

# THE MAIN STAGES, REFORMS AND POLICIES OF THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM IN EUROPE

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**Abstract:** In this paper it is presented the evolution of schooling and education process in Europe from Antiquity to modern times. Education is one of the most important elements of social life, and it has a great impact on it. The article presents the main sociological theories of education which are the functionalist theory (Emile Durkheim) and the social conflict theory (Max Weber). The following chapter presents the historical evolution of educational systems in Europe from Antiquity till the modern times emphasizing on the most important stages and reforms. In this article there are presented the strong links between the process of education and the other aspects of social life and the way they influence each other. The emergence of public schooling systems and its evolution is presented along with the main reforms and public policies. The steps taken for the massification of education and the reforms that led to the increased access to schooling is presented in a strong relation with the social classes that had existed in different historical periods. The foundation and the evolution of higher education institutions – namely the Universities, are presented along with their impact on the social life in Europe.

**Keywords:** education, history of school, educational reform, educational theories.

## Main sociological theories of education

### *Functionalist theory*

Emile Durkheim, one of the founders of sociology, considers that the main objective of education is the "socialization" of individuals by assimilating the values of the society in which they live. By doing so they align to societies set of values increasing social inclusion having clearly defined antisocial attitudes and behavior.

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In economic functionalist theories Theodore William Schultz concludes that through the educational system people acquire knowledge and skills that increase their value on the labor market (see Schultz, 1963). Thus the investment made by the State in improving public education will result in the increase of the quality of human capital, and thereby the development and efficientization of the economic sector.

### ***Social conflict theory***

Starting from the general theory of Karl Marx, Max Weber was the first sociologist who proposed a theory of social conflict in studying education (see Collins, 2000). According to his theory social mobility can be facilitated through education or it can be blocked.

So where increased social mobility is desired, this can be achieved by facilitating the access of the masses to education and higher education institutions, so the individuals may obtain jobs that require highly skilled and thus obtain a higher socioeconomic status, relying only on their own forces. Or, on the contrary, through education there can be maintained a strict social hierarchy, upper classes raising standards of access to higher educational levels, thus blocking the access of individuals from lower social classes.

## **The history of education until the entry into modernity in the European area**

### ***Antiquity***

The first education institutions appeared in ancient Greece in the 4th century BC. The main characteristic of ancient education was the segregation by sex and social classes. During this period, access to education was, with some exceptions, closed to slaves and women. Education at that time meant literacy and the acquiring of practical skills, and had to be carried out between the ages of 14-21 years. Education institutions were different from State to State, and only the "higher" education had certain common characteristics. Common disciplines that Aristotle considered as important for young people, and which were to be studied after the age of 14 for 3 years, were called in ancient Greece "enkuklios paideia" and later in ancient Rome (which will adopt the Greek model of education almost entirely) "artes liberales". These disciplines through which young people were learning to become "worthy free men", were 7 in number, namely: grammar, rhetoric, dialectic, arithmetic, music, geometry and astronomy. To these 7 disciplines, Marcus Terentius Varro, one of the first notable pedagogues of antiquity, adds another 2 disciplines, medicine and architecture in his "Disciplinarum libri" which will form the basis of teaching methodology in higher education until the medieval period (Clarke, 2012).

In the writings of Aristotle, an important element in the formation of young people was the "ephebia" period which had a character of physical and moral training, took 1-2 years, during this time young people learned to become good citizens and soldiers.

After completing this stage of learning, young people could accede to philosophical schools, which represent the highest level of learning at the time. The reasons for the development of education in the ancient period are not fully clear. There are, however, writings of that period that explain, in the context of those times, the need and advantages of literacy. For example, Aristotle in his work "Politics" (1996) defines the necessity of using "words" (writing) into four categories: for accumulating money, household management, training "mathesis" and civic activities. For Diodorus Siculus, knowledge and use of writing have a much more significant character; he felt that the most important human acts are mediated by writing: the vote, writing of letters, wills and laws, more specifically everything that "puts life in order". Siculus also says that writing facilitates communication between persons at great distance and those who no longer can convey messages to those who live (Harris, 1991). These are arguments in favor of literacy, and not for education as a system.

We can draw conclusions that education, in ancient word, has had the main goal of reproduction of social classes, if we take into account the fact that to education very few young people had access, the vast majority of which were members of the ruling class. Transmission of culture to the next generations, and the spread of knowledge may be another reason. From the economic point of view, the practical character of education facilitated trade, area in which primary knowledge of writing, reading and math calculation were necessary. In some historical periods education was politically supported, as it was by the statesman Solon who played an important role in the transition from the archaic period of ancient Greece to Democracy (Harris, 1991).

These early forms of organization of educational system, created in ancient Greece and afterwards assimilated and spread across Europe by the Roman Empire will have a great importance until medieval times, when it will be merged with Christian teaching.

### ***The middle ages***

In medieval times the main features of education were the Christian character of teaching institutions and the occurrence of higher education institutions, in the form in which they will remain until the modern period – the Universities.

The Middle Ages were a period of great changes on the European continent. From a social-political perspective the dismantling of the Western Roman Empire and the occupation of the continent by migrating peoples, that established new States, will represent the most significant changes. From the ideological point of view Europe will also be changed by the emergence of Christianity as dominant religion.

The resettlement of a significant part of the population of the fallen Roman Empire to rural areas, and the decline of ancient cities under the attacks of the barbarian peoples will lead to a stagnation of scientific developments. Elements of life style and culture of the ancient world will survive in the Byzantine Empire. Education will undergo significant changes with the spreading of Christianity across the continent. The spread of the new religion across the whole continent,

which was eventually adopted by all people who lived in this region, will represent the main element of communication between the newly established State formations.

The organizational structure necessary to manage this religious phenomenon on a scale so large will be represented by the Church. As an institution the Church was founded in Judaea, a province of the Roman Empire based on the teachings of Jesus Christ. The adherents of Christianity started a missionary process of spreading their beliefs in the whole Roman Empire, considering that Jesus was the son of God sent to Earth to spread the ultimate "Truth" to mankind. Christian ideas were adopted by a great number of people from the Greek and Roman areas, and in the 4th century AD Christianity was appointed the official religion in the Roman Empire. Although these events took place during late Antiquity they will have a powerful effect in the period of the middle ages. The Church's power will shape the way of thinking in the next period, and as a result of this, the way culture and science will be taught. Christian ideology, being based on the word of God, will be considered as the absolute truth "the sublime philosophy" that cannot be contained. Thus the first ideologists of the new religions will contest some aspects of philosophical and scientific production of the ancient (pagan) world. Some of them, such as Tatian, Eusebius, Theodoret, and St. Basil will study ancient philosophy just to reveal and critic the contradictions and weaknesses (Grant, 1996). This analysis of ancient culture, the censoring of an important part, and the control of scientific production by the Church in next period will model European culture until the Renaissance. In other words, the Church will dictate what and how should be studied for the next Millennium.

With the occupation of the Western Roman Empire by the barbarians and the formation of new kingdoms, the Church will remain one of the few institutions that will survive the transition to the new organization. The Christianization of the kings and leaders of new States will represent the first step in spreading the faith among the population. Being supported by a strong faith of its followers and with the political help, Christianity will cover the whole of Europe until the 11th century, mostly through monk missionaries.

The establishment of monasteries and churches in the territory of the new States will have as a first result the preaching of the faith among the population. Representatives of the Church were educated men and religious centers will become with time, education and learning centers. Teaching done in monasteries and churches was mainly for training the clergy and was addressed to a restricted number of people. The teaching was done in Latin, in the western part of Europe, and in Greek in the East, and focused mainly on the study of religious texts.

Changes that occur in the late 11th century, namely the consolidation of the kingdoms and the end of massive migrations will lead to the repopulation of urban centers and the establishment of new ones. Urbanization will come with the strengthening of the activities that are specific to towns. During this period craft guilds will appear that had well-established training systems (education) for the novices. Learning to become a craftsman didn't mean that the people also learn to

read or write. The emergence of new social classes in urban centers will lead to increasing need for education. In training for liberal professions such as architecture, medicine and law there were necessary secular educational establishments, and this need will lead to the foundation of the Universities.

### ***Renaissance and the Protestant Reformation***

The Renaissance period is characterized by the return of the interest in natural sciences and ancient culture, without passing them through the filter and censorship of religion. Scholasticism, the movement which marked the end of the middle ages and which tried to explain religion using the principles of logic and philosophy ends. The Secularization of science was a phenomenon that started in the 13th and 14th centuries. An important role in this endeavor had the recently established universities, where the liberal arts were predominant and which weren't under the constraints of Christian religion. Historical events in the vicinity of Western Europe have also played an important role in the development of Renaissance culture. The attacks of the Ottoman Empire on Byzantium forced a large number of the population to seek refuge in Western Europe. The fall of Constantinople in 1453 marked only a fixed time in the process of exodus of byzantine citizens that has started long before and which has lasted years after the occupation of the Eastern Roman Empire by a civilization so different. The nearest refuge places for the population of the former Empire were the Italian States situated on the shores of the Adriatic Sea. The cultural heritage, brought by the newcomers, mainly Greek, in the western area led to the creation of a cosmopolitan culture which proved to be beneficial to scientific development. With their arrival, the inhabitants of the Eastern Roman Empire, especially the representatives of the upper social classes, have brought an important number of books in the West, unknown there to that point, particularly writings of ancient authors, and even volumes belonging to the Arab culture.

The most important educational institutions of the period were the universities. In 1400 in Europe there were 29 institutions of higher education. By 1500 their number has doubled, and in 1625 there were 73 Universities, mostly in the central region of the continent. Universities have been established, and even financed by political leaders and by the papacy. In the Bull of Pope Boniface IX, in which he authorizes the University of Ferrara, he justifies the necessity of the University because it will produce "people able to give mature advice, virtuous, and well trained in several areas" (Grendler, 2006).

From the standpoint of the rulers, intellectuals formed in Universities were needed by society because they could provide consistent solutions to problems, and at the same time they were at the base of scientific developments. For the students who followed the courses of the Universities, the challenge was to accumulate knowledge that would offer them a privileged social status.

Teaching in Universities was not standardized; each one of these institutions had the freedom to choose the topics/subjects that were taught. There were significant differences between universities in the Southern part of the continent, especially in

Italy, where the emphasis was placed on the arts, humanities sciences, and theological studies were less sought-after. In the North, particularly in the German and Anglo-Saxon regions theology was one of the most studied sciences, this being explained by the fact that graduates of theology were more appreciated in these regions, and the graduates of these schools had privileged social status after finishing their studies.

In two of these universities, Erfurt and Wittenberg, studied Martin Luther, a character that will change the history of the Catholic Church, and the Western Europe. The reform of the Roman Catholic Church started from the 95 theses which Martin Luther proposed for discussion, a procedure specific in the academic environment. Although the discussions on the topic (About Indulgences power) were not held in the University of Wittenberg, where they have been proposed, they have stirred controversy and discussion within the Catholic Church, and not only. With this example we can see how the scientific production, specific to universities may have a crucial role/effect on society and history. If Martin Luther's theses were discussed within the academic environment, they wouldn't have led, perhaps, to the social movements that took place in Central and Northern Europe in the following period.

## **The emergence of the modern systems of formal education**

### ***The first phase***

About a system of formal education we can speak only from the moment of entry into the educational system in modernity. The main element that makes the transition to modern education is the massification of teaching and the interference of the state in the organization of the education system. In the case of Europe, from the historical point of view, we can talk about modern education after the second half of the 18th century. Ideologically, the modern school appears in the Enlightenment period, the representatives of this ideology considered as being beneficial for the whole society to educate the population, and especially those from the lower social classes that did not have this right to that point.

Through the process of schooling, in addition to the economic reason of training specialized people that were able to meet the economic needs of that time, school had also the purpose of training people to become active, loyal and helpful citizens for the State (Hatos, 2006). In the age of Enlightenment, the representatives of this ideology wanted to change society of that time by increasing the access of a greater number of people to education. This was an important factor in achieving their aim of developing the society. At the same time the secularization of the schools, which were seen as Christian proselytizing institutions by representatives of the Enlightenment, and shifting people to science was an important factor in supporting this reform.

In Europe of that period important political changes took place. The formation of new States and the struggle for colonies will force European countries to put increased emphasis on education. Centralization of power around the capitals and

the need of controlling such vast territories which were inhomogeneous culturally and linguistically will have as a result the use of the education system in the attempt to attenuate these problems. The first European countries to implement centralized educational systems were Germany and France.

The social changes that took place in this period were a reason for changes in the education system also. The industrial revolution brought to the emergence of two new social classes which will have different needs in relation to the existing ones. The most numerous will be the working class formed by the lower classes of society. The majority of workers lived in poor areas in big cities in the immediate vicinity of the newly built factories where they worked. The second class which increased in number during the industrial revolution was the bourgeoisie. Their education needs were different from those of the lower classes, being one of the social classes who had access to the upper levels of education.

In conclusion, we can identify a sum of factors that lead to the changes in the educational system in Europe in the mid eighteenth century. Economic, political, social and ideological (and religious) factors from that period had opened a new road for modern education system. The access to schools, at the first level, for all members of society, was the first step. Vertical access, to all levels of education, for members of all social classes will be a much longer process that will be complete only after the second half of the twentieth century, in most civilized countries.

### ***The second phase***

Political changes that occurred in Europe during the period 1789-1914 had a great impact on education. In France the rupture with the old feudal regime with the revolution of 1789, pushed the continent in an ideological reform process. After the French Revolution, the restructuration of the State and the institutional reforms, offered a modern model of operation, in total opposition with the previous absolutist monarchy system. Regarding education, it had passed through a strong process of secularization and formalization, passing directly under the subordination to the State. Equality of all people, one of the fundamental rights demanded by the revolutionaries, was supposed to mean equal educational and profession choosing opportunities, access to education at all levels and by this a social system based on meritocracy. Segregation of social classes, however, will remain a problem of educational systems until modern times.

The 19th century was the time of the great European empires, and the organization of the education system raised big problems of these centralized organization because of the cultural differences of the people who were part of the same political formations. The formation of national States on the criterion of self-determination was the main reason of the European revolutions of 1848, but which will be a process that will end only after the First World War. So until the formation of national states a large majority of the European population will likely have less access to education, since teaching in schools (especially superior schools) was done in the language imposed by the ruling state. However, teaching in

primary schools was possible in native languages in the majority of States of the empires.

With all the specific elements and particularities of different countries, in the 19th century Europe, state education will be adopted by most of them. The French State was the first to adopt important reforms in the educational system. The ministers of education Guizot (1833) and Jules Ferry (1879-1883) will establish a new educational system, the main characteristics being that primary schooling was free, state governed and financed and laic. The French model of organizing primary school will be copied and adapted by several other European countries.

At secondary level the model established in the same time in France is used until this day. Secondary school started at the age of 11 and lasted for 7 years. The exam for the admittance to high school was after 4 years of middle school, and after finishing 3 years of high school pupils had to take the baccalaureate exam. Only by passing the exam and getting a baccalaureate diploma could someone get to University (Hatos, 2006).

### ***The third phase***

After the two world wars, education at all levels will take shape in which it lasted until now. The adoption of measures that facilitated the access of a large number of people to secondary level of education, and the mandatory character of primary education were prerequisites for the massification of education. The development of industrialized societies and even of those in modernization process had created a vacuum of population that had to acquire certain skills to be able to meet all the needs of educated people for the economic development.

After World War II, the political model adopted by Western European countries and North America was liberal democracy. The liberalization, democratization and respect of human rights were factors that led to the liberalization of the education system by encouraging and giving access to all citizens to education. This can be seen by analyzing the number of people who were enrolled in the University in the twentieth century. In 1900 approximately 500 thousand persons were registered in the system of higher education, representing less than 1% of the cohort of the persons that were the age specifies to this level of education. At the end of the 20th century about 20% of the world population (100 million), with the same age, were enrolled in Universities.

The degree of inclusion is much greater in the case of strong industrialized States, where enrolment rates reach 80% of the population (Schofer & Meyer, 2005). At primary and secondary level education in Western countries 100% rates of enrollment are reached at the beginning of the 20th century. By the year 2000 even poor countries and the ones in course of development will make great progresses regarding the enrollment rates of pupils at primary and secondary level, most of them reaching maximum percentage.



Until 1990, for 45 years, Europe was divided into two contradictory political systems: capitalism and communism. This led to the development of different educational systems.

Initially, after the Second World War, the countries of the Soviet bloc supported the access of a greater number of people in higher education in the interests of achieving technological progress. Problems appeared in the 1960-70 when intellectuals tended to form a social class with an ideology that could contradict the socialist system. Political power intervened by reorganizing the higher education system, supporting technical research and removing the disciplines that might cause problems for the State, often even by "eliminating" the professors and the staff. The cold war, which manifested even in education, had a positive side however through massive investment in scientific research.

The increased number of students of higher education had at times negative effects. An example is the situation in Germany in the 1930s, when a very large number of graduates of higher education, in particular engineers have created an anomie in the economy, forming a "sterile, class of educated workers" who could not find jobs, and thus wasting huge amounts of money from the State budget for their education (Schofer & Meyer, 2005). Situations of this kind occurred when production of specialists on a particular sector exceeded the requirements of the labor market. Problems of this sort have dimmed with the increase in social mobility and the development of the economy to the tertiary sector.

In the present the emphasis in creating educational policies is put on achieving "social justice" (McMahon, Forde & Martin, 2011). This means giving equal chances to all the population in education and eliminating the social class barriers. At ideological level this requirement is morally correct, but to be implemented it must pass through the legal system. Policies decision is therefore responsible for the enactment of this proposal and it should be thoroughly analyzed and taken into account other variables such as economic, social, cultural etc. Restructuring of the national budget to implement a reform of the educational system is long and difficult process, because education does not produce immediate economic growth and developing states prefer to invest in other areas that have immediate outcomes. In the long run, massive investments in education bring economic benefits to both state and society.

A recent example of public policy at European level in the field of education reform was the Bologna Process which aimed at standardizing higher education systems. This uniformity would result in an easier labor movement formed in this system, increased student mobility through the credit transfer system and increased attractiveness of the European system of education for people from outside the Community.

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