-ruling centralized educational practice.

However, a part of the practicing teachers could not really do anything with this sudden freedom, and with the new tasks, because up until then they socialized differently, and the learning of the new framework was clearly time-consuming.

The Public Education Act and the National Core Curriculum have changed over the past two decades, in the light of experience and learning process. The NCC was revised in 2003, after that it retained its strategic nature, but enhanced the creative features (Jelentés a Magyar közoktatásról, 2006).

It was a change in the shift of attitudes: there were no more discussions on literacy in the content of education. It was set as self-explanatory fact. The experts start to talk more about competencies, rather than literacy, that means they are not so interested in the matter of acquired knowledge but they rather care about the active capacity (Halász, 2003).

As the final result of the discussion, the definition of competency later was added into the NCC. The adopted interpretation of the competency by the European Union says that competency is a system of knowledge, skills and attitudes. The Hungarian National Core Curriculum is guided by this convention (Nemzeti, 2003).

The institutional image moves from a prescriptive nature towards a service providing nature.

Accession to the European Union, preparation and national strategies in education

In 2003 the Equality Act (Evi CXXV. törvény az egyenlő bánásmódról és az esélyegyenlőség előmozdításáról, 2003) in Hungary was published and it complies with the EU regulations in education field. At the same time the international comparative studies (for example, OECD-PISA) reveal that education in Hungary is not developing the knowledge-applying skills on an acceptable level, and education does not reduce, but increases social inequalities.

It is well-known that in the 90s the effect of economic, social and political transformation was increasing the processes of the social inequalities and poverty. The proportion of poor part of the society increased particularly high among the families with children. The significant loss of the transformation was in this part of the society, which lost incomes and social position, gained in previous decades during the period of full employment. Societal problems reflect

directly in extremely expressed way in the education sector. Until the mid-nineties the system of education in Hungary was almost entirely free from inequality (Halász, 2006). As a result, by the second half of the 90s, the Hungarian educational system contained a high level of inequalities and injustices, which could not be explained simply by the transformation of social and economic environment (Halász, 2006).

The Hungarian students' poor results pushed further the professional dialogue, and they moved the education towards the establishing of competency-based thinking and methodology.

As a preparation for the accession, Hungary created the sub-national strategies, including the Medium-term Public Education Development Strategy. This document analyzing the situation and conditions, provides an appropriate self-criticism, admits the shortcomings of the educational system, referring to the exploratory researches above. It identifies the areas requiring intervention in the education, and also identifies developmental priorities.

Medium-term objectives and the priorities of development:

- The foundation for lifelong learning by developing key competencies,
- Reducing inequalities in education,
- Improving the quality of education,
- Supporting the development of the teaching profession,
- Information and communication technologies in development,
- Improving the physical conditions of education,
- Improving the cost and the governance of public education (Az Oktatási Minisztérium középtávú közoktatás-fejlesztési stratégiája, 2004).

The planning documents of different stages of implementations, which were created for using of the EU funds' sources, are the following:

The National Development Plan (NDP) and New Hungary Development Plan (NHDP) include such operational programmes in certain educational sector: Human Resources Development Operational Programme (HRDOP) and the Social Renewal Operational Programme (SROP).

These documents develop reconstruction for public education according to the objectives of the Medium-term Public Education Development Strategy.

The wide-ranging of OP's priorities and measures (see Table 1) in holistic design was created with the cooperation of the respective sectors (social, education, health, culture) and with the Agency of National Development.

Table 1. Priorities and measures of the Human Resources Development (Operational Programme) (Human Resources Development Operational Programme, www.nfu.hu) (2004–2006)

Priority	1.	Supporting active labour market policies
Measure	1.1.	Preventing and tackling unemployment
	1.2.	Developing the public employment service
	1.3.	Promoting the participation of women in the labour market and the reconciliation of work and family life
Priority	2.	Fighting social exclusion by promoting access to the labour market
Measure	2.1.	Ensuring equal opportunities for disadvantaged pupils in education
	2.2.	Promoting social inclusion through the training of professionals working in the social field
	2.3.	Improving the employability of disadvantaged people, including the Romany

Priority	3.	Promoting lifelong learning and adaptability
Measure	3.1.	Promoting the development of skills and competencies necessary for lifelong learning
	3.2.	Developing the content, methodology and structure of vocational training
	3.3.	Developing the structure and content of the higher education
	3.4.	Training promoting job-creation and the development of entrepreneurial skills
	3.5.	Developing the system of adult training
Priority	4.	Developing the infrastructure of education, social services and health care
Measure	4.1.	Developing the infrastructure of education and training
	4.2.	Developing the infrastructure of services supporting social inclusion
	4.3.	Development of health care infrastructure in regions lagging behind
	4.4.	Development in health care in the regions lagging behind

The different priorities in the implementation are representing the sectors, and the professional supervision and coordination of the priorities is the role of the respective ministry, while the managing of the resources and technical management of applications are the responsibility of the NDA.

Table 2. Priority axes of the Social renewal (Operative Programme) (2007-2013) (Social renewal Operative Program, www.nfu.hu)

1. Improving employability, promoting entry to the labour market	
1.1.	Development of the employment services and establishment of an integrated employment and social service system
1.2.	Labour market activation, prevention and training
1.3.	Social economy, innovative and local employment initiatives and pacts
1.4.	Territorial aspects
1.5.	International and cross-border cooperation
1.6.	Use of the flexibility facility
2. Improving adaptability	
2.1.	Facilitation of access to training
2.2.	Development of the institutional system promoting adaptability on the labour market
2.3.	Enhancement of the adaptability of organizations
2.4.	Territorial aspects
2.5.	International and cross-border cooperation
2.6.	Use of the flexibility facility
3. Providing quality education and ensuring access for all	
3.1.	Supporting the dissemination of competence-based education
3.2.	Improving efficiency of the public education system; developing innovative solutions and cooperation
3.3.	Decreasing the segregation of severely disadvantaged and Romany pupils, promoting their equal opportunities in public education
3.4.	Supporting the education of groups with different educational needs, and the integration of pupils with special educational needs, intercultural education
3.5.	Territorial aspects
3.6.	International and cross-border cooperation
3.7.	Use of the flexibility facility

Continued Table 2

4. Developing the content and organization of higher education to create a knowledge-based society	
4.1.	Improving the quality of tertiary education in accordance with lifelong learning
4.2.	Expansion of the capacities of R&D&I&E of tertiary education, thus supporting the enhancement of institutional cooperation with businesses
4.3.	Territorial aspects
4.4.	International and cross-border cooperation
4.5.	The integration of horizontal considerations in education, research, and management
4.6.	Use of the flexibility facility
5. Strengthening social inclusion and participation	
5.1.	Developing the human capacities of the most disadvantaged territories
5.2.	Investment in future: child and youth programmes
5.3.	Improvement in access of increasingly disadvantaged groups to social services, in order to promote their integration into the labour market
5.4.	Development of the social care system, improvement in access to services
5.5.	Development of local communities and the civil society
5.6.	Enhancing social cohesion through crime prevention and reintegration programmes
5.7.	Territorial aspects
5.8.	International and cross-border cooperation
5.9.	Use of the flexibility facility
6. Health preservation and human resource development in health care system	
6.1.	Improving health and encouraging health-conscious behavior
6.2.	Development of human resources and services to support restructuring of health care
6.3.	Territorial aspects
6.4.	International and cross-border cooperation
6.5.	Use of the flexibility facility

The pilot program Nr. HRD OP 3.1.2 was the first stage in which competency-based education and teaching methodology packages were created. The program contained professional support for the implementing of complex innovation in the educational institutions. Regarding this program it is important to emphasize that joining the European Union, with the related strategic planning, with the lively thinking, and with the strengthening cooperation between the sectors, the learning process, which started to combat the deficits of the educational field, has become even more powerful and complex (Social Renewal Operative Programme, www.nfu.hu).

The transformation of vocational education

In the 80-90s the transition from planned economy to market economy largely affects the needs of the labour market of former communist countries. Completed segments in economy disappeared because of the expiry of the artificial system. In the societies of today the markers are: post-industrial, informational, global. Production of the material is no longer the centre of economic activities. While in the 70s, a quarter of workers have made direct productive work, today it is approximately 5-10%, and experts have predicted a further decline. The trade, service and particularly the information sectors are employing the growing proportion of the workforce (Mártonfi, 2003). These processes pushed the Hungarian vocational training to the direction of extreme changes.

In 1994 the National Qualification Register (NQR) was published, which largely

defined the content of developed frameworks. The NQR is not considered as an innovative step. The characteristics of the NQR showed the problems of the vocational education and training. It limited the development of proper understanding and appointment of workforce. The number of qualifications was too large (900-1000 positions are in the index in comparison with international workplaces register). The Binding of qualifications distributed qualifications according to the sectors of ministries. Qualifications, occupations and competencies are not divided so rigidly, they are divided by the logic of governmental sectors. So it is difficult to find a usable argument for this kind of splitting of qualifications between the ministries. Otherwise, the many industrial sectors reduce the effectiveness of administration, make it more expensive, and make difficult to reach a coherent operation. It was an “ancient-compromise” which spoiled a possibility of the creation of an effective NQR. The third limitation is inertness in real and adequate renewal. Finally, occupations and qualifications are matched to each other, that is why correlation of occupations and qualifications becomes less valid (Mártonfi, 2003). In 1998 according to the NCC decision, anachronistic training in the 9-10th grade was completely terminated (Mártonfi, 2003; Vágó, 1999). Later the important steps of the VET’s transformation took place in such a way: a) the radical reduce of the number of professions, b) definition of the basic professions, and their separation into part-professions.

All of these transformations were made according to the issues of Life Long Learning principle. For certain social groups (for example, low educated persons, certain groups of children with special needs) the increasing rate of professions based on graduation has negative outcomes.

Under the support of the EU Structural Funds, the development of professional-structured education in comprehensive education was set up in the Human Resources Development Operational Programme (HRD OP). 3.2.1. Central framework operated in the periods of 2004-2006. The transformations and the requirements of examinations were done according to the competency-based modular approach (Bükki, 2004).

The relevant skills and competencies for VET were defined and distinguished by different types. This step indicates the competency-based approach that became an important factor in educational policy in recent years (Bükki, 2004).

In spite of the major transformations the VET still not adequately responds to the changing labour market needs. This can be determining by several reasons:

- the changes of labour market have accelerated so much, that it is often impossible to follow them quickly enough;
- the new system remained limited by the sectors of ministries, and the creation of new professions is a too long process;
- in institution’s confrontation for own survival, they often keep training on, even if the possibilities of employment are low regarding to a profession.

In the processes of adult training there are faster responses to the demands of changes. There are training courses that are not included in the NQR description, so their establishment goes faster. Training courses pass through some accreditation process, as well, but the quality and usefulness of them are questionable.

Hungary faced with significant phenomenon that is the transformation of the role of VET. A lot of students planning to continue their studies in universities at the time start VET studies. It means that the double choice of students is faced: in case they fail in university exams, they will have extra place in vocational training schools. So the VET schools in many cases are more like passages, stations than endpoints (Mártonfi, 2003). Beside of the artificial extension of student status, studies in vocational training are useful for the professional socialization, self-cognition. VET has intense relationship with technical realities and through these often gives a lot more valid experience than higher education courses in the same sector.

Steps toward inclusion

The previous situation and problems of inclusion

The integrated education in the countries which have developed network of special educational institutions sets a target to give opportunity for education for all without any approaches of segregation. Hungary's special education system was basically segregating. Integration processes start by approval of Public Education Act. In Hungary, in the 2001/2002 school year, there were 320 special-education institutions and 240 special courses in the primary schools.

The mainstream and special educational institutes initiated the process of the unique integrative inter-institutional solutions.

Some of the special institutions transformed to methodological support centers and they were active in the process of inclusion creating services, cooperating with specialists and parents. However, the support was insufficient. In Hungary one of the largest problems in the processes of inclusions was a lack of professionals' adequate training, but this problem was successfully solved and special education system step by step enters into undivided general education system of Hungary.

An important aspect in the transformation of the Hungarian education system is changes in the education of children with special educational needs (SEN). In the context of above-discussed educational changes, as an internal request, and as a result of the influence of EU Education Policy trends, substantial changes in this area were achieved.

With the accession to EU, Hungary started to deal with the problems of the education of students with special educational needs (SEN). The European Union supports and encourages its disabled citizens to become active in the creation of their own lives instead of being passive recipients of various benefits (Mészáros, 2002). In 1998, the Act on equal rights and opportunities for persons with disability was implemented in Hungary. The main thing was the establishment of the new concept of social integration of people with disability. Definitions concerning special needs were revised.

The definition of special educational need

The special educational need is considered as any kind of difference of "trainability", of any kind of reason (Salné, 2001). Since 2003, the Public Education Act applies the expression "special educational needs" instead of disabled. The special educational needs are described as situation under which the right to get special education, training, care and other kind of needed help in the integrative environment is given.

The Public Education Act defines conditions that gives right for *social maintenance*, and divides it to two main groups:

- special educational needs (disabled) students and children;
- children and students with behavioral and learning difficulties (Együttnevelés határon innen és túl Szerkesztette: Kőpatakiné Mészáros Mária, Oktatókutató és Fejlesztő Intézet Budapest, 2009).

The second group has the right to differentiated education and certain additional services for child developing as well.

The learning based on the competencies, new methodological attitudes and inartificial experience – taking into the mind its complexity - could give new impulse and solutions for the mainstream institutions concerning the topic of integrating children with behavioral and learning difficulties.

Developmental steps

The measures of The Middle-term Educational Strategy were pointed to decrease the inequality in education field. The National Development Plan's Human Resources Operational Programme tried to give a good and supporting solution to the pursuits of inclusion with

the construction titled equal opportunities for disadvantaged students in the educational system. As a result of the support of the law and funds, and as result of intensive work of the professionals, the number of institutions organizing integrated form of education and number of SEN children in them has increased.

For the inclusive activity the institutions are getting normative financial support, unfortunately sometimes the integration is not sufficient because of the lack of real supporting environment. With the growing need for integrated education, the position of previously segregating institutions became problematic for government, teachers, parents and SEN pupils as well. Inclusive education could be implemented through professional and inter-professional cooperation. In future many closed institutions of special education could transform to the methodological and support centers.

Conclusion

1. The governance and regulation of education system have changed by the decentralization process from the eighties. This process has many reasons. First of all, the start of the reform of the governmental and executive/administrative system, which is associated with an essential decentralization change in the western European countries. The changes were not in balance: in some sectors the reform was effective but other sectors were slightly concerned by the effectiveness of reforms. The second reason and need of the reform is the growing complexity of the post-modern society.
2. As a result, a reforming process has started, organized from the top and linked to this specificity, and it had some disadvantages. In 1993, the Public Education Act was published, and as a superior source of law lays down the frames of operations and the professional work in public educational institutes. As an important initial measure for the educational institutions the act provides to create their own pedagogical programme, as a general document, which has to contain the educational principles and goals of the school and also has to contain the detailed educational activities, local curricula, etc.
3. In 1994 the National Qualification Register (NQR) was published, which largely defined the content of developed frameworks. The NQR is not considered as an innovative step. The characteristics of the NQR showed the problems of the vocational education and training. It limited the development of proper understanding and appointment of workforce. The number of qualifications was too large.
4. The integrated education in the countries which have developed network of special educational institutions sets a target to give opportunity for education for all without any approaches of segregation. Hungary's special education system was basically segregating. Integration processes start by approval of Public Education Act. In Hungary, in the 2001/2002 school year, there were 320 special-education institutions and 240 special courses in the primary schools.
5. With the growing need for integrated education, the position of previously segregating institutions became problematic for government, teachers, parents and SEN pupils as well. Inclusive education could be implemented through professional and inter-professional cooperation. In future many closed institutions of special education could transform to the methodological and support centers.

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