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COMPARING EDUCATIONAL POLICIES, PROGRAMMES AND PRACTICES IN EU INSTITUTIONAL GOVERNANCE (2011-2017)

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Abstract

The present study aims at monitoring the educational policies, programmes and practices in the European Union (hereinafter EU) launched in the period 2011-2017. The study focuses on the EUR-Lex database (EU official law database) enabling a quantitative and qualitative content analysis of the EU educational field from January 2011 to December 2017 by considering the following research areas: (1) the EU strategic framework in the field of education; (2) the relationship between education, innovation, research and the EU governance and institutional priorities. The goal of the research is to indicate how and why the policies, programmes and practices were developed in this period. The research considers the following research topics: (1) "education"; (2) "training"; (3) "youth"; (4) "lifelong learning"; (5) "educational projects"; (6) "educational policies"; (7) "vocational training"; (8) "qualifications"; (9) "competences". The study also reports the EUR-Lex stated criteria: (i) the institutional actors (European Commission, European Parliament, Council of the European Union) (monitoring period: from January 2014 to December 2017); (ii) the year of the document (monitoring years: 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016 and 2017) and (iii) the type of the document (monitoring period: from January 2014 to December 2017).

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Keywords: Education, European Union, institutional governance, legislation, policies.

1. Introduction

The present study aims at establishing an appropriate research linkage between the educational policies, programmes and practices launched by the European Union in the period 2011-2017. The legal documentation primarily reviews the institutional basis of the EU educational system by enhancing the relationship between the educational performances, training and lifelong learning and considering the main legislation in the field in the selected period 2011-2017 as follows: 1) the EU strategic framework for cooperation and collaboration in the field of education and training (Education and Training 2020 (ET 2020); 2) the legal support of the new strategy for high quality education, "inclusive and future-oriented school and higher education" focused on the fundamental role of the life-long learning, the school education and the digital challenges (Communication from the.., 2017); 3) the legal determinants of the future EU youth strategy here including: employment, social inclusion and citizen participation, educational policies and training perspectives, voluntary initiatives, the linkage between youth, activities, human development, social engagement and youth partnership (Communication from the Commission..., 2018); 4) the EU agenda for supporting the linkage between growth, jobs, higher education systems (Communication from the Commission..., 2011).

2. Problem Statement

The research focuses on the EU strategic framework in the field of education and on the relationship between education, innovation and research. Considering the EU governance and its institutional priorities, the research displays the results in the period January 2011-December 2017 using the data provided by the EUR-Lex database by selecting the following stated filters: (i) the year of the document (monitoring period: 2011-2017); (ii) the institutional actors: focus on the main institutional actors of the EU governance: European Commission, European Parliament, Council of the European Union (monitoring period: January 2014 – December 2017); (iii) the type of the document: Staff working document, Report and Communication (monitoring period: January 2014 – December 2017). The goal of the present paper is to focus the key aspects of the educational policies and the impact of the decision-making processes at the EU level. However, there are various and complex views regarding the EU educational policies, programmes and practices following: (i) the evaluation of the usefulness of the relationship education – citizenship education (Georgi, 2008) and the transformation of the educational resources (Tuomi, 2013); (ii) a comparative appraisal of the effectiveness of the EU values, principles and policies (Olimid, 2018; Georgescu, 2018); (iii) the EU processes and information affecting good education (Biesta, 2015) and research in science education (Taylor & Villanueva, 2017); (iv) the examination of the educational variables. Prior studies have researched how the policies, programmes and strategies would affect the professional relevance of education (Teichler, 2015) and intercultural education in Europe (Faas, Hajisoteriou & Angelides, 2013). In addition, some argue that including the educational performances in the analysis of the EU institutional governance is relevant as examining two linkages: (i) legal outcomes – social transformation (Halász, 2015); (ii) curricular approach (Soare, 2013) – education outcomes – EU institutional governance (Caspersen, Frølich, & Muller, 2017).

3. Research Questions

To focus the educational policies, programmes and practices in the European Union institutional governance, we launch three research questions: Q1. How and why the policies, programmes and practices in the field of education were developed and enabled by the EUR-Lex database in the period 2011-2017? Q2. What is the EU main institutional actor in the field of the educational policies, programmes and practices in the selected period? Q3. What types of documents (e.g. Staff working document, Report, Communication) were mainly released in the selected period?

4. Purpose of the Study

The research can be examined in two different ways: at the individual level and the institutional level. As both levels illustrate, the point of researching the legislation updates within the EU governance is not to collect legislation, but to focus and extend the comparative appraisal in the field of legislation by monitoring the legal documentation in the period 2011-2017. Thus the research aims to present: (i) the legal inputs (EU law, Official Journals, national legislation, etc.) and (ii) the social outputs of the educational policies. Moreover, the study contributes to analyze the EU profile and progress indicators in the field of the educational system: the policy standards, the implementing actions, the supporting actions in the European Union Higher Education Area and the data system, the development dynamics in the educational sector, the education components in the Post-Lisbon period, the training policies at the EU and Member States levels, the role of the social and institutional partnerships, the particular training measures, the cooperation between the European and national authorities, etc.

5. Research Methods

The study explores a dataset of more than 1000 documents per each finding reviewing and monitoring the EU governance based on the institutional data and legal tools since 2011. The EU legislation mainly focuses on the communications, reports and staff working documents launched and/ or adopted in the period 2011-2017. During a period of three weeks (July 22, 2018 – August 15, 2018), the study focused on the EUR-Lex database (EU official law database) enabling a quantitative and qualitative content analysis of the EU educational field from January 2011 to December 2017 by considering the following research topics in the field: 1) "education"; (2) "training"; (3) "youth"; (4) "lifelong learning"; (5) "educational projects"; (6) "educational policies"; (7) "vocational training"; (8) "qualifications"; (9) "competences". The study uses the data information released by the EU official database of EUR-Lex indicating the appropriateness of the legislation in the selected period and refining the stated criteria of the database: year of the document, the institutional actor and the type of the document in the field of education. The research methodology reveals the importance of the EUR-Lex primary data and legal sources involved in gathering information and statistics related to the educational policies by considering the following research steps: 1. Identification of the nature of the legal data and criteria for evaluating the research findings (the period and the main institutional actors relevant for the educational policies and programmes); 2. Identification of the research topics; 3. Identification of the topics frequency distribution (per year, institution and type of document); 4. Discussion of the key findings and variables.

6. Findings

The topics frequency distribution per year is considered the inner aspect of the research of the educational programmes and policies. Figure 01 displays the general overview of the topics frequency distribution per year in the selected period showing a clear evidence of the evolution of the topics frequency distribution per year: 30441 results for "education"; 15526 results for "training"; 4816 results "youth"; 1445 results for "lifelong learning"; 7200 results for "educational projects"; 23529 results "educational policies"; 5003 results for "vocational training"; 6155 results for "qualifications" and 24684 results for "competences". Overall, when considering the eight year period (2011-2017), it can be focused an increasing tendency in the period 2011-2014: 21904 results (2013); 20457 results (2011); 19174 results (2012); 16380 (2014) and a decreasing tendency in the period 2015-2017 as follows: 2015 (11 973 results); 2016 (14746 results); 2017 (14165 results).
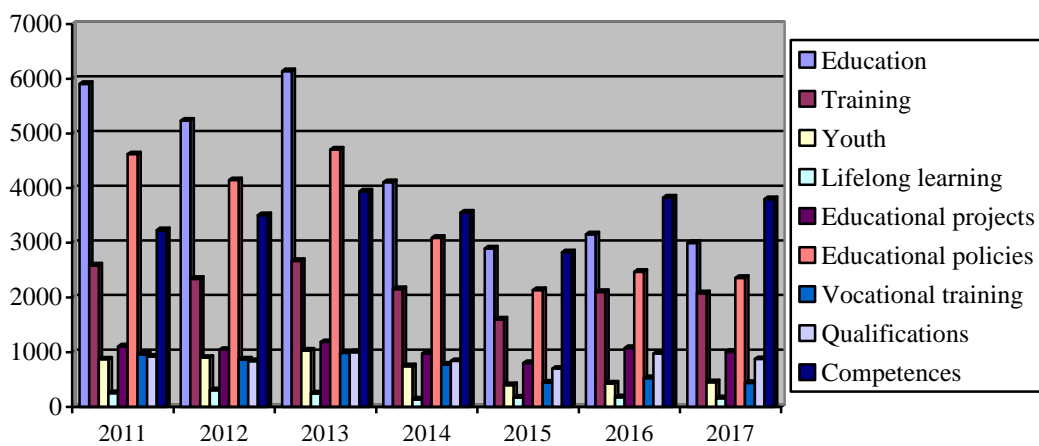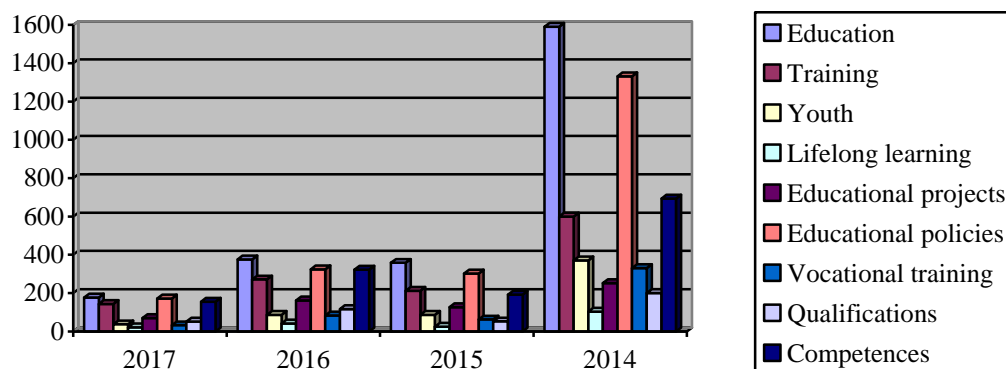

Figure 01. Topics frequency distribution per year in the selected period 2011-2017

The topics frequency distribution per institutional actor is presented as follows: European Commission (Figure 02); European Parliament (Figure 03) and Council of the European Union (Figure 04). The results of the Topics frequency distribution per institutional actor in the selected period 2014-2017 (European Commission) show a considerable increase for "education" in the year 2017 (1430 results) comparing to 1366 results (2016); 1156 results (2015) and 1205 results (2014). The research also estimates a significant decrease for the following topics in the period 2014-2017: "training" (average result: 675); "youth" (average result 192,25); "lifelong learning" (average result 74,5); "educational projects" (average result 448,25); "educational policies" (average result 1009,25); "vocational training" (average result 187,25); "qualifications" (average result 304,25); "competences" (average result 1064,5).
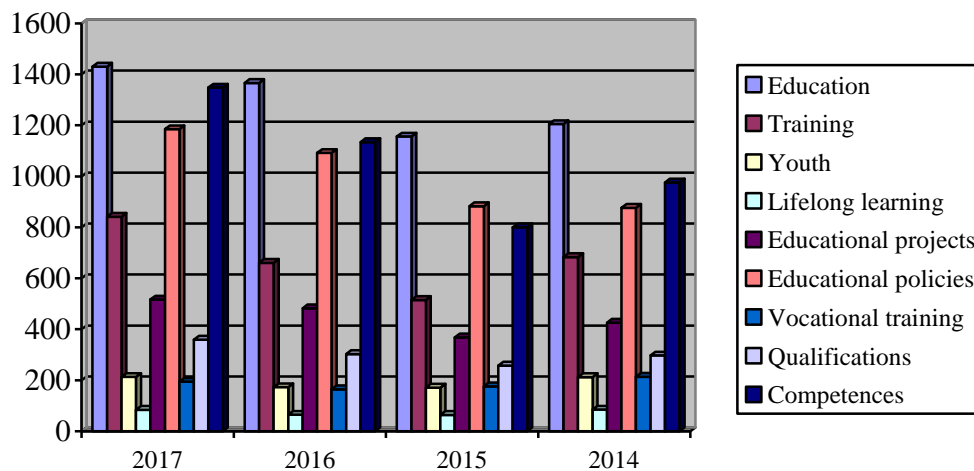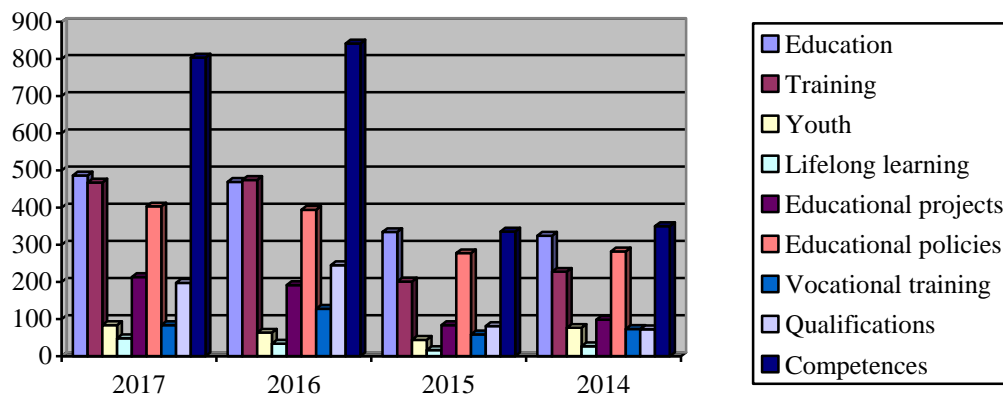
Figure 02. Topics frequency distribution per institutional actor in the period 2014-2017 (European Commission)

In particular, Figure 03. Topics frequency distribution per institutional actor in the period 2014-2017 (European Parliament) shows substantial changes in the incidence of the findings for: "education" (1590 results in 2014); "educational policies" (1332 results in 2014); "training" (600 results in 2014 and 211 in 2015); "education" (358 results in 2015 and 375 results in 2016); "educational policies" (323 results in 2016); "competences" (322 results in 2016).
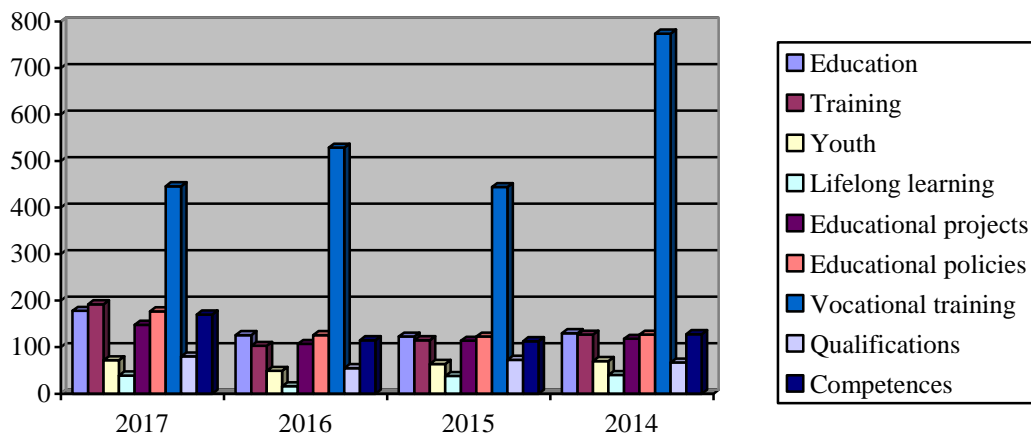

Figure 03. Topics frequency distribution per institutional actor in the period 2014-2017 (European Parliament)

Figure 04. Topics frequency distribution per institutional actor in the period 2014-2017 (Council of the European Union) presents the following variations of the selected topics: "competences" (2331 results for the selected period); "education" (1613 results); "training" (1369 results); "educational policies" (1356 results). Moreover, the same figure shows in 2017 significant differences according to the research of the topics: "education" (highest performance: 486 results) and "educational policies" (highest performance: 403 results).
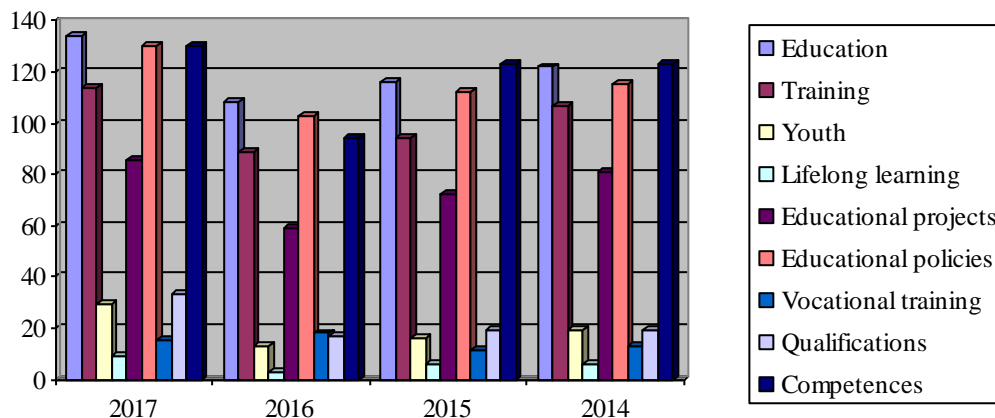
Figure 04. Topics frequency distribution per institutional actor in the period 2014-2017 (Council of the European Union)

Next, a correlation research evaluated the performance of the following types of documents: Staff working document (Figure 05); Report (Figure 06) and Communication (Figure 07) issued in the field of the educational policies, programmes and practices in the European Union institutional governance. As it is presented in Figure 05 and Figure 06, the analysis focused a strong correlation of the following results: "education" (126 results in 2016, Figure 05 (Staff working document) and 122 results in 2014, Figure 06 (Report)); "training" (103 results in 2016, Figure 05 and 107 results in 2014, Figure 06); "competences" (128 results in 2014, Figure 05 and 123 results in the same year, Figure 06). Therefore, the results of the Figure 05 and Figure 06 were quite equilibrated focusing the inner effects of the educational policies and programmes in the period 2014-2017: "education" (557 results for Staff working document and 480 results for Report); "training" (537 results for Staff working document and 404 results for Report); "youth" (255 results for Staff working document and 77 results for Report); "lifelong learning" (133 results for Staff working document and 24 results for Report); "educational projects" (487 results for Staff working document and 298 results for Report); "educational policies" (553 results for Staff working document and 460 results for Report); "qualifications" (275 results for Staff working document and 88 results for Report); "competences" (526 results for Staff working document and 470 results for Report). A further major finding to emerge from the research of the types of documents (Report) is the convergence of the EU educational system broadening new horizons for the educational and vocational curriculum.

Figure 05. Topics frequency distribution per type of document in the period 2014-2017 (Staff working document)
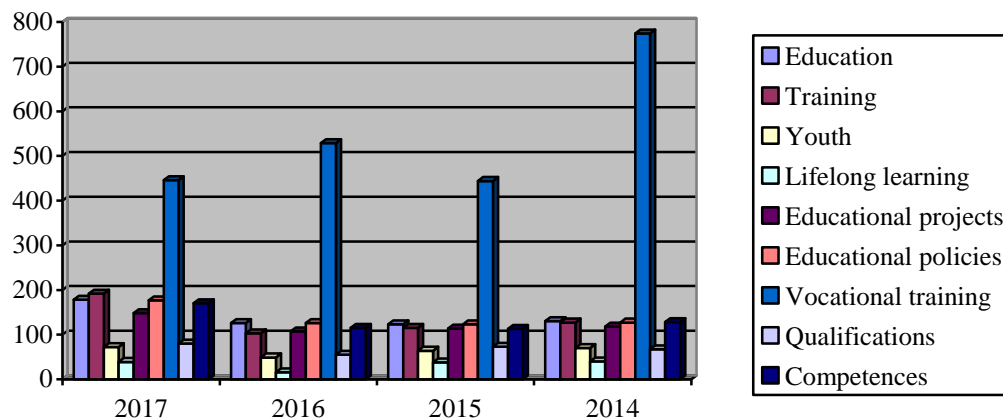
Figure 06. Topics frequency distribution per type of document in the period 2014-2017 (Report) points the discrepancy between the frequencies of the three types of documents selected for the analysis. The research reports a four-year trend analysis (2014; 2015; 2016; 2017). The trend in which the "Report" is analyzed becomes dominant for the analysis of the types of documents in the field of education for several reasons, here including the transformations of the educational policies and strategies in the European Union in the selected period, the professional education, the higher education sector challenges, the education information, training, lifelong learning etc.

Figure 06. Topics frequency distribution per type of document in the period 2014-2017 (Report)

Figure 07. Topics frequency distribution per type of document in the selected period 2014-2017 (Communication) indicates the gaps in the analysis of the types of documents leading to a focused perspective of the education area. The key consideration regards the frequency of the following topics: "vocational training" (774 results); "educational policies" and "training" (127 results each) that influence a good education development in the EU institutional governance. Moreover, Figure 07 makes the point about the EU institutional governance in the period 2014-2017 drawing attention to the question of how

the types of documents (Communication) were issued and evolved linking the educational policies, the social mobility, the educational achievements and the social status.

Figure 07. Topics frequency distribution per type of document in the selected period 2014-2017 (Communication)

7. Conclusion

Developing a research model for the analysis of the educational policies, programmes and practices in the European Union institutional governance required a screening of the EUR-Lex data content. This approach enhanced an evaluation of the performances of the institutional actors and the types of documents focusing an increased perception on "education" and "educational policies" as major functions for fostering the EU institutional governance. Moreover, the research of the topics: "training"; "vocational training"; "lifelong learning"; "educational projects"; "competences" and "qualifications" revealed major direct correlations between the EU policies, programmes and projects. On the other hand, the analysis is an effective instrument for developing and integrating a research model based on the activity of the EU institutions in the field of education in the period 2011-2017. The research concluded by positing "education" and related topics: "educational policies" and "educational projects" as the major tools to reform and adapt the EU institutional agenda suggesting new pathways for the vocational training and the lifelong learning perspectives.

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