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EU POLICY ON EDUCATION FUNDING

Empirical
studies

Keywords

Educational system
Pre-school
School fees
Scholarships
Educational programs

JEL Classification

A20, I28

Abstract

On average, EU countries allocate 6.4% of total public expenditure for the direct support of the public sector at all levels of education. In view of a more rational allocation of resources seriously diminished by the crisis there are made efforts to identify educational areas considered problematic in terms of accessing various education programs. This paper presents pre-school funding policies and policies to support families with preschool and school age children in the European Union through a comparative analysis of the focus group type.

There are also presented concrete ways of achieving that family support such as tax cuts, family allowances or by taking into account certain factors in order to establish fees. In all countries where taxes are paid for pre-compulsory education (ISCED A) there is a mechanism by which parental contributions can be adjusted according to the means available taking into account criteria such as family income, number of children, family status (children who live with one parent) geographic area, etc.

Introduction

Pre-primary age has become a particularly sensitive period in child development. A fairly large number of socio-economic factors had a significant impact on the *psychological development of the child and his chances of having a successful school career*. One of the most important factors is poverty followed by belonging to disadvantaged classes, functional illiteracy, low level of education of parents, religious traditions associated with a cultural life where education level is not a very important value. (Figel, 2009)

Education influences changes in attitudes in society, with direct effects on the development and the main contribution is based on the ability to transform individual attitudes and values from "traditional" to "modern". (Cicea & Dobrin, 2005). One of the biggest tasks of education in this time of crisis "*is to meet the individual needs of education and social and economic development needs of the community (local, regional, national)*" (Pogolsa & Bucun, 2012).

The complexity of the economy has led in turn to the adaptation of education not only in training but also because "*it helps people to integrate into the present*" (Puskas, 2010). The educational system in each country has its peculiarities caused by economic, social, political, cultural level, the traditions of each nation and pedagogical concepts they promote. The educational system in the present, is trying to cover both the financial and educational needs of each individual. It should provide affordable options for everyone and methods of financial support to those who can not afford to support their children's education. In the schools and preschool, child's education is largely a state responsibility (finance, monitoring) and parents (access, choice, control). In this first stage the children can't decide for themselves whether to attend or not an institution or a particular course of study, decisions in this regard are being taken in 99% of the cases

by parents, and in the next stages, the child is largely dependent on the earlier stages

Pre-school in Italy and Belgium is *accompanied by early intervention programs to help the most disadvantaged people*, they are accompanied by other measures such as for language learning and support for social adjustment. Parental engagement *is supported through special programs of parent education and awareness of marginalized people*. *Pre-school education is proving to be essential for later stages of learning, both in terms of results and socialization* (Androulla & Algirdas, 2012).

Also essential for parents *is to know that when they are at work their children are under surveillance in an institutionalized system*. According to a survey conducted by Gallup in 2010 in Romania, during the week, 49% of little ones spend at the most an hour a day in the company of parents. "

2 . Research Methodology

In order to achieve the main objective were used the following **research methods**: analysis and synthesis, induction, used in the selection of opinions of experts in the field on issues studied and inference, by cross method, surveying the evolution and the measures adopted over time.

To achieve the objectives we used a series of bibliographical sources consisting of specialized books, accounting rules, tax and legal studies and articles published in various national and international bodies in the field. In this regard, we collected data from the Institute of Education Sciences (IES), Ministry of Education Research and Youth (MER), Eurostat, Education Audiovisual & Culture Executive Agency (EACEA), Eurydice, in order to make a comparative analysis, of the focus group type in terms of education system principles Romania-EU 2010/2011. In this respect, we analyzed preschool education funding policies and policies to support families with preschool and school

age children in the European Union and concrete ways of achieving that support such as tax cuts, family allowances or taking into account certain factors in establish fees. In all countries where taxes are paid for pre-compulsory education (ISCED A) there is a mechanism by which parental contributions can be adjusted according to the means available taking into account criteria such as family income, number of children, family status (children who live with one parent) geographic area, etc.

3. Analysis Results

Policies that funded preschool education and support of families with children of preschool and school age.

According to statistics published by Eurostat the situation regarding children's access to pre-school (3-6 years) has improved considerably due to expansion of early childhood education and development. This rate grew continuously from 90.3 % in 2007 to 93.2% in 2011. According to the European Commission up to 2020, this value is expected to reach to 95%. Romania, in 2007, has a rate of 81.8% and in 2011 82%.

In more than half of EU member states attending public preschool institutions (ISCED 0) is free, this feature being their strong point, allowing access for all children, especially those who come from low income families, with a large number of children or those with special family status (table 1).

In some countries, institutions may charge fees for preschools, especially for children under a certain age, usually three years (three years is the age at which they start the ISCED level 0). Last year of pre-school education is free in public institutions in the Czech Republic and in Sweden the gratuity is available for children of four and five years. Also, the public sector is free in countries like Bulgaria, France, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Portugal and Romania, while in the

private sector parents pay taxes. In Ireland, Poland and the UK, there are free seats for part-time for all children three to four years (corresponding to ISCED level 0), Schools can offer overtime but they charge.

In certain countries such as France, Italy and Romania in the public sector there is no charge, but you can collect contributions for auxiliary services such as meals served at school and transport. In France almost all private schools receive grant from the state, this leading to a very low level of charges.

In Hungary, the municipality has a duty to provide pre-school education. In the event that a private institution wants to take over the task of pre-school, this is achieved through an agreement between the municipality and private institution and children benefit from the service free of charge. In Spain the second cycle of preschool (3-6 years) in the subsidized and public schools is free and the first cycle of education (0-3 years) is charged. In Sweden public and private pre-school establishments are free for all children between four and five years.

In Spain and Germany, education is compulsory until the age of 6 years, parents may choose to enroll children in kindergarten from the age of three years. If the family does not have enough funds it can receive state aid based on income. As in the two countries above, in Finland preschool education is optional but only for children of 6 years. Preschool education, medical care, lunch, transportation to and from the nursery is free.

In exchange for the services of nursery parents pay a fee calculated based on family income and after-school activities are carried out by local authorities helped by volunteers. If transportation to and from school each day exceeds 3 hours a day, children are entitled to free accommodation in boarding. Both in Finland and in Sweden in case of compulsory education (7-16 years)

education services, teaching materials, transportation and meals are free.

In Spain, compulsory education is free but the teaching materials, textbooks and extracurricular activities are paid. Families with low budget can get financial aid by the legal system of each region. In their help, the Ministry of Education organizes an annual competition for scholarships. Private schools run by the Catholic Church largely have lower taxes than in other European countries, due to subsidies granted by the State.

In the Netherlands compulsory education is free up to age 16. Parents pay a fee for the *additional expenses* (educational materials, books and after-hours school) different from one school to another.

The methods used by the Member States in view of supporting the families with school-aged children varies from one country to another, such as reducing taxes, family allowances or taking into account certain factors in order to establish fees (table 2). In all countries where fees are payable for pre-compulsory **education** (ISCED 0) there is a mechanism by which parental contributions can be adjusted according to the means available to them, taking into account criteria such as family income, number of children, family status (children living with one parent), geographic area, etc..

In most Member States **household income** is the determining factor in setting these fees; Slovakia, Poland and the Czech Republic are the only Member States with exception to this rule. In the Czech Republic the fees are the same for all children and are established in each calendar year by the director of the institution. Exemptions from taxes are applied to all parents receiving social assistance and who have children in placement. France, Ireland and the UK are the only Member States where family income is the only criterion taken into account by local authorities, institutions

can only decide if a family is exempt from taxes or not.

In Estonia we find different criteria: at the central level it is considered only family income, while locally they are considering other additional criteria, such as number of children or family status. In Ireland we meet criteria such as marital status of the parents, whether or not they have a job or attending an education establishment day time or part-time. In Denmark, Austria and Germany paying taxes is made by geographic area. United Kingdom applies strategies such as **tax credits** to families with incomes below a certain level and whose children attend overtime schedule with fee. Here we meet a universal child benefits by means available to parents. For children of older age groups there is a connection with continuing education after the end of compulsory education until the age of 19.

In Luxembourg we meet *bills for services for children*, which are granted regardless of parents income with which children are entitled to at least three hours of service per week, free or partially exempt. This method, adopted in 2009, provides a partial exemption or a significant reduction in parental financial contributions.

In all member countries, **family allowance** is given at birth until the end of compulsory education; age limit can be extended if young people continue their education after completing compulsory education.

Reducing taxes is a complementary of family allowances, providing financial support for parents with children of school age, they usually apply regardless of the level of education that children attend from pre-school to upper secondary education. Discounts do not apply to parents of children in preschool education in Italy and Portugal, while in Norway, the reduction shall be granted only to families who can provide evidence for the expenses of services for children.

In most member States, with little exception, from pre-school to secondary education, students can receive **scholarships**, in Spain and Belgium scholarships are available for preschool. Romania is the only EU country that combines scholarships and family allowances: € 200 and *Money for High school* programs provide grants for low-income families throughout the school year.

On average, EU countries allocate 6.4% of total public expenditure for support of the public sector at all levels of education. The more common methods of support at EU level are the family allowances and tax cuts. These methods are widely used to support families with children of school age.

The German education system is slightly different from that of other countries. Students attend different schools with fully compatible curricula in the first two years, so it may defer the selection of a certain specialization. In the Netherlands we find a system of education based on "a common core curriculum." In the first two years of secondary education students learn in the chain VMBO and then for three years in HAVO and VWO routes.

Based on the material possibilities of communities, parents' wishes and not least the real needs of children, there were founded in the European Union different kindergartens with special educational programs with flexible schedules.

In Romania the government encouraged preschool operation with flexible program between 4 and 12 hours a day. In preschool institutions were founded just specialized groups for education of children with special needs. Within these groups there are children with speech disorders or handicaps. In 2011, 2107 children were institutionalized in these institutions. Complementary to the standard educational services there have been developed and implemented new services: psychology, physical education,

psychosocial (foreign languages, dance, chess, arts, computer, etc..).

Another model developed and expanded in Romania is *individualized early education* model supported by FISM, UNICEF and UNESCO. This model has been implemented in more than 20 kindergartens and provides educational services to children from vulnerable families in the project to improve the quality and access to early education in rural areas with special emphasis on vulnerable groups (Ministry of Education Sector 2012-2020, 2012). Another major project conducted to develop and extend preschool education is the *Education for All - Fast Track Initiative*. The project aims at the revitalization and development of preschool education.

Several EU countries and Romania include a program which takes place after school (school after school). This program has the advantage of guaranteeing quality services: personnel qualified and more able to support the child in preparing lessons, to supervise for a longer period of time. It was also found that schools that offer additional educational programs (school after school, step by step) are among the favorite schools by parents in comparison to the schools that offer only mandatory program.

These programs have led to both financial and educational advantages; schools where such programs are conducted have succeeded in providing school success for more students than schools working in ordinary program (Margineanu et al., 2011) . These actions are developed by identifying educational areas considered problematic in terms of accessing various education programs. Following these assessments are allocated additional resources in order to support implementation of various educational programs.

It is clear however that in developed countries there is a developed education system, obtained through substantial investments, both public and

personal, then the benefits can be shared by the whole society and the individuals concerned.

In order to improve the access, the future need to focus on investment in higher education and the implementation of strategies, such as scholarships, bank loans and loans repayable based on future earnings (Ministry of Education, Vision for the future Romania (2030),).

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Table 1. Funding preschool educational orientation (ISCED 0), in the school year 2010/2011.

Country	Public institutions	Subsidized private institutions
BE	X	X
BG	X	Y
CZ	X;Y	Y
DK	Y	Y
DE	Y	Y
EE	Y	Y
IE	X	Z
EL	X	Y
ES	X	X
FR	X	Y
IT	X	Y
CY	Y	Y
LV	X	Y
LT	X	Y
LU	Y	Y
HU	X	X;Y
MT	X	Y
NL	Y	Z
AT	Y	Y
PL	Z	Y
PT	X	Y
RO	X	Y
SI	Y	Y
SK	X;Y	Y
FI	X	X
SE	Z	Z
UK	X;Z	Z;Y

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Legend : X = Free Z = Free in some unit Y = The fee

Table 2 Factors taken into account in case of reductions or exemptions of taxes in public and private subsidized preschool institutions of educational orientation (ISCED 0) 2010/2011:

Family Income				X	X	X	X			X	X	X		X	X			X	X		X					X	X
Number of children				X	X	X					X	X		X	X			X	X		X					X	
Family status (single parents)				X	X	X							X				X										
Geographic location				X	X												X										
Other criteria			X			X							X				X	X					X				
There are no fees	X	X						X	X				X			X	X				X				X		
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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