PREMISES OF THE QUALITY MANAGEMENT IN EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT: The paper deals with the concept of quality, in general and the manner in which it is perceived in education. For the educational process, quality is not produced exclusively by school, as a provider of educational services, but by the beneficiaries and the purchasers of education.

KEY WORDS: quality, competence, evaluation

JEL CLASSIFICATION: M12, M41

1. INTRODUCTION

The education system "represents, for all countries, one of the most important services from the category of those covered by the state budget. Its main purpose is to prepare the qualified professionals necessary for all the branches of the economy, to achieve the permanent education and qualification of the people, to stimulate and facilitate the process of general training, thereby contributing to the development of the society, and to the continual growth of the economy. The importance given to education in the already developed countries is also demonstrated by the fact that the in U.S., for example, in the universities, there is a larger permanent staff than in the agriculture" [1].

In the department of education, the researches regarding the quality began in the early twentieth century. The title of founder of the field research, "The measurement of the quality of the programs and institutions" belongs to Ralph Tyler, who formulated, in 1950, the principles of evaluation of the effectiveness of a training program.

The concept of quality was "imported" in the education system from the productive sector, and the notion has been frequently used over the past twenty years.

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2. QUALITY- A COMPLEX CONCEPT

Despite the usage of an apparently consensual terminology in the teaching literature, quality must be defined each time, because the authors can either refer to the quality of the functioning of the institution, or to the quality of the educational system in general, or to the quality of the process of learning.

In the professional works, they highlight the difficulties in providing a unanimously accepted definition of the quality of education, a difficulty caused by several reasons. Among these, there are emphasized the heterogeneity between educational institutions, the specialties, the assumed roles, the relativity of the concept according to the experience of those who formulate it, the diversity of cultures in which they originate. Despite these difficulties, in recent years there have been made efforts to draw the contours of the concept of quality in the education system" [2].

These efforts led to two categories of approaches: one, regarding the definition of quality in terms of education outcomes and another, regarding the quality in terms of the processes that affect/bring quality, that is, the organization and the management of the educational institutions, the value of the programs and the teaching curricula, the level of accomplishment of courses and other educational materials, the didactic and pedagogical capacity of the teaching staff, the effects of the scientific research.

Based on these approaches, at present there are at least six definitions of the quality in the education system:

- *the quality as excellence*, seen in relation to the performance of the existing standards;
- *the quality as perfection*, a concept that moves the centre of gravity from the standards of the results, characteristic of the first definition, towards the standards of the processes;
- *the quality as the aspect according to the purpose,* regarding the quality in relation to the mission of the institution providing the education;
- the quality as a value for the money, assessed in terms of the recovery of the investment made by its beneficiaries;
- the quality as the transformation of its beneficiaries, seen as the strengthening of the responsibility of the students towards the learning process;
- the quality as a retributive control, or a reward for the achievement of a certain level.

Throughout human history, the concept of "quality" has undergone various changes, but, irrespective of the historical moment, by "quality" they understood the extent to which those interested in somebody or something were satisfied (by that something or someone).

Therefore, we can speak of the quality of a product, of the quality of a person or the quality of an organization as an extent to which those interested in these get satisfaction in relation to them. Moreover, "quality" was incorporated into the concepts related to the scientific management since its emergence.

Even regarding the scientific management, the concept of "quality" has undergone several changes, evolving from an attribute given to a product, to a grade of competence given to the organization. Thus, as a natural course, in the last part of the

twentieth century it began to take shape a separate field of scientific management - quality management.

In order to correctly appreciate the concept of "quality" of the education system, we should reunite the approaches and the definitions associated with it, and on this basis to establish the multivalent content of this concept.

Quality, in this perspective, is a state of the education system, whose results correspond to certain standards that ensure for its beneficiaries favourable employment opportunities in the labour market, as they quickly fit the high requirements of the activity at the working place, even opening a new horizon for how to approach and solve the problems of the special fields in which they work.

The high quality of the educational process is directly conditioned by the structure of the curriculum plan and the different teaching programs, by the correspondence between them and the latest achievements in the field in each stage of historical development, by the interdependence between these programs and the manner in which they are achieved through courses, seminars and evaluation methods with real-life requirements, of the existing social-economic practice. Thus, the message of the concept of quality remains its major importance for the users of quality policy, the fact that the teachers and the students are the ones who realize it, that learning effectiveness depends on the commitment of both parties in relation to the rigors imposed by this concept.

In practice, it is much more important the manner in which each participant in the process of education defines the quality of the activity that he provides. In the European countries there are, indeed, specific definitions on the quality of the education process, and the universities, individually, have developed specific definitions, depending on the mission they have assumed, on the resources that they possess, on the demands of the beneficiaries of education.

In Romania, the law number 87/2006, for the endorsement of the Government's Emergency Ordinance number 75/2005"[3] presents a technical and regulation definition, through they ensure common and consistent understanding of the term according to which "The quality of the education consists of the assembly of characteristics of a study program and of its provider, through which the beneficiaries' expectations are met, as well as the quality standards".

The national framework for ensuring the quality in Vocational Education and Training operates with two distinct definitions. [4]: one issued by the European Framework for Ensuring the Quality in Vocational Education and Training, according to which "the quality in vocational education and training is not only technical, but it depends on the specific objectives achieved in different units of time"; the second definition adopted within the EU Phare programs to modernize the vocational and technical education brings inputs regarding the quality as "a degree of satisfaction in relation to the sphere of education and vocational training, established according to specific standards and to the achievement of a level of expected excellence, realized by the beneficiaries and by other stakeholders".

The fact that one can attribute several definitions to the quality in higher education emphasizes the multi-faceted character of this term. Most researchers

consider that the concept of *quality* can be best represented through the terms of *compliance* or *adjustment to objectives*.

We can discuss, therefore, the existence of at least two elements:

- the reference model or the reference standard;
- the object or the process whose quality is determined in order to assess the degree of correlation with the standard;

After signing the Bologna Declaration in 1999, Romania became a member of the "Bologna Process" which aims to set up, until 2010, the European Higher Education Area through new changes and transformations.

The assurance of the academic quality is one of the main objectives of the Bologna Process. The reality is dependent on the correspondences that are established between the meanings of academic quality and the transformations taking place in higher education system.

Quality must be defined in an instrumental manner, in order to be evaluated. The approaching of the concept of quality together with the notion of consumer / customer, make it appear as a multidimensional concept, which can be evaluated from the perspective of the different users / customers.

The role of consumer / customer in higher education can be assigned to: the state, the entire society, the students, the employers, the academic community, the international partners.

We will try to follow the dimensions of the quality from the perspective of different consumers / customers:

- from the perspective of the state, the concept of quality may refer to the means of administration of the state budget resources (the allowances granted, for an equivalent student, through the institutional contracts), according to some indicators of quality..., revenue management, the investments in university development, the existence of an internal quality assurance mechanism **or** to the modality of approaching university as a national component or good (dimensions: the weighting factor of the teachers with scientific degrees and titles, the weighting factor of the teachers who actually participate in scientific research, the quality of the masters and doctoral programs offered by the university, etc.);
- from the point of view of the students, quality may be defined by: the professional abilities of the teachers closely linked to the university's curriculum quality (the quality of the master and doctorate programs offered by the universities); the quality of the information services and the training modalities; the psychological climate within the universities especially given by the quality of teacher-student relations; the quality of the methods used to evaluate the students, the quality of the accommodation conditions within the campuses of the universities, etc. and last, but not least, the quality and quantity of educational facilities;
- from the perspective of the employers, the quality is mainly given by the competencies, the qualities and the qualifications awarded to the graduates;
- from the perspective of the society, quality is determined by the process of social inclusion and the competence of the graduates;
- from the perspective of the academic community and the international partners, the quality dimensions mainly refer to: the academic management (human resources

management); national and international cooperation – the existence of specific centres of excellence; the image of the university, and its ranking among all the other national universities; mobility programs for both students and teachers;

In conclusion, by directing the education process towards quality, the trend has highlighted a very important concept – the competence [5].

2.1. Quality management in education

"Quality management" as a science has recently appeared . The concept could be defined (considering the French definition of ~management~) as the way in which the satisfaction offered by an organisation is being managed. From this perspective we could say that the quality management influences most of the processes in an organization having a direct influence in defining, documenting and applying the internal norms referring to the different organisational processes, and it influences the way in which the staff puts these norms into practice and last but not least it guide the way in which the employees perceive and represent the reality. As any science, the quality management relies on a series of principles which set the main directions which an organisation ahs to follow in order to offer the maximum of satisfaction to the ones interested in its results.

The changes in the higher education from Romania and those from entire Europe and other parts of the world where various and radical and also continuous. In Romania from the beginning of the year 1990, there have been founded the first private universities, and the number of public universities, faculties or new study programs, specializations have grown very fast.

The educational management creates its own content by taking over and capitalizing the concept created from the economic, sociologic, psychosocial perspective, and it relies on education and school, becoming a distinct psychosocial activity from a qualitative point of view.

Therefore, the educational management can be considered "that scientific, pedagogical discipline, elaborated with the help of a interdisciplinary strategy, employed in the study of events which come in the decision of organising a determined pedagogical activity and in managing the educational programs". Therefore, premises are created for a *global management* (which refer to the framework og elements approached in their functional-structural interdependence), *optimum* (managing the system by a maximum capitalization of the resources), *strategic* (the long term development of the system by the ongoing innovation of its structures).

By processing the function of management on the level of the resources specific for the educational system and process, modern pedagogy identifies the following *functions* for the training management:

- planning –organizing the education;
- orientation methodological guiding of the education process,
- regulating function self-regulation of the education system and process.

Planning-organizing function of the educational system involves the efficient capitalization of the human, material, informational resources through the "reflection" on the future action (planning), for prospective purpose (strategic) and improving

purpose (tactic), as well as by creating some decisional structure and tools which facilitate the connections between departments.

Methodological-orientation function of the educational process focuses on evaluation and according to this on the evolution of quality to the maximum level of the operational dimension of the educational system and process, and the training of the professors, as well as the pedagogic research which is required for the continuous improvement of the instructive-educational activity.

The norm of the educational management is concentrated in a framework of principles required for the social effectiveness of the training activity - permanent personality development, on all levels of the system and educational process. The most important aspects are:

- The principle of global strategic management of the educational system and process;
- The principle of efficient management of the educational system and process
- The principle of hierarchical management of the system (is focused on the interdependence of the functions and structures on a social level and it points out the priority of the managerial functions according to the managerial structures;)
- the principle of the complex management of the educational system and process (points out the unitary character of the management).

This conceptual short overview of the educational management points out that this type of management has a well defined evolution in the context of socio-human managerial disciplines, and it is materialized in the context of the managerial disciplines, by content and the factors involved.

The scientific character of the educational management results from the educational scientific management results from the performing interpretative horizon where education is investigated, managed, evaluated, regarded as a system and a design and accomplishment process. On the level of the functional triad represented bz the above-mentioned functions, educational management gains the attributed on the total quality management. With the help of the functional triad, the quality planning is accomplished and it can also be controlled and continuously improved.

Being part of the quality management, the educational management becomes a future scientific tools, having a performance and efficiency, and a relatively new paradigm of approaching pedagogy, a methodological step needed to acquire efficiency in the training and development activity of the human personality.

The educational management represents the theory and practice, the science and art of design, organization, coordination, evaluation, regulation of the elements of the educational activity(not only of the resources), as a free, integral, harmonious development of the human individuality for the autonomous and creative affirmation of its personality, according to the ideal set on the level of the educational policy.

The educational management would represent an optimum-strategic global approaching methodology of the educational activity, but not a way of managing the basic unit of the educational system, applicable on the level of the complex scholar organization.

In what the educational process is concerned as an integrant part of the activity of delivering services for the society one can start from the analysis of a basic concept: QUALITY:

The management responsibilities are:

- to provide the efficiency in what the quality and the development of the curriculum is concerned;
- to offer active support in the development and supply of the quality of the educational programs;
- to meet the needs and expectation of the internal and external factors;
- to develop and maintain efficient partnerships with the interested external factors;
- to provide the management of the human and physical resources which is required in order to accomplish the mission, which means: to offer a safe and harmonious learning environment, to provide learning places which should meet both the individual and the collective needs, to provide teaching resources and methods which allow the access of all students, to employ staff according to recruitment and selection criteria and to provide access to lifelong training programs.

Management indicated a certain mentality, an art of leading and training human resources.

The evolutions from the previous years on the international and national level have pointed out the need of building a national quality management. In the educational system the quality of the educational process has become a national priority.

In order to analyse the quality of an educational institution and of the educational services one should first understand the concepts with which they operate: quality, criteria, quality indicators, standards, descriptions.

The concept of providing the *quality* has been used in economy, and in organizations having as a main goal their profit: to produce and sell as much as possible, functioning in a strong non-competitive environment. *Quality* is produced by the one who supplies a product or a service on the market, but it is defined by the customer and not by the producer.

Quality represents an intrinsic attribute of any material or immaterial object which resects the degree of complying with the requirements of the beneficiary.

The quality of an educational institution is determined by the quality of the processes and the quality of the educational services offered.

It is important to mention that for the educational process, quality is not produced and defined exclusively by school as a supplier of educational services but by beneficiaries and clients of education.

Both beneficiaries and customers, have to be permanently consulted and their satisfaction to be a permanent reason of preoccupation for the educational institution so that it could generate a competitive system.

The triad the quality of the organization, the quality of the processes and the quality of the educational services has some characteristics which make them work together not separately.

The quality of the organization involves: the organizational culture, the structure of the organization, facilities, human resources management; the quality of the educational process involves the ways of using the resources, the existence of the procedures, information, process organization etc., and the quality of the educational services manages the degree of fulfilling the requirements of the customers, and those of the internal and external ones.

If the above-mentioned objectives are met in the didactic process, the educational activity is provided along with a multitude of services specific for the educational units. The quality of the educational process relies on the quality of these three components.

Offering quality is a major problem in the relations among university, being an important institutional activity in accomplishing their mission as a privilege of the competitiveness and compatibility as an expected result of the educational and research process.

The relevant institution and partners are those responsible for the definition of the policies, systems and procedures of providing quality. These vary, in the professional education and training system, from one sector to another, according to the structure of the society, the specific contexts and the institutional frame. It is necessary to improve the transparency and coherence of the policies and practices in the field of providing quality.

In the last period the increased interest towards providing quality is explained by:

- the quantitative growth of the institutions and students;
- the increased interest of the society towards all the fields of the social life and towards higher education;
- the emergence of new educational programs, which stimulate the needs for the well prepared specialists.
- the internationalization of the higher education and of the academic mobility;
- the problem of quality identifies :
- the value of the university education for the society:
- the democratization of the education:
- the need for diversification;
- the applicative character and its connection to the social-economic practice;
- the responsibility of the higher education in the entire educational system;
- the openness towards reforms and innovations;
- the interdisciplinary and continuity of the studies;
- planning and human resource management;
- training of the teacher and the level of their education;
- providing mobility and international cooperation;
- teaching material and academic support for development etc.

Due to the fact that there is no institutionalized system for the training of the managers, the main aspects of the academic management will be to improve the mechanisms from the managerial structure, in making the managerial practice

professional and building a training and development system for their competences in this professional field.

According to the types of reasoning of the managers regarding the orientation of the educational institution towards the organizational quality, there can be two types of institutions: a conservative educational institution or an innovative one.

The difference appears in the way in which the quality of the educational institution is perceived: within the school in the results of the didactic activity, the students with their gained knowledge and the facility of getting diplomas or the living conditions and the financial bodies according to the expenditures of the available resources; or there may be a process where the institution has to constantly adapt to the new, and to be involved in the improvement of its processes and services.

Table 1. Typology of the educational institutions

Conservative educational institution	Innovative educational institution
1. The manager refuses to introduce a quality system.	1. Managers which promote the introduction of some quality systems and which identify from the comparison with other institution ways of improving the performances.
2. The education institution is insensible to the social modifications, market requirements.	2. The institution is innovative, sensitive to the modifications of the society and the market requirements.
3. The didactic procedures and techniques are set according to the tradition and experience of the teaching staff.	3. The teaching procedures and techniques are elaborated after a reporting to the performing international institutions and the experiences gained during the training courses.
4. The lack of the motivation system of the teaching staff.	4. Motivating the staff according to the individual and organizational performances.
5. The management staff is oriented to give advice and take decisions.	5. The management staff is receptive to the proposals of the others.
6. Deficient communication, decisive opaqueness, focusing on rumours and not on information.	6. Efficient communication system, efficient transparency.
7. Focusing on budget funds.	7. Training and attracting extra-budget funding resources and considering this aspect an essential responsibility for the entire staff.
8. Resistance to change.	8. Procedures for the stimulation of creativity.
9. Incompetent management staff, uninterested.	9. Competent management staff and open to experience.

At the same time, an important element in the way of approaching management is the customer, that is the receiver of the material product offered by the supplier.

Table 2. Features of the customers

Types of customers	Categories of customers
1. External	Tax-payers Organizations and companies which employ graduates Organizations and companies which take advantage of the services of the education institution (micro-production, educational services for the community)
2. Internal	 Managing the institution Teaching staff Auxiliary and administrative teaching staff. Students

Putting into practice a quality oriented strategy is accomplished through the quality management defined as a framework of the activities of the management function which determined the policy in the field of quality, a policy of orientation towards the customer with the close observance of the objectives and responsibilities which are implemented in the quality system by means as: quality planning, quality control, providing quality and improving quality.

Promoting a customer oriented policy in a quality system can be accomplished by the development of some specific procedures of identifying the needs of the customers by elaborating some standards and procedures as well as by measuring the degree in which the results obtained in the educational institution are according to the set objectives.

In the "customer orientation" policy it is necessary to set some concrete consulting – participation procedures of the students for the elaboration of the strategic targets, concrete programs and actions, and the concrete functioning of the school, taking important evaluation decisions, etc.

The systems and procedures for the quality provision usually refer to:

- Designing and planning the development of the university: how the strategic targets and development strategies are set, and which the responsibilities, mechanisms are and decisional procedures, who participated in taking the decisions, how are those decisions made available for the community and how the consensus around these strategic targets is created, etc.
- Implementing and supervising the programs: who answers and who participated, what are the supervision methods and tools and the feedback and how the participation of the "interests bearers" is provided, how their feedback is taken over.
- Evaluation of the way in which the institution works, revising the projects, programs: the methods, tools and evaluation procedures of the programming documents and who participated in them, the warning mechanisms.

The quality evaluation system has to be created in a different way. First of all, it has to provide the accomplishment of the main functions of evaluation that are:

- the evaluation has to be optimal, to impede the emergence of the major malfunctions and at the same time to clearly show what went right or wrong in the past activities;
- the results of the actions have to be known by students, parents, teaching staff, managers, community, so that all these interest groups could judge if the "investment" (not only the financial one) has led to the requested impact and if it is worth continuing it. This aspect proves if the feedback for the significant interest groups has been achieved.
- revising and improving the educational policies and strategies on the level of the universities so that these could serve the mission. In the past years, in Romania and on the level of the European Union, the need for a culture of self-evaluation is becoming more and more important and encouraged through the educational policies.

The self-evaluation is considered to be a fundamental dimension of "the organization which learns": the external evaluation is often inefficient in a society where the change is extremely fast and unpredictable but it does not lack importance.

The international practice uses various methods of providing quality in education: auditing, evaluation, accreditation [6].

2.2. Higher Education Accreditation

Accreditation is defined as "the way of providing the quality that certifies the observance of programs of study and activity standards by educational organizations. Accreditation is proposed and granted according to the results of the external assessment process developed by ARACIS (Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education), as acknowledgement regarding the academic quality of a higher education institution or of an educational organization previously authorized for temporary activity and that complies with the minimal requests of performance standards and indicators regarding quality of education ..." [7].

It is absolutely necessary to invest as much confidence as possible in Romanian universities, whether public or private ones, because they provided an increase in the number of university graduators under relatively underfinancing circumstances, embracing, although slightly, present-day important fields of activity.

The role of accreditation is to certify if a certain higher education institution can be granted a status with effects either upon the authorization of certain programmes, or upon the students.

The external evaluation of results in education is one of the processes that ensure quality in education.

Since education means value and knowledge has useful value, there can be drawn a parallel between what quality means in mainly economic international standards and how these standards were forged to be reduced to the Romanian education.

ISO 9000 is the collection of international standards, independent of the characteristics of a sector, describing the elements the quality system should comprise,

without specifying the modalities of implementation of these elements (which is a matter of the specificity of each organization).

In practice there are used three terms in defining quality:

- drafted quality desideratum;
- manufacturing quality processing;
- delivered quality demand of the market.

Product quality is created in the manufacturing process, but ends with the consumer, so that the producer's interests of and consumer's expectations are two independent aspects, linked together by the degree of satisfaction.

Going back to the theme of quality in education, it is noted that the Law of quality of education shows a fragmented approach to quality; moreover, it lacks an articulated system design because: it is defined the quality of the project, but it lacks the manufacturing quality (schools and teachers, but also management); it also lacks delivered quality (the degree of social utility of the product of school and society's interests).

While the manufacturer's point of view is expressed, the consumer's is not even mentioned. However, the legislator has not questioned himself in advance if the community (ultimately graduates) agree with that quality of education? Does it meet their needs, whether temporary ones? Is it a reliable product?

Obviously, these rhetorical questions cannot be answered immediately, but they define the way in which the legislative subsystem operates: superficially, ineffectively and sufficiently. Unfortunately, the problems regarding education quality, as they were solved by the EO no. 75/12. 07. 2005 do not stop here.

Quality should be first assessed by the Ministry of Labour, by means of (all types of) labour coverage statistics, staff turnover, the coverage degree of qualified personnel in the field, professional reorientation costs, unemployment for each professional category etc. if we were to develop an objective action! Quality in education is the ultimate expression of expectations, if this is the first definition taken into account (there is also the definition according to which quality is the lowest cost for a given use).

A prerequisite of quality is the decentralization of education, represented by the transfer of authority, responsibility and resources from the central to the local level. The fields of decentralization are: curriculum, human resources, management and leadership and, last but not least financing.

The decentralization of education is not an end in itself, it is part of national decentralization strategy and aims to create an educational system organized, administered and financed according to European principles regarding the provision of the quality of the educational process, free and equal access of all young people to education, that is, adapting the educational offer to the interests and needs of the direct and indirect beneficiaries.

Decentralization should not cause imbalances and distortions in organizing, directing and supporting the national education system. The decentralization of decision does not exclude, but involves developing the monitoring, control and evaluation system, both by the local community and by government institutions and professional bodies.

Assuring the quality of education and educational services is a long term investment with definite repercussions on the quality of life and work. Thus education quality becomes the most important condition for improving professional employment, social cohesion and not least economic competitiveness.

Quality providing systems are, as we have already seen, set nationally to ensure education and training improvement and accountability. Their purpose is to increase the efficiency and transparency of supply at all levels, thus promoting mutual trust, acknowledgement and mobility both within and outside the country.

Quality providing involves achieving the following objectives [8]:

- a) establishing a system of internal and external assessment;
- b) continuously assessing the products (graduates, research, etc.);
- c) improving standards of learning;
- d) training educational staff based on the principle of compulsoriness of such activities, of the specific materializations of the university academic staff training and integration of educational research (active research) as an approach for the training of trainers in teaching;
- e) developing counselling and guidance for students;
- f) focusing on long-term results and not on performances used exclusively for academic purposes;
- g) re-drafting institutional criteria and institutional performance standards, assessing university specializations and curricula and classifying them;
- h) increasing exigency in promoting teachers, as real requisition induces a hierarchy of values in education, an emulation of the process of scientific research and classroom teaching. Establishing quality criteria generally applicable and specific, which allow a reappraisal of values in Romanian education;

Providing quality regards education programs as well as learning outcomes, but does not guarantee the improvement of quality, though offering substantial support to education providers. Therefore, this remains the responsibility of education and professional training providers.

3. CONCLUSION

Priority in terms of restructuring and improvement of higher education based on skills is represented by the elaboration and development of the national qualification system in higher education (National Qualifications Framework and Quality Assurance in Higher Education) and involve a number of actions both at the system level, and provider level (e.g., the implementation of quality provision standards, adapting curricula to the qualifications of the National Qualifications Framework in Higher Education.

Interaction among universities, business community and research and development sector, particularly through the development and strengthening of partnerships, will be used as a tool to increase the response capacity of higher education to changes occurring in society, to foster economic competitiveness and innovation and to promote education, skills and entrepreneurial competences. To meet the requirements of the knowledge-basef society, it is necessary to focus on actions

aimed at developing postgraduate education offers (to support the accumulation of new knowledge and increase skill levels of human capital) and on actions that ensure strong basis for the increase of human capital in education and professional training (e.g. pedagogical Master Degree studies).

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