

Quality Assessment and Management In Educational Systems

Japan vs. Romania

By Madalina-Nicoleta Cazan

Abstract:

The present paper tries to encompass some of the differences of the two educational systems, the Japanese one and our own Romanian system, but pointing our common ground as well, in regards to quality assessment, problems and quality management. The focus is on how international bodies perceive the quality of our educational systems and what conclusions regarding some of our problems can be drawn from their findings. And, even though the comparison may be sometimes unfair, it can very well pin point some of the options we have in the course of our educational system reforms and some solutions we can consider in the future. Focusing attention on individuality and creativity, on motivation rather than simple organizational technicalities might prove to be more efficient in both short and long run , given that studies have shown that relatively low improvement in labor force skills have a great impact on the future economic growth of a country.

Keywords : Quality assessment, Quality management, educational system, Japan, Romania

JEL classification: I21, I23

Introduction

Learning is a continuous process throughout our live and we are becoming more and more concerned with the quality of our education. Neither of the subjects, quality assessment and quality management is unheard of in the educational systems all across the world. But every country deals with them in their own way.

Now, my question is, what do 2 very different educational systems such as the Romanian one and the Japanese one have in common with regards to quality assessment and management? Can we learn a lesson from them and the so obvious differences between the 2 educational systems?

But when talking about quality in education I strongly believe there are 2 perspectives: the quality of knowledge received, thus the ability of the educational system to transmit the necessary knowledge and aid students in obtaining the necessary competences, and the perceived quality, quality from the point of view of the ones at the receiving end of the educational process.

In this paper we turn our attention to the quality of the educational system as perceived by the ones involved in providing it as well as those that have as a task to manage it.

Japanese vs. Romanian educational systems

The 2 educational systems are very different in the way they are organized as well as from the point of view of the principles that guide their functioning.

While the Romanian system is organized in such way that the compulsory education ends when the pupil is around 16 years old (until 10th grade, but with discussions to reduce it to 9 grades), in Japan people start at the same age of 3 the kindergarten cycle, but having a compulsory education which ends when the pupil is about 15 years old.

There are other significant differences in organizing the classes and the school activities as a whole: Romanian students start classes at 8:00 in the morning and they end it depending on the class and the educational institution at 2 or 3 o'clock in the afternoon, as opposed to Japanese students that start at 8:30 in the morning and leave at around 3:50 in the afternoon, but spend about 2 hours of this time cleaning the classrooms, the hallways or having lunch. This points us to certain principles that the Japanese educational system teaches its students that are not so inherent in our own system. By teaching students to clean classrooms and hallways they learn different chores and the importance of a safe and clean environment, and by providing them with a free hour for lunch, they emphasize the need for a healthy diet and the need of respecting meal times.

Even though the Japanese educational systems does not focus only on competences as the Romanian one, but has as purpose nurturing the soul, what Japanese people call "kokoro", a strive to provide equality can be seen in both educational systems.

All these differences, combined with the fact that for non-compulsory education in Japan (meaning high school and university) students tend to choose private educational institutions rather than public ones because they are seen as offering more of an individualized program and higher quality level, point out that the way the two systems work is entirely different, especially from quality point of view, as Romanian students tend to consider public schooling as an option for both high school and university since it is still considered to be the most efficient.

The PISA 2000+ project

Now that we have an overview about what makes our educational system so very different from the Japanese one, let's go back to our main subject, that is quality, and talk about quality assessment and what these 2 systems have in common.

International organizations often tackle with the subject by organizing surveys in order to assess and compare countries based on the educational system output, the knowledge they need to transmit to the students. One of these types of projects is the PISA project, the Program for International Student Assessment administered by OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development).

The program started in year 2000 and takes place once every 3 years when a two-hours test assessing knowledge in mathematics, science and reading are given to students, along with 30-minutes questionnaires. The target is 15-year olds, as in the majority of the systems they are in their last year of middle school and compulsory education as well.

The first round of the project took place in 2000 and had as participants 43 countries. Since then the number of countries that participate every 3 years in the survey has risen to 57 in 2006 and 63 in 2009. At least 150 schools are selected from each country.

Because results from the latest survey will only be available in December this year, we'll work with data from the previous years in order to present certain conclusions.

As seen in Table 1, the differences in scores between Japan and Romania are highly significant in the 2006 survey, Japan managing an average score of 531 in science, 498 in reading and 523 in mathematics, while the OECD average was 500 in science, 492 in reading and 498 in mathematics.

Romania on the other hand seems to be below the OECD averages in every aspect, having scores such as 418 in science, 396 in reading and 415 in mathematics.

Given the results, we can conclude that the study findings point out to a below-average performance in terms of knowledge quality in the Romanian educational system.

Another finding of the program indicates the heterogeneity of the educational system that has to educate a large number of different students by using the same means. In Romania the between-school variation for science is of 48.3 % , while in Japan the score is of 48.5 % , concluding that there is still a long way from achieving equality and homogeneity in both educational systems.

We can therefore see problems that belong to both educational systems, but also particular findings regarding quality in our own educational system, which seems to need improvement.

Table 1 PISA 2006 results for 15-year olds performance in science, reading and mathematics

Science			Reading			Mathematics		
	<i>M</i>	<i>S. E.</i>		<i>M</i>	<i>S. E.</i>		<i>M</i>	<i>S. E.</i>
Finland	563	(2.0)	Korea	556	(3.8)	Taiwan-China	549	(4.1)
Hong Kong-China	542	(2.5)	Finland	547	(2.1)	Finland	548	(2.3)
Canada	534	(2.0)	Hong Kong-China	536	(2.4)	Hong Kong-China	547	(2.7)
Taiwan-China	532	(3.6)	Canada	527	(2.4)	Korea	547	(3.8)
Estonia	531	(2.5)	New Zealand	521	(3.0)	Netherlands	531	(2.6)
Japan	531	(3.4)	Ireland	517	(3.5)	Switzerland	530	(3.2)
New Zealand	530	(2.7)	Australia	513	(2.1)	Canada	527	(2.0)
Australia	527	(2.3)	Liechtenstein	510	(3.9)	Macao-China	525	(1.3)
Netherlands	525	(2.7)	Poland	508	(2.8)	Liechtenstein	525	(4.2)
Liechtenstein	522	(4.1)	Sweden	507	(3.4)	Japan	523	(3.3)
Korea	522	(3.4)	Netherlands	507	(2.9)	New Zealand	522	(2.4)
Slovenia	519	(1.1)	Belgium	501	(3.0)	Belgium	520	(3.0)
Germany	516	(3.8)	Estonia	501	(2.9)	Australia	520	(2.2)
United Kingdom	515	(2.3)	Switzerland	499	(3.1)	Estonia	515	(2.7)
Czech Republic	513	(3.5)	Japan	498	(3.6)	Denmark	513	(2.6)

Jordan	422	(2.8)	Serbia	401	(3.5)	Romania	415	(4.2)
Thailand	421	(2.1)	Jordan	401	(3.3)	Bulgaria	413	(6.1)
Romania	418	(4.2)	Romania	396	(4.7)	Chile	411	(4.6)

Quality management and the future

As far as managing quality in the educational systems is concerned, I highly appreciate the Japanese approach, which I will try to explain and which I would like to see adopted and adapted in the Romanian system as well.

The Japanese system has made as many reforms as needed to ensure quality in the public educational system, given that the private one is not under their jurisdiction entirely. And, seeing a real problem in the quality students and their family perceive, the increasingly diversified student body of each school and the need to fulfill different needs that comes with this diversification, they decided to adopt in 2001 a new public school system starting from 2004, inspired by the small-school movement in the U.S. This movement focuses on transforming each school by paying attention to needs and to the full potential of the school. By approving to test this hypothesis in actual schools throughout Japan following 2004, and then create an appropriate model to ensure that a new qualitative and innovative educational system is set in motion, one that allows individuality and creativity and that motivates the student throughout the learning process, the Japanese reforms in terms of policy in quality management seem to be headed in a new direction.

Conclusion

Both educational systems have in common not only projects to assess quality, but also problems that are present and will take greater proportions in the future in lack of appropriate measures.

Both systems are different and there are yet many more reforms we need to do to bring our educational system to the standards of the quality we like to pride ourselves in having, but how we are going to get there is yet uncertain.

What we can do, in my opinion, is look around us, to similar systems or apparently very different ones, that share our problems and see how they cope and deal with such situations.

We need to observe how they manage to improve or keep the quality of their educational systems, how they prevent or counter-attack problems that we seem to have in common, and not just copy solutions, as we have up until now, but try to determine which idea is worth adapting in our own educational system, based on our principles and our way of organization.

I believe in the need to keep reforming, but beyond salary cuts and organizational aspects, keeping in mind that we need a system that works on principles, on quality, that is not change resistant, but easily adaptable, that focuses not only on competences, but on values such as individuality and creativity and many others more that seem to be forgotten in present times.

References:

Okamoto, Kaoru, 2001, *Education of the Rising Sun 21- An introduction to Education in Japan-*, NFSE, Tokyo

Kurosaki, Isao, 2002, 'Transformations in Japanese Education Policy for Quality Management', *Zeitschrift für Erziehungswissenschaft*, vol. 5, no. 4, pages 584-597, viewed 15 October 2010
< <http://www.springerlink.com/content/q2u85151785r3228/>>

Sui-Chu Ho, Esther, 2010, 'Assessing the Quality and Equality of Hong Kong basic education results from PISA 2000+ to PISA 2006', *Frontiers of Education in China*, vol. 5, no. 2, pages 238-257, viewed 15 October 2010, < <http://www.springerlink.com/content/387143666214hj32/>>

http://www.oecd.org/department/0,3355,en_2649_35845621_1_1_1_1_1,00.html accessed on 15 October 2010