



# THE STRATEGIC VALUE OF EDUCATION<sup>1\*</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

*Education has a strategic value for Romania and for Romanians – the motto of the present article, that stands valid in the everchanging educational environment. The purpose of the article is to bring once again to the forefront the stringent need and value of education in Romania, underscoring its strategic value. Be it education in the civil sector or in the military environment, the strategic value of education is an irrefutable evidence and decision-makers, whether rectors or commandants, must not waver in front of challenges in their leadership. We highlight the importance of strategies for education and the adaptability of the Romanian educational system to the modern and dynamic landscape that brings about both new and different generations, but also diverse challenges.*

**Keywords:** education; strategic value; resilience; competence; responsibility.

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Today, such a title can disappoint from the start any audience, even more so one connected, interested, and responsible for the big themes of the moment. And that is because the pairing of the two words, *strategy and education*, has become, over the last three decades, through over-exposure in form and over-absence in substance, synonymous with demagoguery.

While assuring that there is neither courage nor, worse still, cowardice in assuming the theme, the idea of strategic value for education should not be confused with the ubiquitous subject of - any - strategy for education. The concept of strategic value of education starts from the premise that, beyond its decisive impact on the social, cultural, economic defense and security dimensions of any state, it has and must have a strategic connotation and destination (or intention). Precisely so that the other strategies can succeed. The absence of education as the key to any other sectoral strategic approach might be the reason for the failure of *strategies for education* (and not just the inconsistency, underfunding and mismanagement) and the key to partial or, in some places, failure of different sectoral strategies in the economic or defense fields, etc. At the same time and in this world, education is and must be the main resource of all other strategies; it is the remarkable - at all times and in all worlds, education has made the difference of competitiveness, sustainability, and progress.

And I will provide, now and here, just one example from this time, but from another world: in the memoirs of Lee Kuan Yew, prime minister for three and a half decades in Singapore, education is undoubtedly one of the most used words to mark the evolution enshrined in the book's title, *From Third World to First*.

Therefore, what would be the strategic attributes of the Romanian education at present, with pragmatic, concrete value? And how can they be operationalized? These are not only questionnaires that have compelled me professionally and personally interested in the last decade, but are also questions that I have repeated as such, in recent weeks, to a significant part of the current and former rectors of many top universities in Romania. So, the paragraphs below represent a selection, in accordance with the author's opinions, from an amazing palette of consistent, complementary, and sometimes contradictory arguments. I will not name the authors, because I did not ask for the express consent for this, but only for the use of thoughts, appreciating that the goal is to focus on the idea that changes or can change, and not on the man who generates or can implement. However, I thank all my old

and good interlocutors most openly for their continued generosity.

In an imperfect synthesis of the mentioned parallel conversations, the strategic attributes of Romanian education should be the redefinition of roles, resilience, critical thinking, as well as digital skills, respect for social values, and identity.

Today, however questionable this characterization may be, students and pupils in the public system have not been clients for a long time. They have become commodity, valued, weighed and designed more numerically than valuable to justify the needs and aspirations of real customers: teachers. In other words, education providers have turned into *de facto* clients of the education system. There is no longer trading knowledge which gives value to pupils and thus to the school, but instead the cohort of pupils justifying posts, teaching loads and, in some places, the very existence of the school. State education budgeting follows the *money for silence* rule. In the private system, clients are parents who often value the safety, comfort and completeness of the teaching environment (e.g. avoiding school labor - tutoring) rather than their performance. And here the object of the transaction is simple, but slightly reversed: *quiet for money*. Obviously, there are notable exceptions, and not few. But not so much as to disprove the need to redefine the roles of the main actors: 1) students are the sole clients of the education system, 2) teachers are the providers of education, 3) the relationship is synallagmatic, so the rights of one party are the obligations of the other and vice versa. Once this relationship is (re)established, and the contractual identity, if you like, of the other actors will be clearer, be they parents, local or central administration, etc. And the impact in the social development strategies of the parties or the whole will be direct and obvious.

Resilience concerns both what and how we form. A more flexible curriculum, as one of our rectors reminded me, should shift the focus from rendering matter onto understanding concepts and phenomena, strengthen interdisciplinarity, focus effort on technological and economic competitiveness, and reinforce identity, cohesion, and inclusion. Thus, happily complete another interlocutor, the principle of education should be that of unity, not that of the accumulation of disparate, emotionally unintegrated knowledge. And I quote literally the need for: *education-trunk, with roots in tradition and a new appetite centered on man; a cognitive-emotional model to build a sense of life* and an identity in collectivity, I would add. The idea is not to create or recreate a new man, but a current man, able

to fundament, as a resource, viable defense and security strategies, for example.

Critical thinking also takes a look at the process and its outcomes. Rather insisting on the first part (because the rest is fertile subject of conversation), I was drawn to uncontested slogans-mottos in spite of faulty operationalization. Thanks to the contributor in question, the three paradoxes rendered as such are: *School otherwise*. In simple translation, we all want a school that gives up clichés, dogmatism and scholastic methods. A modern, up-to-date school, where teachers, pupils, and students find together ways for education to be transmitted through modern, even glamorous, methods. So that the skills acquired will in the future make use of the development of personal professional careers, but that will certainly turn into a concrete contribution to the benefit of the entire communities. The *school* has *otherwise* translated, unfortunately, sometimes, as a total renunciation of the perennial values of the Romanian education, losing fundamental values: respect, rigor, work cult, tradition.

*A student-centered education*. Also translating, a generous strategy and intelligence that has made the main actor, the young man eager to absorb information, knowledge, experience, the center of education. This has led teachers to deservedly focus on finding the best, most interesting and effective ways to pass on education to their young students. This effort meant a permanent reinvention of trainers so that they could cope with new demands, requirements, trends, and current trends. But be mindful of the fact that *pupil/student-centered education* has sometimes been interpreted as a unilateral adaptation to the new requirements of teachers, not of young students, high school students or students. Worse still, it is often considered that the teaching process should be as easy as possible and the education standards as accessible as possible, so that any young person can promote them. When we do not all have the same potential. This is why the requirements for young people's accessibility have fallen.

*We want a country/school like abroad*. Reference to examples of prestige is a prerequisite in every field, and thus also in education. That is the only way you can be competitive and competition-based. The acquisition of educational strategies and methods from other countries made the competitive level of Romanian education to grow indisputably. And when this takeover was made following a correct understanding of the international phenomenon and by adapting it to the needs and specifics of the Romanian people, it proved to be a beneficial

approach to the Romanian education. In the absence of such adaptation, we build for abroad (see young graduate migration) or abroad (see young future graduate migration).

On the other hand, how we form is already an acute challenge, because I was reminded and I remind, too, that we must make a rapid transition in education from the writing civilization (without abandoning it) to the audiovisual civilization (without fetishizing it). Multimedia and new media are not just optional disciplines or educational ad on, they are new books and notebooks. Moreover, there are new industries. And so we are generating a viable resource for realistic and optimistic economic strategies. Digital skills have long gone beyond the stage of acquiring knowledge or developing skills. Artificial intelligence and immersive virtual reality define a new universe in which individuals and society will function. Digital education is no longer about developing our students and pupils, but about adapting future generations to the new universe in which their lives will unfold. In other words, what is at stake is no longer about success or failure, but about function or dysfunction. And not just professionally, but personally and socially. The lack of digital skills (and access) is starting to leave our citizens outside of the city. The pulse and life of the societies of which I am a part.

During this time, we take pride in making the transition from analog to digital by transferring analog content to digital content. There was a revolution in .pdf and power point needed, but not enough. Because we do not have and do not use (even when we do) digital platforms for education, we do not have digital content creators for education - and I say this without minimizing exceptions or silencing the remarkable results of indigenous digital content creators... for others.

Digital education is not just about skills and abilities. It is, or should be, about social values, too. The new digital universe comes with new challenges. It is not the place, the moment and I am certainly not the most suitable person to mention the social anomaly of the Internet, but the phenomena of online bullying and the associated ones are a worrying reality by weight and effects. Education about how our children should behave in society is imperative to quickly include digital behavioral norms. And not just cyber hygiene. It is also courtesy and digital courtesy, if you will. The seven years at home are newer and... digital. Or rather, they are not at all. And I assert that as a father who has learned not to be *cringe* when he uses emojis from his daughter, not the other way around. There are old social values and new



social values in an old and at the same time new society. Who, where and how do they teach these new values? Not to mention the old ones.

The same applies to identity values. Civic courses are minimal and still simplistic. In most cases, teachers (and faculties) of history and literature naturally try to cover this gap. Meritorious, but unstructured, non-homogeneous and definitely uncorrelated. It is not a joint effort or an educational priority. And this author, along with his interlocutors, does not understand why. Because, beyond discussing and learning, without passion, but also involved with the soul, about what it means to be Romanian and European in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, identity values are, sooner or later, also about civism and civic involvement. About how, when and who should actively participate in protecting and promoting the dimension we are proud of (or ashamed of): to be inevitably Romanian. How do we teach Romanians? And I ask, rhetorically, because I recently witnessed a conversation between an exceptional group of Romanians and French who were asking each other questions from the tests for obtaining the citizenship of the two countries. I was proud of how much our compatriots know about the culture, civilization

and history of France (for us, an important part of universal history) and terrified of how little we know of our own history, culture and civilization. Those cultivated Romanians could easily obtain French citizenship, but they may be in arrears for Romanian citizenship. And it is not their fault. It is our fault that we do not have an operational structure for identity education (just as we do not have a civic education) and we do not have this strategic objective.

The above ideas are not intended to convince or inform. They are perceptions of reality. What concerns more than reality (and we can talk about allocations from GDP, the structure of the budget for education and research, systemic and legislative coherence, etc.) is the perception at the level of the leading actors of education in Romania. Because this perception, built on solid experiences and arguments, will generate future realities. And the question is whether they will enshrine education, as it is, as a value or as a strategic vulnerability for our country. I do not think anyone knows the answer, because no one knows how the future will look exactly, but we all know how we would like this answer to be: for Romania, education is and has a strategic value.

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