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Country Report

Continuity and innovation in the civic and social education curriculum for primary and secondary education in Romania

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Keywords: Civic education; Social education; Education for democratic citizenship; Intercultural education; Competence-based curriculum development


Purpose: The paper maps recent developments in civics and social education in primary and lower secondary Romanian education systems, pointing to significant curriculum changes, within the broader competence-based curriculum reform. The analysis aims also to formulate policy recommendations, based on identified challenges.

Design/methodology/approach: The methodology uses documentary analysis of curriculum and thematic studies, relevant for the policy reforms and practice conceptualisations in civics/social education.

Research limitations/implications: The main findings document the important step forward in promoting civics competencies in Romanian primary education, and social competencies in the lower secondary curriculum. Various challenges affecting the effective implementation of these changes are identified, both at system and school-level.

Practical implications: Focus on formal written and taught curriculum. As curriculum reform in upper secondary education is ongoing, the analysis is limited to primary and lower secondary education.


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1 THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM REFORM CONTEXT

The evolution of civics and social education is directly linked to the evolution of the Romanian national curriculum for primary and secondary education. Different meanings and orientations in the field of civics and social education can be seen in the last 30 years of the post-communist society, directly influenced by the broad curriculum models embedded in the national curriculum.

The turn from a communist society to a democratic one has been a process encountering radical changes since 1990. Bîrzea (1999) argues that democracy means an ideal and a project in permanent construction, an evolutionary process of a gradual approach to this ideal. This view is still valid, even for consolidated democracies, as we can see in the European and international landscape. So, the immediate changes after the 1989 revolution and the collapse of the communist regime were followed by permanent developments. The societal changes required educational answers of different amplitudes, as the educational system from kindergarten to adult education, is a key place where education for democracy should play a role.

Immediate changes meant the elimination of any trace of the communist ideology from the curricula in any part of the educational system. Thus, subjects such as: Constitution - 7th grade, Social-political education - 10th grade, Political education - non-formal mandatory familiarization of pupils with communist party documents and ideology, from 5-12th grade - were removed, and other subjects covering social education were implemented to replace them.

The first comprehensive reform of the education system started in 1997/1998, under the coordination of the Ministry of Education. The reform targeted all levels of education and virtually all aspects of the education process: organization, assessment, curriculum, management etc. One can speak of a real "Copernican turn", meant to determine a deeper change of perspectives, conceptualizations, and practices. Institutions such as the National Curriculum Council, the National Assessment and Examination Service, the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education and the Institute of Education Sciences had major contributions to the in-depth changes in the Romanian education system.

In 1998, for the first time, a training profile for compulsory education graduates, part of the national reference framework for the national curriculum (Crişan, et al., 1998) was developed. The view was to develop key transdisciplinary competencies that would allow the graduate both integration into socio-professional life, and as lifelong learning. In the development of the curriculum in the 90s, this set of skills was the benchmark for the development of school curricula for grades I - VIII (version 1998-1999) and for high school (version 1999-2001) (Sarivan & Singer, 2008). This first reform project reflected the explicit focus on student-centred teaching and learning, capitalizing on the social, interactive dimension of learning. The national curriculum managed, at the end of the 1990s, to become a coherent construct for the entire preschool, primary, secondary, and high school

path, which capitalized on a solid conceptual basis - a curricular framework for compulsory education and a mechanism for generating a new curriculum.

Civic education came into the curriculum framework, for the first time also included in primary education. Starting with 1997, Civic education was included as a compulsory subject in the core curriculum for grades 3, 4, 7 and 8, with an allocation of one hour per week. Prior to this, pilot experiments were carried out in the early 1990s. Civic education was meant of contributing to the holist development of students as active citizens, enabling them with the morals and values of a democratic society, and to take agency in their learning and personal development.

Being a responsible and active citizen involves not only a set of knowledge related to democracy, but also specific skills and attitudes. Therefore, both explicit and implicit civic education were considered (Georgescu, 1998), creating in the same time space for students to "practice democracy", to participate in decisions about the school and the education system, as representatives of the student's council.

For explicit civic education as a distinct subject, teaching textbooks and aids were developed, and postgraduate courses were available (Sarivan et al., 2005). In this effort, the Institute of Education Sciences, under the coordination of Cezar Bîrzea, played a central role, both in conceptualizing civic education and in preparing teaching materials and teachers for implementing it (Bîrzea, 1999, 2001; Rus, 2008). Cezar Bîrzea, a well-known specialist at the European level for his expertise in civic education and education for democratic citizenship, has largely contributed to the development of these concepts during his cooperation with the Council of Europe (Bîrzea, 2001; Bîrzea et al., 2004).

However, as a large-scale effort, the differences between the conceptualization and implementation measures, and the explicitly taught curriculum in the classroom, could be noticed. The deviant link between education policy, classroom practice, official documents and, on the other hand, the concrete results of students, has been widely recognized as a sensitive issue in national and European reports (Bîrzea, 2001; Coțofana-Boeru & Bălan, 2001; Dodescu & Hatoș, 2004; Bîrzea et al., 2004; Rus, 2008). As a process, based on the lessons learnt, the sensitive aspects were partly addressed in the revisions of the curriculum conceptualization carried out in 2009. However, the revisions were of small amplitude, and the textbooks remained the same, despite improvement in the relationship between objectives and content in the curricular documents. Teachers were not sufficiently enabled with the new perspective and the status of the subject remained on a rather low level, with teachers of different specializations teaching it to complete their teaching hours. These aspects were true not only for civic education, but for the whole taught curriculum, as the research highlighted: in 2001, the first comprehensive radiograph on the design and impact of the national curriculum was done (Vlăsceanu, 2002). From the first major curriculum reform project, the problematic relationship between the intended curriculum and the mechanisms of application appeared. Research by the Institute of Educational Sciences (2010) highlights that traditional teaching strategies still dominated, to the detriment of modern ones, and teachers were still

dependent on methodological clichés that negatively influenced the implementation of the national curriculum. Also, the content was not profiled enough with regard to what is meant by a "good citizen" (Colceru, 2013).

Inspired by the European efforts to promote key competencies (2004-2006), the National Education Law 1/2011 assumed, as learning outcomes of compulsory and post-compulsory education, the eight key competencies recommended by the European Commission. The Romanian education system is, therefore, one of the few EU countries embedding the entire philosophy and content of the key competencies in the national curriculum.

The second major curricula reform was initiated in 2013, with the view to ensure competence-based education, in line with the developments of the European level for competence-based teaching and learning. The changes were introduced gradually, per schooling level, starting in 2013/2014 at primary education.

A major modern approach can be noticed, as integrative teaching, with the aim to ensure learning outcomes and competencies. The changes were coordinated again by the Institute of Educational Sciences, with a consensus made in an accountable and constructive way, not directed by a certain party ideology (Teșileanu & Fartușnic, 2015). Key stakeholders were represented in the working groups established at national level, as well as in "validation" groups offering expert feedback on draft proposals.

A "two-pillar" consultation process was initiated for primary education curriculum development. The first pillar was the public consultation on curriculum-framework; in this case, teachers, parents' associations (already having a stronger voice at national level, in particular the National Federation of Parents Association) and other stakeholders expressed views and contributed with specific proposals. The second pillar was the "expert" consultation, addressing teachers and practitioners only, and was focused on subject syllabi development.

Thus, practitioners and specialists in curriculum development elaborated a new framework plan for primary education (2013), and new school curricula for this level of education (2013- 2014), as well as a new framework plan for secondary education (2016), and the new school curricula for secondary school (2017). Through Ministerial Order no. 3239/2021, the Reference Framework for the design, updating and evaluation of the National Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2022) was approved, having the role of establishing a unitary and coherent framework for approaching the national curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2022).

The elements of continuity in the new curriculum can be observed in the use of conceptual landmarks introduced by the curricular reform in Romanian education in the late '90s (curricular areas, core curriculum, school-based curriculum). There is also continuity between the curriculum framework for secondary and those for primary level, designed considering the training profiles of the graduates.

From 2017 the secondary education curriculum experienced a major change, with disciplines related to social education being introduced to all 5th to 8th grades. This way, the continuity of training in civic and social education was ensured, within the curricular area of "Man and society" (reuniting also History, Geography, and Religion). If in primary

education the ground is paved with civic education, in lower secondary school, social education reunites different subjects contributing to the development and consolidation of the social and civic competencies (critical thinking and the rights of the child, intercultural education, education for democratic citizenship, financial education), as part of compulsory core-curriculum.

Thus, not only a quantitative expansion of civic and social education took place, but also a more differentiated and integrative approach to what meant social education, and education for citizenship was considered. The new concept for upper secondary education is under debate and development. The changes meant not only another philosophy but also new subjects, followed by new textbooks and teaching resources.

The accountable and inclusive consultation approach promoted in primary education continued also in the lower secondary curriculum development process. The main outcomes of the consultation with teachers, parents' associations and other professional organisations lead to various improvements, as documented in specific consultation reports (ISE, 2016; ISE, 2017).

2 CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

The reform processes analysed in the previous section, covering the last 30 years of Romanian education system development, should be approached in the larger context, societal and multi-actor ecosystem. Various new pedagogical approaches were conceptualized related to civic education (Bîrzea, 1999; Bîrzea, 2005; Ulrich, 2007; Rădulescu & Tîrcă, 2004), intercultural education (Nedelcu, 2008; Cuceş, 2000; Rus, 2005; Intercultural Institute from Timisoara, 2019), social education (Păun, 2017).

The universities played a large role, both as pre-service and postgraduate training providers and with conceptual and research-based input. Many NGOs contributed to the development of the field and of the civic and social competencies of students, implementing thematic projects in schools, with actors such as UNICEF, Save the Children Romania, Education 2000+, Intercultural Institute from Timisoara. To this, informal education, increasingly in social media, had its clear contribution. Such a vivid ecosystem had its positive impacts not only on the curriculum of social education itself, but also as an „implicit curriculum”, in a societal view.

From the first reform stages in the late '90s, the Romanian curriculum in civic education assumed that social education is a complex and uninterrupted process, approached from different perspectives. Drawing on the three conceptions of citizenship, reuniting the individualistic paradigm, the political and the collective identity paradigm (Giesen and Eder (2001, apud Bîrzea, 2005), students are gradually familiarized with aspects such as: rights, freedoms and responsibilities of the citizens, societal benefits and welfare entitlements; the model of participation and the theory of democracy; identity and sense of (collective) belonging, common values and traditions and so on.

Starting with the primary education curriculum, priority is given to the social factor in education, as stated in educational goals, with an emphasis on social integration of the graduates.

The overview of general competencies defined within the syllabi of the two disciplines, for primary and lower education, offers a valuable insight into their conceptual approach.

Civic education, in primary education (see the third chapter), aims at developing three general competencies:

- Applying rules of conduct in everyday life
- Demonstrate moral-civic behaviour in everyday contexts, in a familiar environment
- Cooperate with others to solve simple tasks working, showing availability. (Syllabus for the subject Civic Education. 3rd - 4th grades, 2014)

The social education, studied in lower secondary school (see the fourth chapter), also aims at developing three general competencies:

- Critical reporting on facts, events, ideas, and processes in personal life and of different groups and communities, using specific acquisitions in the social field
- Cooperation to carry out activities and investigate issues specific to different groups and communities, adopting social and civic values and norms
- Active participation in decision-making processes, by exercising entrepreneurship, respectively by manifesting an active social, civic and economic behaviour (Syllabus for the subject Social Education. 5th - 8th grades, 2017).

This new understanding follows the important contributions of pedagogues and education philosophers, such as Spuru Haret, Petre Andrei, I.C. Petrescu, Constantin Dimitrescu-Iași, Dimitrie Gusti, Constantin Rădulescu Motru, Stanciu Stoian, Cezar Bîrzea, Emil Păun and others. They defined civic and social education as disciplines with a "strong practical-applicative character", that have the "vocation of a proven interdisciplinarity" (Neacșu, 2010, p. 14).

3 CIVIC EDUCATION IN ROMANIAN PRIMARY EDUCATION

The subject "Civic education", is included in the curricular area *Man and society*, also reuniting History, Religion, Personal Development. It is studied in the third grade and fourth grade, 1h/week. The new curriculum framework for the primary level, adopted in 2013-2014, kept this allocation, but significantly changed the learning outcomes, promoting a new curricular model based on competencies. New openings and elements of innovation can be identified, as presented in the table below:

Table 1. Restructuration of curriculum for civic education in primary school - comparison criteria

Criteria	Previous school curricula (approved by OMEC no. 5198 / 01.11.2004 for the third grade and no. 3919 / 20.04.2005 for the fourth grade)	Current school curriculum (approved by order of the Minister of National Education no. 5003/ 02.12.2014)
Curriculum design model	Objective-based curriculum design model.	Competency-focused curriculum design model.
The key concept	The concept of goal, defined in terms of inputs, of expected learning outcomes.	The concept of competence, defined in terms of outputs, as a structured set of knowledge, skills and attitudes, which allow to identify and solve problems specific to a field or general problems, in various particular contexts.
The structure of the school curriculum	Includes the following components: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • framework objectives; • reference objectives and examples of learning activities; • learning contents; • curricular performance standards (evaluation criteria) at the end of primary education, defined in relation to the framework objectives. 	Includes the following components: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • general competences; (“application of norms in daily life; manifestation of habits of moral-civic behaviour in living contexts in the known environment; cooperation with others to solve simple tasks, showing availability” (School curriculum, 2014); <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • specific skills and examples of learning activities; • content; • methodological suggestions.
Learning contents	1. Our relationships with other people; 2. The community; 3. Society and state.	1. The person; 2. Our relationships with things and beings.

Note: A complete list of school curriculum for civic education in primary education can be found in school curricula 2005 and 2014

The changes in the model of curriculum design, concept and structure impose the orientation of the didactic approach towards the pragmatic side of applying the school curriculum, by emphasizing the purpose for which it is learned, as well as the action dimension in training.

Regarding the content of learning, in the school curriculum from 2005 the emphasis was on relationships with others, on the community, on society and the state. Starting with 2014, emphasis is on the notion of person, identity (who am I and how do I relate to this change?). It is intended to preserve the essential features of the national identity that

remind people of who they are and how they perceive themselves in national and international contexts without denying, altering, or fracturing their identity.

4 SOCIAL EDUCATION IN THE LOWER SECONDARY NEW CURRICULUM

In the lower secondary level, a new subject "Social Education" replaced "Civic Culture" in the curriculum framework adopted in 2016. The new syllabi, developed and officially adopted in 2017, embraced a broader approach to civic competencies, in close relation to the multidimensional representation of an engaged citizen: critical thinking, intercultural, entrepreneurial, digital and financial competencies. The subject reflects the new model of curriculum design, based on the EU key competencies included in the learner profile.

Currently, Social Education is a curricular offer for the 5th - 8th grades of secondary education. The discipline is provided in the curriculum approved by OMENCS no. 3590 / 05.04.2016, in the curricular area *Man and society*, with a time budget of 1 hour/week, during this education level. Within the discipline of Social Education each year is a specific focus: critical thinking and children's rights (fifth grade), intercultural education (sixth grade), education for democratic citizenship (seventh grade), and economic, entrepreneurship and financial education (eight grade). As indicated in the subject syllabi, this contribution aims both to directly support social and civic competences of the students, the key competence of initiative and entrepreneurship, and to promote other key competencies (learning to learn, digital, literacy, cultural awareness, and expression).

In the fifth grade, the subject Social Education - Critical Thinking and Children's Rights aims to support students in their efforts to reflect critically on their own rights and offer a reflection space on related responsibilities. It provides daily-life contexts for formulating questions, constructing a personal perspective, and examining the opinions, explanations, and arguments of others. Equally, the learning activities aim to create incentives for the direct involvement of the students in the promotion and defence of their own rights.

In the sixth grade, the discipline Social Education - Intercultural Education explores the values and principles of interculturality. Students explore shared norms, traditions, customs, social roles, and symbols, as well as critically approach stereotypes and prejudices. This subject equally develops competences helping the students to understand and appreciate positively other cultures that are found in an intercultural society.

In the seventh grade, the subject Social Education - Education for Democratic Citizenship is focused on principles and specific values of democratic citizenship, and on learning activities facilitating the development of new skills, such as understanding the functioning of a democratic state, rule of law, and active involvement in school and community-based projects.

In the eighth grade, the subject Social Education - Economic and Financial Education is exploring the economic-financial and entrepreneurial dimension of the citizenship. In full accordance with the age of the students, the emphasis is on helping them to initiate action plans (personal / family) to achieve a goal, and on turning specific ideas into action.

Up to this point, only one generation of students has completed all four years of middle school with Social Education as a subject of study, so it is premature to determine the effects produced by it in the perception and attitudes of the students. (Constantin, 2021)

While the quality of the taught curriculum depends on various factors, it is worth mentioning that the Social Education syllabi have various innovative elements. One example is the modern approach of "patriotism" concept and its forms of expression within the broader exploration of personal identity and the inter-cultural approach (6th grade) and within the active citizenship perspective, including civic involvement and participation in public decision-making, control of public servants and civil society initiatives, including grass-roots/ local communities.

In terms of teaching, the main approach is reflected by the idea that we develop learning to participate by participating, not learning about participation. To achieve this, the curriculum provides the educational framework for participation, project-based. The project approach needs to be followed by the social education teachers, as this is an official requirement, beyond the simple rhetoric. It has allocated in the syllabi 25-30% of the total teaching time budget, per year of study. The project aims to exercise involvement, and the desire to change something. Thus, students are informed about a certain problem, express views, and attitudes, discuss with others, practice collaboration, identify solutions, negotiate, participate in decisions, take responsibility, and initiate actions to resolve the problem (Ulrich, 2016). This way, in an inter and transdisciplinary approach, students are introduced to specific aspects of justice, solidarity, public good, rights and responsibilities, observance of truth (Neacșu & Bucuroiu, 2019).

Civics and social education teachers currently have a choice of several alternative textbooks and could also access a digital version available on a national textbook platform.

Figure 1 shows the covers of textbooks used between 1997-2013, and Figure 2 includes the new textbooks, released in 2014. Even a simple comparison of the book cover can talk about the paradigm shift: from achieving goals (Figure 1) to the development of skills (Figure 2).

Figure 1. Selection of textbooks for primary and secondary school, 1997-2013

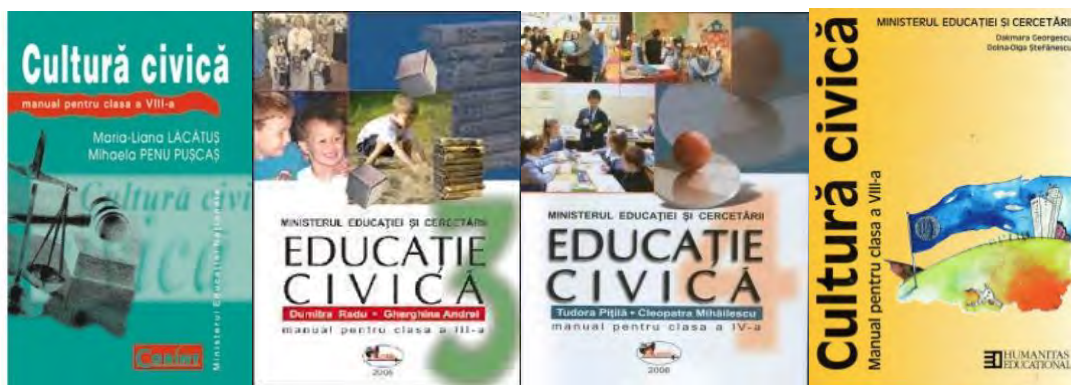


Figure 2. Selection of textbooks for primary and secondary school, 2014-2021

These complex curriculum changes aimed also to transform the school into a democratic framework for learning desirable behaviours, training, and developing competencies, experimenting, and socializing.

The teachers play a crucial role, and their proper training and competencies are the key to the smooth and qualitative implementation of the new curriculum. In the next chapter aspects of teacher training will be analysed, with a focus on existing challenges.

5 TRAINING OF CIVIC AND SOCIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS

The training of teachers covering the subjects related to civic and social education is different, according to the level of schooling. Thus, at the primary level, the class teachers also cover civic education for the 3rd and 4th grades. They are teaching integrated elements of social education in the other subjects, or in extra-curricular activities, after school, or in non-formal projects. In their initial teacher education, the class teachers have dedicated subjects of social pedagogy, intercultural education, and didactics of civic education. Besides this, they can have optional subjects of sociology of education, pedagogy of the community, non-formal education, and so forth, benefiting by an equilibrated theoretic and practical training for the subjects they are supposed to teach.

For secondary education, teachers of different specializations are entitled to teach subjects related to social education. Those teaching social education are usually teachers of history, philosophy, educational sciences, sociology, political sciences etc. Some of them consider the teaching of social education as a secondary activity to their main subject and specialization (for instance, history), and often lack specific training in both content and methodology of social education. Dedicated subjects of social education, didactics of civic education, intercultural education, and social pedagogy are in the curricula of educational sciences specializations of pedagogy or social pedagogy. For the other specializations, the teachers prepare for the teaching career in departments of teacher training. The national curriculum of teacher training departments foreseen didactics of specialization (i.e., history, sociology, political sciences), not of social education. Besides this, their curriculum for the teaching career does not include dedicated courses related to all four subjects

included in social education, for preparing teachers in secondary schools. They can have competencies of intercultural communication, of (global) economy, of human rights, according to the disciplines listed for their specializations. All the graduates of social sciences (sociology, anthropology, human resources, political sciences, international relations and European studies, administrative sciences, communication sciences, psychology, educational sciences [pedagogy, social pedagogy], social work) of law, of military sciences and security, of humanities (history, philosophy, cultural studies, heritage studies) are entitled to teach social education.

Limited training in initial teacher education for teaching social education needs to be completed by continuing education. A large variety of courses, didactic resources, teaching guides, demonstrative lessons and resources have been developed. A large effort to enable teachers, to train them mainly on how to integrate pedagogically the digital resources, to offer them open educational resources, is dedicated nationwide within the frame of the ESF project CRED - Relevant Curriculum, Open Education for All (2018-2023), a project coordinated by the ministry of education, in partnership with the former Institute of Educational Sciences (Petrovici, 2022). More than 55000 teachers from primary and secondary education are planned to be trained, amongst them being the teachers of social education. In addition to the training offer of teacher training houses from each county, there are training offers for civic education, intercultural education, developing critical thinking and so forth. However, as for continuing education teachers pay by themselves (except in the situations when training is provided within large-scale projects, like the CRED), it is up to them if they go for further training or not.

Once the social education-related subjects are in the compulsory curriculum, it is possible for teachers to pass the exam for unlimited employment in education on social education, being organized such exams every year, like for any other subjects, depending on the available places.

Steps are undertaken for improved and consolidated professional status in social education. Thus, under the coordination of the Intercultural Institute in Timisoara, the 3rd national conference in social education is organized in May 2022, with almost yearly editions since the new curriculum has been implemented for lower secondary education. Also, yearly competitions are organized for the projects pupils develop under the Project "Citizen", as well as yearly national Olympics competitions. The Project "Citizen" (Proiect "Cetățeanul"), as a methodological approach to teaching citizenship education, has been introduced by Intercultural Institute from Timisoara in 2004, transferring the one developed by the American Centre for Civic Education, and adopted by many countries, members of the international network of civic education, CIVITAS (Rus, Kaşa & Borovic-Ivanov, 2003; Rock, 2017). Since then, teachers from many counties were trained, and benefited from dedicated resources to enable students to contribute directly to solving problems of the community. Also, "Asociația de Educație Civică", a national association of teachers teaching upon this method, was set up.

The Intercultural Institute from Timisoara, as an institute working closely with the Council of Europe, played an active role in introducing in Romania and translating all the competence descriptors and support materials for implementing the Framework of competences for democratic culture, both for secondary education, and, more recently, for primary education (Rus, 2019). In addition, universities developed postgraduate offers or research tools to enable teachers in different aspects of civic education, for instance, in teaching about the European identity (Chermeleu & Rus, 2019; Borca, Rus & Sava, 2019). NGOs or private providers also have their accredited courses on such topics, attractive for teachers to earn their continuing professional development credits and increased specific know-how.

Despite such efforts for (continuing) teacher education, the results of the national study on teachers' attitudes and values towards democracy (Bădescu et al., 2018), revealed concerning aspects about them. Thus, there is a concerning percentage of teachers with a low attachment towards a democratic regime, and their level of social tolerance is rather low, even lower for some social groups than for the rest of society. The study concludes with the need for better training of teachers on education for culturally diverse communities. Tobin's research reveals that Romanian civic education teachers are often reluctant to discuss any political and social issues with their students (Tobin, 2010). Also, the study of Neacșu & Bucuroiu (2019) on teachers' attitudes towards social education points out that teachers need to be better trained for enabling them with a more open attitude and know-how towards fostering better cooperation and formative partnerships with the community outside school, to be able to provide more authentic education and experiential learning, better preparation of students to contribute to the societal wellbeing.

Besides the personal aspects, USAID (2018) pointed out that in Romania, like in Canada, civic education was taught using quite often a content-driven pedagogy and a teacher centred approach, with insufficient attention to development of students' agency, critical thinking, or collaboration skills (Mufalo et al., 2022). This aspect continues to be a sensitive one for the teaching staff, and an important shift is needed towards a more formative and active way of teaching. The results of PISA for Romania (OECD, 2019) show that the pupils in Romania feel rather unhappy at school and the social and emotional skills have a large space for improvement.

A whole new conceptualization of preparing teachers for a professional career is therefore under reconsideration. Ministry of Education runs several large-scale projects to ensure an integrative intervention for improving the professionalism of teachers at the pre-university level: (1) the project PROF - "Profesionalizarea carierei didactice" [Professionalization of the didactic career], Apr.2021-Dec.2023, in which 28211 teachers will be trained, and a new concept of mentoring along career is piloted; (2) the project CRED, already mentioned; (3) Pre-service training for teaching career through a didactic master, for 400 students - project START in career through the didactic master (2020-2023); (4) improving the relation of pre-university and university systems - ROSE project

(Romanian Secondary Education, 2015-2022); (5) E.T.I.C. - "Educație Timpurie Incluzivă și de Calitate" project [Inclusive and Qualitative Early Childhood Education] (2019-2021), dedicated to teachers in early childhood education, 2600 of them being trained during the project, besides the support materials, the needs analysis studies, the policy briefs, the capacity building activities planned in the respective projects.

6 CONCLUSIONS AND AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

The study aimed to capture the most relevant changes in the last 30 years in terms of civic and social education, at the level of primary and secondary education in Romania.

Thus, it mapped the curriculum developments and the transition from objectives to competencies, changes related to the content, offering examples of good practice in terms of teaching. It pointed to the tendency of moving from the transmission of theoretical knowledge to the observation of problems in the community and action on their settlement, the project method being at the heart of this approach. However, it is a work in progress, and it is too soon to evaluate the effectiveness of the new changes.

Concluding, based on the above considerations, some aspects can be summarized:

Firstly, the increased importance of civic education (for primary school) and social education (for secondary school) is worth pointing out, as the new curriculum reform ensures its continuity along the study levels, as in other European countries (Eurydice, 2017), and a more differentiated approach of social education in secondary education, covered in different compulsory subjects. Besides this, a range of optional subjects are available, approved by the ministry of education, or to be proposed at the school level.

Secondly, not only quantitatively, but also from a conceptual point of view, an improved approach can be noticed. Thus, project-based learning and experiential learning, in partnership with different NGOs or training providers, concern for an interdisciplinary approach, for learning democracy by practising and so forth can be met in the curriculum guidelines. At the same time, the guidelines left space for the teacher's creativity and own didactic decisions to adapt to the class context. Also, a wide range of efforts has been spent elaborating teaching materials, teaching aids, and open educational resources, in quite a short time.

Thirdly, while the importance of social education is explicitly mentioned in several documents of the Ministry of Education, it remains a sensitive issue. In practice, its effectiveness and added value can be improved by further education policy measures:

- A better teacher training for teaching social education, to accommodate the new curriculum changes of all 5-8th grades is to be considered. As teachers of different specialities are allowed to teach it, and it is not a clear identity of the required expertise, a common core of the needed training for teaching social education should be ensured.
- The teachers are not obliged to undertake any further training in social education, despite not benefiting from a dedicated one in their pre-service training as teachers of history, or philosophy, or whatever. They have the opportunity, but it is up to them if

they undertake further education for the social education subjects they are supposed to teach.

- These aspects require an urgent reconsideration, to ensure the quality of teaching the subjects. Otherwise, the curriculum conceptualization can be well done, but its implementation is far from the expected realization. More dedicated efforts are to be spent to ensure that the taught curriculum is of the expected quality, even with better monitoring of teaching practices.

Fourthly, in Romania, civic and social education benefits from little systematic research focused on practice, on its impact on students' learning outcomes. Research is needed on actual practices of teaching in schools, with a view to improving them. From a transdisciplinary perspective, education for democratic citizenship should be a comprehensive and holistic approach, and it is preferable to use experimental designs. Impact research on the added value of civic education is to be conducted in a comprehensive manner, being a way to increase its status, and make people aware of its importance, by taking part, for instance, to the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study. This way, the civic and social competencies of students can be compared with the ones of their peers in other educational systems, and better-informed decisions of improvement can be done.

For example, looking at the social movements of #rezist from 2017-2019, or at the quick mobilization of civil society in being a more active voice sanctioning wrong political decisions, or the quick and impressive mobilization to support the Ukraine war refugees, they are positive signs of mature active citizenship. Also, to pick one of the educational reforms for an implicit civic education measure for living democracy, if we look at the student's council activity, one can say that civic education had a strong positive impact on forming the citizens. *Consiliul elevilor* (Students' council) is nowadays a very important and active voice in contributing to and sanctioning the ministry's decisions.

Other specific areas of intervention include the development of competence-based training, both in initial and in-service teacher training, focused more on combating existing unproductive teaching practices, and teachers' "resistance" to apply the civics and social education syllabi in the spirit, not only in a formal way. Development of methodological guidance with new teacher-friendly resources is another important action to be done, complementing the existing teacher training programs and offering a more in-depth view on key aspects of curriculum implementation (learning context design, teaching strategies and methods, assessment tools etc.). A priority on the short term is also the development of new open education resources in civics and social education, taking advantage of the significant increase of teachers' digital skills during the pandemic period. The use of new technologies for learning and of open educational resources during face-to-face courses is to become the habit. At the same time, taking advantage of the new methodology in developing the school-based optional curriculum, new syllabi could be elaborated at the local, regional, and national level, including integrated courses within the same curricular area or with subjects from other curricular areas.

These measures need to bring together education authorities, students and parents associations, organisations from civil society and from the private sector, professional associations, and international donor organisations.

Summing up, the listed considerations on further possible developments are in line with the foreseen steps of the curriculum implementation, and with the integrative efforts of the ministry of education to enhance the professionalism of the teaching staff. Coherent and systematic further steps can ensure a consolidated and effective social education in formal education, as good premises can be noticed.

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