

Basic and Derived Elements of an Educational System

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Abstract: Education and the existence of an educational system are compulsory elements of every modern society. The problems of making a unique and a defined educational system, a clear and an identifiable educational policy but also the problems of inequality in education have been the subject of different researches in the social sciences, especially in pedagogy for a long time. By accepting the definition which describes education as a systematical transmission of knowledge, skills and values, the same importance must be given to the questions of institutional organization, systematical and generational aspect of the process. Although every man should have equal rights to education, equal chances are not available to all, and therefore perceptible problems that cause inequality occur. The reasons are not only related to different social and cultural heritage – unequal initial positions are to be related to the nature of the educational system and the goals of the educational policy.

Key words: educational system, basic and derived elements of educational system, structure of system interests

Draft of the contemporary situation

In a very comprehensive study, developed in the scope of the Project of the European Union for regional economic development in Bosnia and Herzegovina, it is stated that there is a decline of about 1/3 in a number of children who are at the age to start school in Bosnia and Herzegovina comparing to the past times, and that there are not enough pre-school institutions for the real needs. This report confirms that there is no need for a larger number of primary schools – as the span of generation is quite high – but there is a need for improving standards in them. The span of generation about to start secondary school has increased from 50% to 70%, while the span of the generation about to enter universities has increased from 10% to 25%. It is noticed that there is a tendency for extended education as a result of difficulties in finding jobs after schooling while education and educational system are generally influenced by political currents with an open tendency towards further disintegration and fragmentation.

There are still problems in the area of adult education, especially that related to the relevance of the needed knowledge for technological changes in economy; furthermore, there are no institutions for the needs of public sector and the state administration, especially for their management. The opportunities given require a general modernization of educational system in accordance with the trends in Europe. In the scope of the same project, a working sub-group for education has very clearly presented the main forces, weaknesses, possibilities and threats/obstacles which depict the contemporary situation in the educational system.

FORCES

Tradition and awareness of people about the importance of education and general tendency towards acquiring knowledge

Completed primary education

Existence of the net of educational institutions in the whole area

Existence of secondary education in the whole region and in all municipalities

Existence of a higher education institution in the region

Implementation of educational reforms and adaptation to the EU standards

POSSIBILITIES

Development of private educational institutions

Accepted concept of 9-year primary educational system

Adaptation of educational system on the market and in accordance to the EU standards

Development of educational management

Implementation of Bologna treaty

Development of new ways of education

WEAKNESSES

Out-of-date equipment, out-of-date curriculums and out-of-date educational staff

Bad economical and social situation of the people which prevents education of better quality and variety

High concentration of some educational staff profiles

Shortage in specific staff profiles (agronomy and public professions)

Shortage in extracurricular activities which could be very helpful and useful in practice

Shortage in practical education in specific skills of various trades

THREATS - OBSTACLES

Complexity of transformation of educational system

Out-of-date educational profiles

Non-homogeneity of educational system in relevance to the responsibility in development

Lack of affinity of the political structures to adapt educational system to the needs for development and mobility of work force

General resistance to changes

On the basis of previous pieces of information it is quite useful to remind ourselves of some basic and derived elements of educational system, especially in a case of general anti-dialogue culture and to point at the problem of cultural reproduction and “banking” education as central places of coerced and derived interests of educational system, educational policy and society as a whole. This is especially the case, as it is still not clear what structures, in clearly changeable circumstances, control the distribution of cultural and symbolic capital. In this sense, the elements and the processes confirming the unity of educational system and the defined educational policy in a sense of anti-dialogue, even when evident, deserve the check of its query.

Educational policy and educational system

In the last quarter of the 19th century, practically, all “developed” regions of the world faced a very important event: an appearance of national educational systems. This notion is also important to understand in the context of developing new trade relations which were not present in the 17th and the 18th century.

Simultaneous changes on an economical and educational plan gradually put the question of educational policy in the focus of attention. In what ways could education and educational system be related to the general social trends and requests, and in what ways economic policy and society could determine educational policy and educational system policy? Furthermore, some other important questions were raised:

What an educational system consist of? In what circumstances could an educational system be considered as unique? What is a system and how does it function? Is it possible to expect an adequate creation of educational policy by ignoring educational system (and vice versa)?

In the second half of the 20th century a number of questions were raised, that put humanistic, emancipative, anti-imperialistic and anti-militaristic goals in the focus of attention, and which are nowadays seen as socio-critical, anti-pedagogical, and alternatively pedagogical conception in the theory of education. All these question educational system and educational policy in the scope of current questions frequently asked in our society as well. Educational policy usually determines the policy of an educational system. If we focus on a formal structure of any educational system including formal and constitutional limits of a country or possible territorial units, we can make a graphical explanation of the relations among basic elementary and secondary schools and a large number of higher education institutions. In order to make lack of structural explanations less severe, we will start from the following hypothesis:

We wonder if Bosnia and Herzegovina has the basic national politics. Of course, educational policy does not exist in the same form as monetary, fiscal or defense policy. If we question the authority of people in charge of the implementation of monetary or defense policy we will probably get a precise answer. But, we will confront a totally different answer if we attempt to find out anything about the basic educational policy in Bosnia. Where does it take place? Who defines it? There are no precise answers to these questions but we have

to accept the fact that if we move from one place to another or from one school to another, we will find similar procedures and similar values. It is possible to notice the similarities in buildings, infrastructure and dormitories. How can this happen in an absence of any basic policy? In fact, there is some kind of system.

It is obvious that every system has a structure. A system must have a unity of elements which are parts of a whole. Every system will have its structure as well. It is essential to have a law or principles and a set of common beliefs which define behaviour of the society in the system and people who are referred to the unity of the system.

According to Green and others (1980), these elements could be marked as the basic, and they are basically in contrast to the derived elements of the system. School and educational system, therefore, have their own basic and derived elements.

Basic elements will be defined by:

1. medium of exchange (in order that institutions become a part of an educational system there must exist some relations among schools – certificates, diplomas, etc), and
2. principle of sequence (confirms that the system of schools has been organized on levels, so that person completed n level is considered to have completed $n-1$ level but it is not certain that the person will enter $n+1$ level).

Derived elements imply:

1. size of the system,
2. system of control, and as a result of it all,
3. distribution of the results.

Every educational system is of a specific size. There are different sizes; there are also different ways of expanding and making one system smaller. Systems have their own interests, which should be determined and defined. The structure of interests within an educational system should consist of:

- parents' interests
- pupils/students' interests
- teachers' interests
- clerical interests
- economical interests and market needs, and
- social interests – state interests

Basic elements of the system

In every society there must be some kind of pattern according to which young people grow up and become a part of the society. This pattern, whatever it is, could be described as a system for education of young people. The word “system”, in this context, means something like “way”, “method” or “pattern”, or “usual procedure of growing-up”.

There is no society which can exist without some kind of raising new generations, but there are societies without determined process that could be taken for an educational system.

Educational system show up only when a number of processes defer or when they are determined by specific sort of institutions. This notion corresponds with the notions of schools. The conclusion could seem unimportant but it is not. If there were no differences between a system of education and an educational system there would not be possible to raise any important questions of the educational policy.

The notion of educational policy means a determined and a defined system of educational institutions. If there is an educational system, there are schools as a part of this system. In the same sense, there must be schools that are not in strong relations with other schools, but even though they function in this way they are still a part of the system. An example for this could be a hypothesis that a subject passed in one of private collages would not be accepted in a state school. But this would not be enough for functioning of the system.

In order that institutions become a part of an educational system there must exist clearly determined relations among schools and other institutions of the system. A necessary way of independence is shown through certificates, diplomas and transcripts which although different, in many aspects become similar in their bases. They are instruments by which certain activities could be recognized in a school/college, and be exchanged for similar activities within other institutions. These instruments of the system are “mediums of exchange” (or “connective tissue”; Green et al., 1980). Their existence enables us to speak about a unique educational system in the same way as the existence of a local currency and its exchange for foreign currencies enable us to speak about a unique monetary system. This notion implies a sort of independence or diversity which enables a pupil to complete year 5 in one part and start year 6 in the other part of the country.

There is a question: does the existence of mediums of exchange imply the existence of an educational system? Think, for example, of two schools in the same area, or in a neighbourhood, but under the different supervision, with slightly different educational missions, and let's imagine that their activities are different so that they could not be recognized in one another. In this situation it would be quite impossible to say that they belong to the same educational system. But, despite this, if they are under the same higher institution, ministry of education for instance, they could still be considered as parts of the same educational system. Therefore, the departments of physics and literature do not have medias of exchange but belong to the same educational system as they are under the authority of the same regulatory agency (institution, university, ministry, ...). This example enables us to conclude that a medium of exchange is not necessary for the existence of a system but it also questions in what proportion is the higher institution sufficient for schools of different activities to be parts of the same system.

However, the notion of "educational system" does not refer to any system of schools or colleges, but to the system determined on the principles of sequence. This confirms that the system of schools has been organized on levels, so that person who completed n level of the system had obviously completed $n-1$ level before, but it is not certain that the person will complete $n+1$ level. Here, we have to accept the fact that the organization of levels are not the same in different schools, so the principle of sequence is different on different levels – primary schools, secondary schools, colleges, academies, universities, etc. (especially in the case of three-year or four-year undergraduate studies). Despite of the different definitions, the absence of the principle of sequence would mean nonexistence of the system and an existence of many other things would be questionable.

Derived elements of the system

Basic elements of an educational system also require the definition of derived elements: size of the system, system of control, and as a result, the distribution of results and resources. Every educational system has its specific size. There are different types of sizes; there are also different ways of expanding and making a system smaller. The dimensions of a size and the growing modules of a system are determined by the following elements:

1. the increase in number of educational institutions or making new educational outcomes (departments at the universities, professional profiles in secondary schools)
2. increase in the number of pupils
3. vertical expansion – changing the age for education (children start school at the age of 6 instead of 7, or they finish compulsory education at the age of 15 instead of 14)
4. horizontal expansion – the existence of various schools and various educational profiles: music schools, trade schools, medical schools...
5. differentiation – different curriculums among schools
6. increase in efficiency and better success by improving curriculum
7. extending the school year/school day
8. increase in number of employees in the educational system

If the system expands in one dimension, it could cause a development and an expansion in its other dimension. There is a connection between different models within one system but that connection is not necessary. Mutual connection and the implication of another, depends on the needs and existing values of the system, formal politics, needs and nature of social influence on the manifestations.

Structure of system interests

Besides parents', pupils/students' and teachers' interests, of a huge importance is an existence of state interests. There are two types of state interests: coercive and derived. Coercive interests are contained in two needs – each individual reaches economic independence or at least a minimal obedience to civic regulations. Coercive interests are minimally related to educational ideals, and maximally to the power. There is no society which can completely realize a socialization of young people or which can be immune to the crime. Therefore, coercive interests are in the function of a social community and its own survival. In this sense, education, as in the case of the physiological human needs, has a dimension of the urge of survival. A community must pay special attention to the education of young people in order to provide coerced state interests.

As a consequence of coerced interests, appear secondary, additional interests, by which we mean a process of deciding who can teach, who will learn and for how long. The state determines control of capital for education, gives various clearances to teachers, specifies curriculum and defines standards.

Furthermore, within this system, one of variables is the existence of derived interests. Derived interests should serve to fill up the "pots" of educational system with adequate contents, and educational values. Unfortunately, this content of derived interests is very often a negation of nature and meaning of the education

and the educational system. One of the most common is inequality of educational opportunities for those who want to acquire certain educational achievements. Pierre Bourdieu talks about this phenomenon in the context of, so called, “cultural capital”. Bourdieu developed a thesis on the fact that none of the organized societies drops this defined cultural capital, but it distributes it unequally throughout the society which results in class differences and different academic achievements. Higher values, as certain monopoly of the dominant culture in a society, enable the socially and economically more powerful to impose their own definition of reality, so every educational system is being founded on these basis. Explaining these processes, he points to a social genesis of behaviour patterns and simultaneous thinking and acting on one and the development of the social structures on the other hand. According to Bourdieu, for a process of internal changes which could expose this manifestation, the existence of categories such as symbolic power (social groups capable of imposing certain hierarchy in value) is necessary. This symbolic power using symbolic speech (giving diagnosis; determining directions, orders and norms; as well as making reports) and with the help of symbolic forces (which are capable to “re-make” and change the world), should grow into constitutional power (the result of a long period of institutionalizing) (Bourdieu, 1998).

This sort of understanding educational system is actually what made Bourdieu come to conclusion that the basic purpose of education is the contribution to the continuity of social reproduction based on the relations of power and privileges within a society. The notion of the cultural reproduction and the appreciation of the fact that in every society there is a thing called cultural capital, indicates that every family (parents’ and pupils/students’ interests), in a context of its existing quality of life, could feel the pressure and strain if it is not able to become a part of social “struggle” for better status on equal terms. Also, it seems quite appropriate to mention Bourdieu’s contribution in the area of understanding constant tensions among the dominant and the inferior groups within a society in which every group strive to establish and confirm its social identity, status and value.

In relation to this, Pierre Bourdieu suggests: “dominant groups are capable of defining their own culture as worth of a tendency and a possession and to confirm it as a foundation of the knowledge about the educational system. However, this valuation by the dominant culture is arbitrary... The high value attributed to the dominant culture in a society as a whole is simply an aspiration of the powerful to impose their definition of reality on others”. (Haralambos, 1989, p212)

If we refer the definition of education and educational system from the beginning of the text to the needs of a man, general “humanizing” and confirmation of humanity, we would necessarily have to speak about “practice of freedom”, and overthrowing the system which is developing on the basis of “banking education”, “cultural invasion” and “anti-dialogue acting” (Freire, 2002). Within this concept, educational system and all its institutions should serve the development of cultural dialogue, overreaching inequality, especially estranging from a tendency towards expansion of institutions and a development by the principle of “the garrison”. On the contrary, basic and derived elements of the system will confirm further fragmentation and question the notion of unity but it will define education as systematic transmission of knowledge, skills and values in the state of non-freedom and for non-freedom.

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