

Kurowicka-Roman Ewelina. Analysis of changes in the education system in contemporary societies on the example of Poland and Finland. *Journal of Education, Health and Sport*. 2020;10(8):490-498. eISSN 2391-8306. DOI <http://dx.doi.org/10.12775/JEHS.2020.10.08.059> <https://apcz.umk.pl/czasopisma/index.php/JEHS/article/view/JEHS.2020.10.08.059> <https://zenodo.org/record/4056617>

The journal has had 5 points in Ministry of Science and Higher Education parametric evaluation. § 8. 2) and § 12. 1. 2) 22.02.2019.

© The Authors 2020;

This article is published with open access at Licensee Open Journal Systems of Nicolaus Copernicus University in Torun, Poland

Open Access. This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Noncommercial License which permits any noncommercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author (s) and source are credited. This is an open access article licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Non commercial license Share alike. (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>) which permits unrestricted, non commercial use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the work is properly cited.

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interests regarding the publication of this paper.

Received: 03.08.2020. Revised: 28.08.2020. Accepted: 28.08.2020.

Analysis of changes in the education system in contemporary societies on the example of Poland and Finland

Ewelina Kurowicka-Roman

The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin

Address to correspondence: kurowickaewelina@gmail.com

Orcid: 0000-0002-4515-6450

Abstract

Education is an important field that is the basis for functioning in a modern society. For this reason, there is a need for all activities related to the organization of the teaching process to be carried out in an effective way that will create optimal conditions for teachers to transfer their knowledge to students. It is important to create an education system that will respond to the current challenges in the field of teaching and educating a young person. One of the most important factors determining the proper course of the education process is the appropriate preparation of the teaching staff. In this publication, the basic concepts related to education and the educational system will be discussed. The aim of this article is to analyze the changes in the education system on the example of Poland and Finland.

Key words: education system; education; science; society

The concept of the education system

In order to start considering changes in the education system in contemporary societies, the term system should be defined, which is a set of interconnected elements fulfilling a

specific function and treated as separated from the environment for a specific purpose. System in general can be defined as a set of elements and relations between them. The concept of the system is relatively often used in pedagogy or sociology, as it is often referred to as the class-lesson system, the didactic system, the education system, the pedagogical system, the school system or the education system analyzed in this paper. In the sociological approach, society is perceived as a system of interrelated cultural elements that perform functions for the balance of the whole. The education system in general is a structure that cares for the effectiveness of education, conducted with the intention of achieving goals consistent with the actual educational needs of the group. The effectiveness of the structure of the education system depends to a large extent on the interaction between its individual elements. The education system understood in this way includes institutions established for education, upbringing, care, educational policy, administration (dealing with the distribution of resources), teaching structures (includes education levels, student and teacher populations, programs, styles and methods of teaching) and services supporting the system, such as psychological, health and social care.

Education concerns the implementation of processes related not only to the transfer of knowledge, but also to the shaping of attitudes and moral patterns. As S. Chrobak points out, education refers not only to education and vocational training but also to the full formation of a person [1]. Education is one of the important factors shaping social changes, the development of an individual and entire social groups. Education is a term encompassing all processes leading to the upbringing of a person and is based on processes such as socialization, education, teaching, learning in order for the subject to acquire the qualities and skills needed to live in society.

Education is based on four pillars developed by Jacques Delors. According to these principles, education should:

- learn to know: through the opportunities offered by education, one should strive to master the tools for gathering knowledge and developing one's own intelligence,
- learn to act: that is, to acquire the necessary professional qualifications and competences that will help people in the future to find themselves in difficult situations, work in a group, as well as help in getting a valuable job,
- learn to live together: collaborate with other people to implement important projects and tasks, and use it as a method of avoiding or resolving conflicts,
- learn to be: that is, to achieve goals related to your own personality [2].

The school should be a place for the pupil's comprehensive development, where, through the influence of the teacher, it is possible to educate an independent individual, creatively approaching the problems and challenges of the modern world. For this reason, the education system should operate in an effective manner in order to be able to ensure the implementation of the goals set out in the core curriculum for individual educational stages.

Changes in education in historical terms

Nowadays, the vast majority of people living in Europe have the ability to write and read, have at least a basic knowledge of their own country, its location or history. At school, students acquire both knowledge and skills, and socialize in a group. For many people, education has become an investment in the future in order to obtain the necessary education and the desired professional qualifications. In Europe, the currently known education system was created at the beginning of the 19th century. At that time, enrollment in primary schools in Switzerland, the Netherlands and Germany was widespread. In turn, in the case of Great Britain, universal compulsory education was introduced in 1870. Poland was under partitions at that time. Hence, the territory of Poland was within the area of three education systems of the partitioning states. Only Poland regained independence in 1918 led to the integration of the entire country and the creation of a uniform education system on Polish soil. In 1919, compulsory free primary school was introduced for students aged 7-14, gradually in Poland and throughout Europe the period of free education was extended. In 1988, in the UK, the government decentralized public schools and put more power into the hands of local governments. In Poland, local government units (municipalities, poviats, voivodships) are responsible for running public schools, receiving funds for this purpose from the state budget in the form of subsidies. It is a system in which public schools financed by public self-governments play a dominant role.

Due to the dominant role of public education in the Polish education system, I would like to reflect on the issue of equalizing educational opportunities. British sociologist Anthony Giddens analyzes the issues of equalization of differences by primary schools [5]. This is due to the fact that in the education system there is still a lively debate on public education, its standards of knowledge and the possibility of equalizing social inequalities. The people making up the free and universal education system were of the opinion that schools of this type would provide greater equality than a selective education system. According to critics of the universal education system, the earlier selection system made it possible for gifted children from poorer families to continue their education, and in turn, primary schools inhibit gifted pupils [5]. According to its critics, the general education system prevents students from

entering selected schools. They point to the existence of informal methods of selecting pupils into schools, such as material status, parentage, etc., which makes it difficult for gifted pupils from poorer families to get into school with a high level of education.

Currently, education is greatly influenced by technological progress and the use of new technologies in teaching processes. Hence, another problem is indicated, which is information poverty, unequal access to information, technical means and the latest technological achievements [5]. One of the methods of counteracting the negative features of public education is changing the style of their management and implementing new management methods. This could be that for schools with unsatisfactory learning outcomes, local authorities would organize tenders to private companies for the management and administration of these schools [5]. It is an interesting solution and worth considering. To some extent, the current Act on Educational Law allows a private person to be entrusted with running a public school. Article 9 of this Act allows for the transfer of school management to a legal person or a natural person in the case of educational institutions up to 70 pupils.

The structure of the education system in Finland and Poland

One of the key determinants for comparing education systems in different European countries is student performance in international tests. Finland, due to the high student results achieved in PISA tests, is often set as a role model in terms of education [6]. The PISA test (Program for International Student Assessment) is an international test of knowledge conducted under the aspiration of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. Its purpose is to obtain comparable and measurable data on the skills of fifteen-year-old students in order to improve the quality of teaching and the organization of educational systems.

It is worth considering the sources and reasons for the good results achieved by students in schools in Finland. This country has a three-tier education system. The structure of the Finnish education system includes the stage of early childhood education and care, compulsory pre-school education for six-year-olds as a pre-school stage. Compulsory primary school has nine classes, and high school and vocational school consists of three classes. The last stage of education is higher education, which lasts similarly to Poland, 3 years for undergraduate studies and 2 years for graduate studies. After 3.5-4 years of study, students can receive a title equivalent to the degree of Polish engineer. In the case of the school education system, compulsory education in Finland applies to children from 7 to 17 years of age, and local government bodies are obliged to organize a free and non-compulsory zero class for six-year-olds. The nine-year primary school can be considered the first stage of

education. During this period, the student acquires knowledge in subjects such as mathematics, Finnish, Swedish, environmental knowledge, art and foreign languages [13]. In the 7th grade of primary school, the student may choose optional classes related to his or her interests. For students with learning disabilities, the Finnish education system allows them to attend a specially created 10th "remedial" grade in order to complete their knowledge before moving on to the next stage of education [13]. In the case of secondary schools, the student has the choice of a general secondary school and a vocational school. In both of these types of schools, the duration of study is 3 years, with the possibility of extending it for an additional year. In a general education school, as in Poland, the student takes the national matriculation examination. The vocational school, in addition to school education, also includes a 6-month vocational training at the workplace, where the student can learn the profession in a practical way. It is interesting that education in vocational schools does not prevent students from applying for admission to higher education. After passing the state examination, a vocational school student has the option of taking state examinations and applying for admission to studies. There are two types of higher education institutions in Finland - universities and polytechnics. As in Poland, obtaining a bachelor's degree is possible after 3 years of study. What distinguishes the education system in Finland, however, is the fact that people with at least 3 years of experience in the profession corresponding to the field of study can get into the master's studies at the polytechnic [6]. When analyzing the structure of the education system, it can be seen that it is largely similar to the system present in Poland. So what is the main source of the success of the Finnish education system? M. Noińska considers the following factors as the main distinguishing elements of the Finnish education system:

- individual approach to the teaching process and care for the well-being of all students,
- excellent substantive preparation of teachers,
- great autonomy of teachers, as they can independently create curricula or decide on the choice of a textbook or the lack of it,
- social relationships based on trust, because teachers themselves create curricula in accordance with the core curriculum and adapt it to local needs [6].

Another important reason for the success of education in Finland is the involvement of local authorities. Local authorities engage in the development of the education system and encourage schools to create their own innovative projects in order to achieve the assumed goals and achieve the competences assumed by the students in the core curriculum [4]. An important element distinguishing the Finnish model of education is the professional status of

teachers. This is a very important issue to be looked at when analyzing the education system. In Finland, the teaching profession is one of the elite. The enrollment criteria for pedagogical schools are excessive and only 10% of candidates are admitted to pedagogical studies [3]. The teacher's prestige is influenced by many factors, which include mainly:

- size of the town where the school is located,
- institutional factors inscribed in the educational system (conviction of the environment about the importance of individual subjects, the specificity of educational stages),
- organizational culture of the school (management style, relations with the principal, atmosphere in the teaching group),
- contacts with the school environment,
- student results,
- personal characteristics of teachers [12].

D. Walczak, in her research on the teacher's professional prestige in Poland, indicates factors that may strengthen and lower the prestige of the teaching profession. The circumstances negatively affecting the teacher's prestige include social changes, which lead to such phenomena as the democratization of access to knowledge, the decline in the importance of higher education, the systematic increase in the level of consumption, but also the processes of individualization and the need to express one's own subjectivity, increase in the position and importance of children in the family and the dissemination of a democratic style of upbringing children, which affects the work of schools and the tasks faced by the teacher [12].

In Poland it can be noticed that the social status of teachers is gradually deteriorating. This is due to the requirements, thanks to which new applicants can enter higher education, and low salary. Polish teachers also pay attention to the changing perception of their profession in the eyes of their parents, who are becoming more and more demanding. Thus, it can be concluded that the trust in teachers on the part of society is declining today, which lowers the prestige of this profession. Despite these negative circumstances and social phenomena, there are elements that can raise the prestige of teachers. Particular attention can be paid to the characteristics of the teacher, knowledge, skills, competences, the style of working with the student, autonomy, as well as the school atmosphere, where the relationships between the individual members of the school community play a key role [12]. Thanks to the high quality of their work, educators can shape their positive image in the eyes of children, parents, management and the whole society. In order to be able to do this, a

greater selection for the teaching profession becomes necessary, which will result in increased requirements and higher salaries.

Moving on to the analysis of the structure of the Polish education system, it should be noted that over the years it has undergone various transformations and transformations. The current composition of the structure of the Polish education system was shaped during the reform of the education system carried out from the 2017/2018 school year.

As a result of the changes, the target structure of the education system, in light of the education reform, includes:

- 8-year primary school,
- 4-year general secondary school,
- 5-year technical secondary school,
- 3-year industry first-level school,
- 2-year second-cycle industry school,
- a 3-year special school preparing for work,
- post-secondary school [10].

In the case of this type of schools, the education reform involved the liquidation of lower secondary schools and the establishment of 8-year primary schools, divided into two educational stages. The first stage, from the 1st to the 3rd grade, is early childhood education. In the second stage, from the fourth to the eighth grade, subject-based teaching is carried out. The reform of education also abolished compulsory education for 6-year-olds, and extended education in high school to 4 years, and in the case of technical schools to 5 years. As a result of changes in the education system, vocational schools were shut down and replaced with first and second degree industry schools, where education lasts three and two years, respectively. In addition, the education system maintains the existence of special schools preparing for work, intended for students with moderate and severe intellectual disabilities and with multiple disabilities, where education is adapted to the educational needs and psychophysical abilities of students. The education system also includes post-secondary schools for graduates of secondary schools (high schools, technical schools).

The education reform carried out in 2017 will trigger discussions in Poland on the shape and legitimacy of the introduced changes. The possible actions that may contribute to the improvement of the education system include:

- increasing financial outlays for the education system,
- limiting the number of students in classes,

- increasing the number of hours of a foreign language, mathematics and science subjects,
- taking into account the opinion of teachers and parents on the directions of planned changes in education,
- improving the quality of teacher education and increasing the prestige of this profession by introducing selection of admissions to pedagogical studies and increasing salaries for educators,
- reducing the frequency of introducing reforms and ill-considered changes that are destabilizing and stressful for teachers,
- introducing the division into groups during foreign language classes,
- reduction of bureaucracy and the need to prepare many documents,
- full-time employment of teachers and psychologists in schools,
- limiting the impact of policy on education;
- creating space for students' creativity, learning logical thinking, arousing curiosity and motivation for development,
- stabilizing the educational system and limiting the frequency of its changes,
- reducing nepotism when hiring teachers [8].

The very good results achieved in the PISA test in 2018 by students of Polish lower secondary schools again aroused discussions about the sense of liquidating lower secondary schools. Polish students in all areas studied in this test (reading, nature, mathematics) were on the podium on a European scale, and in the case of mathematics also on a global scale [7].

Summary

Education is an important element that cannot be abandoned or omitted in a conscious and responsible society. It is a condition for the successful development of the country in the economic and social spheres. Currently, the educational system in Poland is exposed to various perturbations related to political factors. Polish education cannot be exposed to uncertainty and unpredictability. In a complex educational process, there is a need to plan and implement activities in the long-term aspect. In order to improve the effectiveness of the education system, it is worth focusing more on increasing the prestige of the teaching profession.

References:

1. Chrobak S., *Edukacja - wiedza zdolna ukierunkować człowieka w świetle pierwszych zasad i ostatecznych celów*, „Forum Pedagogiczne” UKSW 2011, nr 2, s. 53.
2. *Edukacja. Jest w niej ukryty skarb*. Raport dla UNESCO Międzynarodowej Komisji do spraw Edukacji dla XXI wieku pod przewodnictwem J. Delorsa, Warszawa 1998.
3. Fazlagić J., *Porównanie systemów edukacji w Polsce i Finlandii*, 2014, s. 3, <http://administracja.Sgh.Waw.Pl/pl/coe/projekty/Documents/szkola-dzis-i-jutro/jan-fazlagic-porownanie-systemow-edukacji-w-pl-i-w-fi.Pdf> (dostęp 24.07.2020).
4. Fazlagić J., *Systemy kształcenia nauczycieli w wybranych krajach europejskich*, Scientiavis, Poznan 2017, s. 31.
5. Giddens A., *Socjologia*, PWN, Warszawa 2006, s. 518.
6. Noińska M., *Kilka słów o systemie szkolnictwa w Finlandii*, „Studia Scandinavica” 2017, nr 1(21), s. 160.
7. *Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) Results From PISA 2018*, źródło https://www.oecd.org/pisa/publications/PISA2018_CN_POL.pdf (dostęp: 20.07.2020).
8. Roman K., *Analiza i ocena reformy edukacji w Polsce w opinii nauczycieli*, „Społeczeństwo i Edukacja” 2017, nr 25(2), s. 139.
9. Smak M., Walczak D., *Pozycja społeczno-zawodowa nauczycieli*, Instytut Badań Edukacyjnych, Warszawa 2015, s. 12.
10. *Struktura szkół po zmianach*, źródło: <https://reformaedukacji.men.gov.pl/o-reformie/uczen-i-rodzic/struktura-szkol-po-zmianach.html> (dostęp: 20.07.2020).
11. Suchocka A., *Przemoc symboliczna jako element ukrytego programu kształcenia polskiej szkoły*, Zeszyty Naukowe Akademii Marynarki Wojennej 2011, nr 4 (187).
12. Walczak D., *Prestiż zawodu nauczyciela w percepcji różnych aktorów życia szkoły*, „Studia z Teorii Wychowania” 2016, t. VII, nr 4(17), s. 110.
13. Woźniak W., *System edukacyjny jako instrument wyrównywania szans. Przypadek Finlandii*, „Polityka Społeczna” 2008, nr 1, s. 34.