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The Importance of Quality Assurance in Education

Dumitru Săndulescu¹, Mariana Leafu²

¹PhD at Viaceslav Harnaj Technical College, Sector 1, Bucharest

²Director PhD at Extended Program Kindergarten No. 16, Târgoviște, Dâmbovița County

Abstract

The quality of educational services is an essential pillar in building a modern, development-oriented state. Over the more than three decades since 1989, numerous reforms have been implemented in the field of education, targeting both school curricula and the structure of educational management, including educational institutions specifically. These changes are closely linked to the financing of education from public funds and the responsibility of authorities in managing this sector.

To prevent the waste of public resources, the need to implement efficient control methods has become essential, aiming to ensure the optimal functioning of the educational system. Additionally, it is crucial for schools to adopt a coherent set of tools that allow them to treat students and their parents as clients, who should benefit from educational services at the highest quality standards. This approach contributes to increasing efficiency and strengthening trust in the educational system.

The article aims to highlight the importance of quality assurance in education as an essential factor for the development of a high-performing and inclusive educational system. By analyzing the principles, processes, and benefits of quality assurance, the article seeks to emphasize its role in improving the performance of educational institutions, promoting equity and accessibility in education, as well as adapting these institutions to the requirements of modern society and the labor market. Additionally, it focuses on the need for an approach that integrates continuous evaluation, collaboration among stakeholders, and the efficient use of resources, to ensure high standards of quality and sustainability in education.

Keywords: educational services, quality of education, competencies, management

INTRODUCTION

The quality of education is a fundamental element in the development of a modern and competitive society, having a direct impact on economic, social, and cultural progress. In a global context marked by rapid changes and complex challenges, ensuring quality in education has become a strategic priority for countries that aim to build resilient educational systems capable of meeting the diverse needs of students, parents, teachers, and society as a whole.

Quality assurance in education involves more than just meeting performance standards. It is a dynamic and complex process that aims to monitor, evaluate, and continuously improve educational processes, institutional management, and learning outcomes. This process provides an integrated framework to ensure that every student has access to equitable learning opportunities and high-quality educational resources, regardless of their social, economic, or geographic background.

In Romania, the implementation of quality assurance systems in education has undergone significant development in recent decades, inspired by European and international models. The establishment of structures such as the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-university Education (ARACIP) and the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS) marked an important step in the standardization, evaluation, and improvement of the performance of educational institutions in the country.

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Corresponding author:

Dumitru Săndulescu

PhD at Viaceslav Harnaj
Technical College, Sector 1,
Bucharest



The importance of quality assurance in education is not limited to guaranteeing standards of excellence. It plays a crucial role in promoting public trust in the educational system, facilitating academic mobility, recognizing qualifications, and adapting education to the requirements of a globalized economy. Furthermore, a well-regulated and evaluated educational system contributes to the development of generations capable of actively participating in sustainable development and strengthening a society based on values such as equity, diversity, and inclusion.

This article addresses the importance of quality assurance in education, analyzing key processes, associated benefits, and challenges that must be overcome to transform this dimension into a real tool for improving educational outcomes. It also highlights specific aspects of the Romanian educational context, with a focus on implementing innovative practices and aligning with international trends in the field.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

For the development of this article, a qualitative approach was used to provide a deep understanding of the processes, importance, and impact of quality assurance in education. This methodology allows for the exploration of the diverse perspectives of stakeholders involved in education and the identification of key factors that contribute to the continuous improvement of educational quality.

Objectives of the methodology:

- Analysis of current quality assurance practices in pre-university and higher education institutions in Romania.
- Identification of challenges and solutions associated with the implementation of a robust and effective quality assurance system.

Data Collection Methods

Document analysis was conducted by reviewing official documents and relevant reports on quality assurance in education: annual reports published by ARACIP and ARACIS, legislation related to quality assurance in education, and national and European strategic documents, with the aim of identifying current practices, performance indicators, and standards used in quality assurance.

Participatory observation was another method used to develop this article: direct observation of internal and external evaluation processes in several educational institutions to understand how these processes are implemented in practice. The analyzed documents were examined to extract relevant information about quality standards and applicable policies. Restricted access to certain official documents or internal processes limited the completeness of the analysis. With the integration of bibliographic sources, the research methodology aims to deeply explore the topic of quality assurance in education, using a qualitative approach that combines data collection from both primary and secondary sources.

Bibliographic sources used:

Official documents:

- ARACIP (2020). Annual reports on the quality of education in Romania.
- ARACIS (2021). Quality standards in higher education.

- European Commission (2018). Recommendations on inclusive education and quality assurance.

Studies and academic papers:

- Miclea, M. (2019). *Quality Management in Education*. Bucharest: Universitaria Publishing House.
- Popescu, A., & Ionescu, R. (2021). Perspectives on external evaluation in the Romanian educational system. *Journal of Education and Culture*, 14(3), 45-62.

Legislative framework:

- National Education Law No. 1/2011, updated in 2024.
- Government Decision No. 1534/2008 regarding ARACIP.

Quality assurance is an essential process that involves the systematic evaluation and review of educational offerings, with the aim of maintaining and improving their quality, equity, and efficiency. This process includes various components, such as self-assessment, external evaluation (through inspections) of the institution, evaluation of teachers and school leaders, as well as assessments¹

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The implementation and development of robust quality assurance systems are essential for ensuring high-quality and inclusive education within the European Education Area. These systems provide an indispensable framework for monitoring and continuously improving educational processes, contributing to the maintenance of high performance standards and promoting diversity and equity in education.

Additionally, quality assurance plays a crucial role in supporting student mobility in Europe by increasing transparency and trust in education systems. It facilitates the mutual recognition of qualifications obtained in different countries and the learning outcomes achieved abroad. Thus, quality assurance becomes a central pillar in promoting high-quality education, supporting shared values and principles of inclusive education, and strengthening the European dimension of the teaching and learning process.

Member states are encouraged to adopt the following measures to support a high-quality, inclusive, and accessible education system that enables everyone to develop essential competencies, according to the European framework "Key Competences for Lifelong Learning":

- **Promotion of key competences:** Developing and strengthening key competences from childhood and throughout life, integrating them into national lifelong learning strategies.
- **Support for students:** Providing adequate support for all students, including those with special needs or from disadvantaged backgrounds, to help them reach their full potential.

4. <https://education.ec.europa.eu/education-levels/school-education/quality-assurance>

- **Raising basic skills levels:** Improving literacy, numeracy, and digital skills, alongside the development of lifelong learning abilities.

- **Promotion of STEM:** Encouraging competencies in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), with special attention given to the involvement of young people, including girls, in these areas.

- **Digital skills and creativity:** Increasing the level of digital competencies, promoting entrepreneurship, and fostering creativity among young people.

- **Foreign language learning and active citizenship:** Supporting the acquisition of language skills, including foreign languages, and promoting active citizenship and awareness of common European values.

- **Diversification of learning methods:** Using diverse learning methods and environments, including digital technologies, and supporting educational staff in adopting these practices.

- **Validation of competencies:** Strengthening collaboration between educational institutions and promoting the assessment and recognition of competencies acquired in different contexts.

- **Integration of sustainable development goals (SDGs):** Introducing UN goals, particularly SDG 4.7, into educational programs, with a focus on education for climate change and the sustainable use of resources.

- **Monitoring progress:** Reporting progress in promoting key competencies across all sectors of education and training, using frameworks and tools from the Strategic Framework for European Cooperation (ET2020) or subsequent ones.

- Encourage learning and the promotion of common European values from childhood and throughout all educational stages, strengthening social cohesion and the sense of belonging.
- Implement the Paris Declaration, focusing on education for active citizenship, ethics, tolerance, and social and civic competencies.
- Use Council of Europe tools, such as the framework for competencies for democratic culture, to promote civic education.

To provide inclusive education, member states should:

- Promote inclusion in education for all beneficiaries, offering adequate support according to their needs.
- Collaborate with the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education to monitor and implement successful practices.

To promote the European dimension in education, member states are encouraged to:

- Support the understanding of the European context and common heritage through participation in the e-Twinning network, cross-border mobility, and transnational projects, including an annual European Union day in schools.

- Enable educational staff to promote common values and support inclusive education through training and empowerment.

Implementation measures should include:

- Reviewing existing policies to ensure compliance with these recommendations.
- Engaging the public in the policy-making process based on evidence regarding the social and civic dimensions of education.
- Promoting collaboration through the exchange of best practices and peer learning within the EU.
- Effectively using EU funds to implement the recommendations.

The development and support of competencies for all beneficiaries is a key pillar for ensuring equitable and high-quality education. All young people must have access to opportunities that allow them to develop a full range of key competencies, including literacy, language skills, mathematics, science, digital and programming skills, civic and social competencies, as well as entrepreneurial and transversal skills, such as creativity and critical thinking.

The European framework from 2006 on key competencies for lifelong learning supports this development, and its revision, included in the "New Skills Agenda," will continue to improve education and vocational training. To achieve these objectives, educational institutions must adopt new approaches to the learning process.

Contextualized learning, which connects the educational process with real-life experiences, produces better outcomes. Methods such as project-based or problem-solving learning, internships, and involvement in community activities...

It stimulates students' motivation, provides relevance to the content being studied, and facilitates the development of social, civic, and entrepreneurial competencies. Education in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) becomes more effective when integrated with economic, social, and environmental challenges or linked to arts and design, highlighting its applicability in daily life. The integration of digital technologies into the educational process can significantly improve the quality of learning and support innovation in educational institutions. These technologies enrich educational experiences and support the development of a wide range of competencies, beyond basic digital literacy. However, only a quarter of European children benefit from training by teachers who feel confident in using digital technologies. These digital tools can also facilitate communication and collaboration within and between institutions, contributing to more active involvement of students and their families in school life³.

Quality assurance in early childhood education and pre-university education in Romania involves three main processes at the level of educational institutions, according to legal regulations: internal quality evaluation, external quality evaluation, and continuous quality improvement.

³ COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE, AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS School Development and Excellent Teaching for a Great Start in Life {SWD(2017) 165 final},

<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1496304694958&uri=COM%3A2017%3A248%3AFIN>

The objectives of these processes, defined by standards and reference standards, include the following:

- **Institutional capacity**, which covers administrative and managerial structures, logistics, and human resources.
- **Educational effectiveness**, focusing on the content of study programs, learning outcomes, financial resource management, and graduate employment rates.
- **Quality management**, which aims at strategies and procedures for quality assurance, the development and updating of study programs, teacher evaluation, access to learning resources, and transparency of information.

These three domains are divided into 16 criteria, each associated with specific performance indicators. The number and content of performance indicators differ between pre-university and higher education and include specific requirements (descriptors) that define the performance levels necessary to meet quality standards.

Regarding responsibilities, the legislation stipulates that the Ministry of Education is responsible for evaluating both the education system and the educational process, in accordance with national standards, through specialized institutions.

The evaluation of the educational system and process consists of two essential components: one internal, carried out at the level of educational institutions, and one external, conducted by specialized bodies:

- **School inspectorates** are responsible for evaluating the educational process in pre-university education.
- **The Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-university Education (ARACIP)** conducts institutional evaluations of pre-university educational units.

The Ministry of Education evaluates the entire education system.

Internal Evaluation

Internal evaluation is carried out by the Commission for Evaluation and Quality Assurance (CEAC), which is formed at each educational institution level, in The composition of the Quality Assurance and Evaluation Committee (CEAC) includes:

- Members from the institution's staff;
- A representative of the union;
- A representative of the students;
- A representative of the parents (for early childhood education, primary and secondary education);
- Representatives of other stakeholders (local authorities, national minorities, employers, depending on the educational level).
- Accordance with national standards and regulations concerning education quality.

The role of the CEAC (Quality Assurance and Evaluation Committee) includes:

- Developing strategies and procedures for improving quality;
- Publishing an annual report on the quality of education;
- Proposing programs and measures for quality improvement;
- Collaborating with all involved stakeholders (teachers, students, parents, local councils, etc.).

The annual internal evaluation report is published on the ARACIP website, following a standardized national format.

External Evaluation

External evaluation is coordinated by:

- ARACIP – for pre-university education;
- ARACIS – for higher education.

It uses national standards and common procedures, applied uniformly to both public and private institutions. There are three main types of external evaluation:

1. Provisional Operating Authorization:

- Carried out before the institution begins its activities.
- Operation without this authorization is prohibited.
- The evaluated requirements are a subset of those used for accreditation.

2. Accreditation:

- Conducted after the completion of a full cycle of education, but no later than 3 years after the first graduation cohort.
- Accreditation grants the institution all legal rights.
- Accreditation standards represent the minimum operating conditions set by law.

3. Periodic Evaluation:

- Conducted every five years.
- Evaluates the quality provided by institutions in relation to minimum standards and reference standards (optimal level of achievement).

Through these mechanisms, the educational system aims to maintain a high level of quality and to constantly adapt to the needs of beneficiaries.

External evaluation is carried out by specialized evaluators selected from among teachers and school directors who have completed specific training programs and are registered in a public register. The evaluation teams, consisting of 2-4 members for pre-university education, analyze the quality of education based on standards and, where applicable, reference standards, using evidence such as documents, statistical data, direct observations, and interviews with stakeholders.

Improving quality in education is a continuous process of evaluation, analysis, and implementation of corrective measures carried out by educational institutions and providers. This process is based on the use of appropriate procedures and the application of reference standards to achieve educational objectives.

Reports generated from internal and external evaluations are used by the leadership of institutions to analyze educational and administrative activities, contributing to decision-making regarding institutional development. Improvement proposals identified in the annual internal evaluation reports are integrated into the institutions' development plans.

At the local and central levels, the results of evaluations are used for decision-making regarding the funding of educational institutions, for analyzing and forecasting the needs of the education system, and for drafting annual reports on the state of education.

County school inspectorates and the Ministry of Education play a crucial role in monitoring and controlling quality in pre-university education, using evaluation reports to set objectives and monitor progress.

In 2020, new quality standards and an updated methodology for the external evaluation of pre-university education were adopted, aiming

to streamline, decentralize, and actively involve beneficiaries. These changes focus on simplifying the process, reducing bureaucracy, digitalizing, and unifying evaluation procedures, shifting the emphasis from evaluating resources to evaluating processes and outcomes. Additionally, the new quality standards place increased attention on human dimensions, such as well-being, equitable access to education, and equity in the delivery of educational services, thus promoting a more comprehensive approach. The quality system for early childhood education and care was recently updated, particularly in 2019, when this educational stage was integrated into the overall framework of quality in pre-university education. These changes reflect the importance of addressing quality in early education as an integral part of the broader educational process.

In Romania, early education includes both preschool education, provided by kindergartens for children aged 3 to 6, and pre-preschool education, offered by nurseries for children under 3 years old. Until 2019, in the absence of a dedicated curriculum, the quality assurance system was applied exclusively to kindergartens, while nurseries were seen more as care institutions rather than educational ones.

h to quality in education.

The adoption of a specific curriculum for pre-preschool education in 2019 integrated nurseries into the quality assurance system of pre-university education. They are now required to meet the same national standards and follow internal and external evaluation procedures, including for authorization, accreditation, and periodic assessment. However, the legislation governing the operation of nurseries remained unchanged, and they are still required to comply with specific child care requirements set by the authorities responsible for child protection and public health.

In 2020, the Ministry of Education launched a project to unify the regulatory framework applicable to nurseries, aiming to harmonize approaches between nurseries and kindergartens, strengthening the educational component of nurseries without neglecting child care aspects.

Quality assurance and quality management in education are essential elements in the Romanian educational system, managed institutionally. Developing institutional capacity and involving relevant stakeholders are key priorities. In pre-university education, the quality improvement model is supported by a system coordinated at the national, regional, and local levels, under the guidance of the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-university Education (ARACIP).

ARACIP is responsible for implementing the national quality assurance strategy, conducting external evaluations of the quality of education provided by educational institutions, as well as their authorization, accreditation, and periodic evaluation. The main objective of external evaluation is to certify the institutions' ability to meet quality standards, promote a "culture of quality," and provide recommendations for improving education.

Quality assurance in higher education

In 2006, the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS) was established. Universities, although benefiting from greater autonomy in relation to direct control by the Ministry of Education, are required to implement their own quality assurance systems that ensure high standards and highlight differences in educational performance.

Fundamental principles of the quality assurance system

These include:

- Alignment with European standards;
- Institutional responsibility and diversity;
- Cooperation among all components of the educational system;
- Emphasis on performance;
- Institutional identity and self-assessment;
- External evaluation and continuous quality improvement.

Through these approaches, Romania aims to create a high-quality educational system that responds to the needs of beneficiaries and promotes excellence at all levels [<https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/ro/national-education-systems/romania/asigurarea-calitatii>].

Professionalization of teaching staff and school leadership

Despite the transition to a results-oriented educational system, elements of an input-based system will continue to exist in the German states. Supervision of school curricula and textbooks, standardization of school graduation exams, and regulation of university modules and state exams for teacher training will remain essential components of oversight systems.

Teacher training has a strong academic orientation and involves a lengthy process.

For the continuous development of teachers and school leaders, state-run teacher training institutes offer professional development courses. In accordance with new regulations, continuous professional development has become mandatory, and school leaders are now responsible for planning and organizing it within their schools.

Standards for teacher training are necessary. These standards focus on basic competencies in teaching, educating, assessing/diagnosing, and innovating, and also promote the continuous professional development of teachers.

Regarding content, the standards should set the following focus areas (competence domains) for the curriculum of studies:

- **Teaching and education:** Analyzing and evaluating institutional processes, as well as reflecting on them to improve the quality of education;
- **The profession and role of the teacher:** Professional development of teaching staff, managing conflict situations, and decision-making in the context of educational conditions;
- **Didactics and teaching methods;**
- **Learning aspects and processes, human development, and student socialization;**
- **Motivation for learning and academic achievements;**
- **Differentiation, integration, and individual support for students;**
- **Diagnosis, assessment, and educational counseling;**
- **Effective communication:** Constructive interaction, moderation, and conflict resolution in the educational context;
- **Professional use of learning technologies in the teaching process;**
- **School development:** Understanding the history, structures, and evolution of the education system and school institutions;

- **Educational research:** Objectives, methods, interpretation, and application of research results in pedagogical practice.

CONCLUSIONS

Quality assurance in education is a fundamental pillar for building a modern, equitable, and inclusive education system. Based on the analysis conducted, several relevant conclusions have emerged regarding the importance, challenges, and perspectives of implementing a robust quality assurance system in Romania.

Quality assurance is essential for improving educational performance, developing the competencies of students and learners, and enhancing educational inclusion. The standards and procedures implemented provide a coherent framework for continuous evaluation and for adapting educational processes to the changing needs of society and the labor market.

Internal evaluation, carried out by educational institutions, and external evaluation, conducted by specialized bodies such as ARACIP and ARACIS, contribute to identifying strengths and areas that need improvement. This integrated process facilitates the promotion of a "culture of quality" and supports strategic planning at both the institutional and national levels.

The main challenges identified include:

- Insufficient resources for implementing and maintaining quality standards.
- Resistance to change from some educational stakeholders, who perceive evaluation processes as bureaucratic.
- Disparities between urban and rural areas, which create inequities in access to quality education.
- The integration of early childhood education into the quality assurance system, a recent challenge that requires legislative and administrative adjustments.

Quality standards emphasize inclusion and equitable access to education. However, to achieve these objectives, adequate funding and active support for students with special needs or from disadvantaged backgrounds are necessary.

To meet contemporary demands, the following actions are needed:

- Implement continuous training programs for educational staff to encourage better understanding and application of quality standards.
- Adopt digital solutions to simplify evaluation processes and increase their transparency.
- Promote collaboration between educational institutions, authorities, and other stakeholders to develop an educational system that addresses current economic and social challenges.

Aligning with the requirements of the European Education Area and applying the principles of "Key Competences for Lifelong Learning" strengthens the integration of education in Romania into a global framework, encouraging mobility and recognition of qualifications.

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