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**EUROPEAN POLICIES ON RESEARCH IN EDUCATION. A**  
**THEORETICAL APPROACH**

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***Abstract***

The paper titled "European policies on research in education. A theoretical approach." analyses in detail European processes and policies in the field of education, with emphasis on programs developed and implemented at European Union level. We will also make correlations between the educational environment and the labor market. It also sought to implement the Bologna Process in the Member States of the European Union, illustrating the effects of these very different socio-political and historical contexts on the EU standardization process. What can be said about the European Union is that it supports from all points of view the education and its necessity in the professional development of an individual. The European Union also sets the framework for EU countries to exchange best practices and learn from each other in order to: promote equity, social cohesion, active citizenship, stimulate creativity, improve the quality and efficiency of education, thus supporting innovation and entrepreneurship.

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## 1. Introduction

From an educational point of view, the European Union has as a fundamental objective the creation of a harmonious system, which leads to the increase of the employment of the labor market and indisputably, to the improvement of the economic context. Also, under the Bologna Principles one can see the importance and emphasis placed on the students, as they can get a professional career according to the expectations of the European Union. The Bologna Declaration is considered in the current context a particularly important element in the development of European education policies. Since it was signed on 19 June 1999 by ministers at European level who focused on the education system. The declaration is not legally binding nor is it a Community initiative but a public international law of 46 states, but also supported by European institutions such as the Council of Europe, the European Commission, the Council of Europe and UNESCO-CEPES, as well as representatives of the institutions higher education, students, teachers, employers and quality assurance agencies. The statement is also a document based on the general principles set forth in the Sorbonne Declaration of May 25, 1998, a statement that states the importance of education, research and of educational cooperation in the process of development and consolidation of stable societies, democratic and pacifist, emphasizing the development of European cultural dimensions and the need to create a European space for higher education. Thus, the higher education system is considered as a keyway to promote and encourage citizens' mobility, as well as their ability to engage and work in any other state.

Another important precedent is the signing of the Bologna Magna Charta Universitatum in 1988, emphasizing the importance of the independence and autonomy of universities that ensure the continuous adaptation of higher education and research systems to changing needs, societal demands and scientific advances. The fundamental objectives taken into account at the time of the Bologna process were the creation of a European Higher Education Area, based on international cooperation and academic exchanges, for the benefit of students and teachers, European researchers but also from other areas of the world.

In line with the principle of subsidiarity, policies targeting higher education are decided at the level of each European country. As the European Union has, for the most part, a role to support and coordinate these policies. The main objectives the European Union has proposed in this area of activity are: to encourage student and staff mobility through various programs, such as Erasmus, supporting the mutual recognition of diplomas and periods of study, and last but not least, promoting co-operation between higher education institutions and the development of distance learning so that each person has the opportunity and opportunity to study regardless of the context of each.

Education, and in particular higher education, as the starting point in the drafting of this chapter, has been formally recognized as an area of competence of the European Union under the Maastricht Treaty, which was adopted and implemented in 1992. An important point to note is that the Treaty of Lisbon has not changed the provisions as regards the role and importance of the European Union institutions at the educational and vocational training levels in the labor market. Next, a few articles of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, abbreviated to the TFEU, the Treaty of Lisbon and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, are highlighted, highlighting the essential aspects of the educational field viewed from the perspective of the European Union: Article 165 - Treaty on the

Functioning of the European Union, abbreviated TFEU (2008): “The Union shall contribute to the development of quality education by encouraging cooperation between Member States and, where necessary, by supporting and supplementing their action, while fully respecting Member States' responsibility for the content of education and the organization of the system educational and cultural and linguistic diversity” (para. 1).

## **2. Problem Statement**

The European Union sets the framework for EU countries to exchange best practices. Analysing research programs and methods at EU level we will identify best policies on research in education. There is a discrepancy between educational policies regarding research in education at the level of the European Union states. Through a careful analysis of the best practices regarding the policies that govern the research in education, we can have a clear picture of the steps to be taken to make them more efficient in all the states of the European Union.

## **3. Research Questions**

The main questions of the research were: What are the European policies on research in education and which are the best research programs in education at European Union level?

We also wanted to identify the policies and implemented research programs in education at the level of the European Union educationally advanced states.

## **4. Purpose of the Study**

We aim to identify the main strategies adopted by the educationally advanced EU states regarding implemented research programs in education in order to help create efficient policies on research in education for all European Union countries. Moreover, we will analyse the best used research methods in terms of efficiency. We also aim to identify if there is an upward trend in implementing research educational programs at the European Union level.

## **5. Research Methods**

Starting from studying the main documents adopted at the European Union level that regulate the research activities and projects in education we conducted an analysis regarding the methods and results of research programs aiming the educational system implemented in the EU countries. Moreover, we analysed the strategies adopted by the educationally advanced EU countries in order to be able to identify the most relevant policies to be applied at European Union level as support for the educational process.

## **6. Findings**

The Lisbon Strategy is the basis for knowledge at European Union level. It was launched at the level of the European Union in 2000 and was subsequently considered by a number of economic analysts to be difficult to carry out in practice taking into account the economic and social context of the European

Union construction as it was redesigned in the 2010-2020 horizon, through the knowledge-based economy. It is the Lisbon Strategy that aims at launching a much broader strategy for Europe's economy, which focuses mainly on broad economic policy coordination so as to generate sustainable, dynamic and sustainable economic growth over time, and undeniably lead to an increase in employment. This would clearly lead to the economic and financial recovery of the European Union.

The main areas of activity that the Lisbon Strategy emphasizes are:

- Knowledge and innovation;
- Research;
- More sustainable and ever-growing economy;
- Existence of a high level of employment in the labor market;
- Social inclusion.

“The Europe 2020 Strategy was adopted by the Council of the European Union, namely in June 2010, and also aims to meet the following objectives, which are also considered fundamental for the evolution of the European Union from an educational perspective:

- Improving conditions for research, development, innovation, in particular for combined levels of public and private sector investment in this area of activity to reach 3% of GDP;
- Employment rates reach 75% for the 20-64 year-old population;
- Improving education levels, in particular by setting the target of reducing school drop-out rates below 10%; and increasing to at least 40% the rate of population aged 30-34 graduating from a tertiary education;
- Promoting social inclusion, with a strong emphasis on reducing the number of people at risk of poverty and social exclusion by at least 20 million by 2020” (The European Commission, 2019).

EU Member States have promoted the Lisbon Strategy to create a new knowledge and knowledge community, which has been called a "knowledge society". Generally, this society has a high level of competitiveness but also social cohesion, relying on population development and efficient use of all the information available in most areas of activity but also in the social sectors, which would undeniably leads to the development and evolution of the European Union.

“The European Union also wants to meet the benchmarks at European level, namely that at least 95% of children should attend early education, less than 15% of those aged 15 years should be subordinated to in the field of reading, mathematics and science, the early drop-out rate in education and training aged 18-24 should be below 10%, at least 40% of people aged 30-34 should have follow a form of higher education, at least 15% of adults must participate in learning, at least 20% of graduates and 6% of people aged 18 to 34 with an initial vocational qualification should have spent some time studying or training abroad, the share of graduates employed (aged 20 to 34 at least at the level upper secondary education and leaving education 1-3 years ago) should be at least 82%” (The European Commission, 2019a).

Over the years at the European Union level, a particular emphasis has been placed on the European area of education and research. Since the European Commission has taken a number of measures to improve and develop this structure. The measures adopted focus mainly on: key competences for lifelong learning, the development of digital skills, research programs and last but not least, shared values and

inclusive education. This was considered the first package of measures adopted by the European Commission, thus being implemented more precisely in January of 2018. Since the European Commission is constantly working with the Member States of the European Union on a continuous basis for personal fulfilment and development, social inclusion and, last but not least, active citizenship. “The key competences considered are: providing high quality education, training and lifelong learning for all, research programs, supporting teaching staff, promoting a variety of learning approaches and contexts in the perspective of lifelong learning and exploring approaches to evaluation and validation of key competences” (The European Commission, 2019b). Through a process of proposals for recommendations for the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union, the European Commission aims to contribute to the development of future-oriented education and training tailored to the needs of European society.

### **6.1. Research programs and methods at European Union level**

Erasmus +

This program was first adopted in December 2013 and was also implemented from 1 January 2014. The fundamental objective of this program is to invest in education, promotion and training and the development from a professional point of view, to facilitate integration into the labor market. At the same time, the Erasmus + program offers opportunities for: individuals who want to spend a period of mobility or volunteering abroad and benefit from linguistic training, as well as organizations wishing to collaborate within the framework of project partnerships in the field of academic training and vocational schools, schools, adult learning and European sports events. The Erasmus + program also supports teaching, research, networking and debate on EU topics. Another very important aspect that can be said about this program is that Erasmus + supports the Eurydice network, which describes the educational systems in Europe and provides a comparative analysis of national systems and policies from early childhood to adult education. The budget allocated to this program is € 14 billion and cooperation is possible both between the Member States of the European Union and between third countries.

“The main actions of this program are as follows:

- Mobility of people for learning purposes;
- Support for policy reform;
- Cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practice” (European Parliament, 2019).

What can be said about higher education is that it plays a key role in the Erasmus + program. Since, out of the total Erasmus + budget, a minimum of 33.3% is allocated to higher education. Over the 2014-2020 period, two million higher education students are expected to participate in mobility programs. Erasmus + not only supports the mobility of students and higher education staff, but also funds Erasmus Mundus joint masters programs and Erasmus + loans for masters students.

The main purpose of the Erasmus + program is to contribute to the Europe 2020 strategy for growth, jobs, social equity and inclusion, as well as the objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy, abbreviated ET2020, the European Union's strategic education and training framework. At the same time, this program aims at promoting a sustainable development of its partners in the field of higher education

and contributing to the implementation of the European Union Youth Strategy. The specific issues that are addressed in this program are:

- Reducing the unemployment rate, especially among young people;
- Promoting adult learning, especially for the new skills and aptitudes needed in the labor market;
- Reducing early school leaving;
- Promoting cooperation and mobility with the EU's partner countries;
- Encouraging young people to participate in European democracy;
- Supporting innovation, research, cooperation and reform.

Increasing youth employment is considered a key factor in the employment policy of the European Union, especially in the context of the Europe 2020 strategy for growth and jobs. The opportunities that the European Union creates for young people are: the opportunity and access to employment, better opportunities in terms of education and training and, not least, better opportunities for solidarity, mobility at the educational level. A new initiative is the European Solidarity Body, which aims to create opportunities for young people to volunteer or work in solidarity projects that benefit communities and people in Europe. Also, an internship quality framework was created to offer guidelines for internships outside formal education to provide high quality learning content and fair working conditions. At the same time, another key point leading to a gradual decrease in unemployment is entrepreneurship among young people.

Promoting entrepreneurship for young people is one of the objectives of the Europe Strategy

2020 and the "Youth on the Move" flagship initiative. Employment and entrepreneurship are also one of the eight areas of action promoted by the EU's Youth Strategy (2010-2018).

Adult learning includes formal, non-formal and informal learning - general and professional - undertaken by adults after leaving the initial education. At the moment, individuals increasingly need to focus on harmonious professional development to remain competitive at the labor market. Since it can be said that adult learning is a fundamental factor for the European Union and for Europe as a whole, because it is important that the European Union strengthens and promotes competitiveness, it must overcome the economic challenges, respond to the demands of new skills, and it must also maintain productivity. Learning is a key factor in ensuring and contributing to social inclusion, active citizenship, and last but not least, participation in a digitized economy. The specific priorities taken into account in this area are: improving governance through better coordination between policy areas, increasing efficiency and relevance to society's needs; more flexible learning opportunities for adults and improved access to more on-the-job learning, the use of ICTs and second-chance programs leading to a recognized qualification; significant increase in supply and access to high-quality provision, in particular in terms of literacy, numeracy and digital skills; effective information, guidance and motivation strategies to reach and assist adult learners; improving quality by monitoring the impact of policies and improving the education of adult educators.

Promoting cooperation and mobility with the partner countries of the European Union is one of the most important ideologies practiced at European Union level in the context of the existence of the Erasmus + program. Cooperation with countries outside the European Union improves the quality of education and training within and outside the European Union by promoting peer learning and comparing

education systems across the world. At the same time, it stimulates innovation as well as job creation through mobility and also offers opportunities to staff and students to expand their horizons in terms of information obtained during the study years. As regards universities at the level of the European Union, they have a positive history of internationalization, which over the years has facilitated the development of international curricula and joint degrees. So they promoted international research and innovation projects and also supported the exchange of students, staff and knowledge.

#### Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA)

The Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) is a component part of the EU's Framework Program for Research and Innovation Horizon 2020. They aim to support research and innovation training with a strong emphasis on innovation skills. The program finances global mobility and cross-sectoral mobility in all areas. In terms of higher education, MSCA grants encourage transnational and interdisciplinary mobility. The MSCA will become the main European Union program for doctoral programs, funding 25,000 PhD and postdoctoral research projects. In addition to promoting mobility between countries, the MSCA also seeks to break the real or perceived barriers between academia and other sectors, especially the business environment.

A fundamental role of these actions lies with the European Parliament, and it is well known that the competences of the European Union are quite limited in terms of higher education. Thus, the role of the European Parliament is to promote a close cooperation between the Member States of the European Union and also to strengthen the European dimension whenever necessary. Over the years, the European Parliament has played a fundamental role in the university field because it has been able to exert a greater influence on the formulation of policies for higher education in Europe through its significant influence. But the three key points highlighted by Parliament are: mobility, employment and, last but not least, the Bologna process. So, Parliament has acted systematically and successfully to increase the budget available for current higher education programs, including Erasmus +, and has advocated reorienting the EU funding priorities in the 2014-2020 multiannual financial framework to what it considers be more forward-looking spending, such as in higher education. Also, another close link created over the years has been between higher education and employment. Whereas in 2010 the European Parliament adopted a resolution on "Dialogue between universities and business: a new partnership for the modernization of European universities", calling for a dialogue between higher education institutions and the business world in all areas of study, and recalling the importance of learning on the throughout life and mobility, promoting research and the exchange of good practice. In 2012, Parliament adopted a resolution on the modernization of higher education systems in Europe, inviting the higher education institutions to integrate lifelong learning into their curricula, to adapt to new challenges by creating new areas of study, reflect the needs of the labor market and promote gender equality in higher education. And the last point highlighted by the European Parliament is the Bologna Process. An eloquent example that can support the above-mentioned idea is that in 2012 the European Parliament adopted a resolution that underlined the importance of the Bologna reforms for the creation of the European Higher Education Area and for the objectives set out in the Europe 2020 Strategy.

## **6.2. Policies applied at European Union level to support the educational process and research**

The policies applied by the European Union to stimulate education and its importance are numerous and are also applied in different sectors of activity, such as: education and care of preschool children, education institutions, education and training, higher education, adult education. Taking into account the above-mentioned example, it is possible to state with regard to the stated areas that they cover an important and significant area on the labor market, influencing in a considerable manner the evolution of each individual from a professional point of view. Early childhood education and care, abbreviated to the EICP, refers generally to any activity. Regulated provision of education and care for children from birth to compulsory schooling, which may vary from one European Union country to another. These include, inter alia, nurseries and family care centres, public and private funded structures, pre-school and preparatory structures. The education and quality care of preschool children can lay the foundations for future success and can offer them, even more to children from disadvantaged backgrounds, the chance to form, to ensure a decent standard of living, to find easier to find a job and to integrate into society. High-quality education and care for preschool children is therefore an important investment in education and training. At the same time, a particularly important aspect that has been taken into account in this area of activity is the idea that the European Commission has adopted a proposal for a European Council recommendation on quality systems in the field of education and care for preschool children, supporting Member States in their efforts to improve access to, and quality of, pre-school children's education and care systems. The aforementioned framework also focuses on five important factors, such as: access to early childhood education and care systems; training and working conditions of staff responsible for the education and care of pre-school children; defining appropriate curricula and governance; financing; monitoring and evaluation systems.

The fundamental objective proposed by the European Union in this area of activity is that 95% of children over 4 years of age attend the pre-school children's education and care systems have been reached as a European average but there are still large differences between countries and regions. The European Commission thus helps EU Member States to identify challenges in this area and possibilities to address them in order to improve the educational context at European Union level.

With regard to the second area of activity on which the European Union has placed emphasis in policy making, it is the educational institutions. The European Commission is working with the EU Member States to develop their education systems. Each state must therefore be responsible for the organization and content of its education and training systems, but there are advantages in collaborating on issues of common interest. In addition, a number of priority areas have been identified during the analysis of the educational field, such as: access to pre-school education should be facilitated, support should be given to pupils with special needs in order to better integrate them into schools with and the dropout rate should be reduced, teachers, school principals and teacher trainers need to receive increased support, including career opportunities throughout their careers. At the same time, in order to guarantee more effective, fairer and more efficient governance of school education and to facilitate student mobility, the means of quality assurance must be developed.

Education and vocational training is a key area of activity in the development and evolution of each EU Member State in terms of increasing the labor market participation rate and professional



development. Education is a global factor that affects each state in a different way depending on the context in which it is situated. Since VET is a key element of lifelong learning systems that equips people with the knowledge, knowledge, skills or competences needed in certain occupations or, broadly, on the labor market. It responds to the needs of the economy, but also provides students with personal development skills and active citizenship. Education and training contributes to enterprise performance, competitiveness, research and innovation and is essential for employment and social policy. I am afraid that, as mentioned above, the European Union places great emphasis on the importance and necessity of education in the life of the European citizen. VET systems in Europe can rely on a well-developed network of VET providers. They are based on governance structures involving social partners (employers, trade unions) in different bodies (chambers, committees, councils, etc.)

European Union actions are designed to bring an international dimension to studies, teaching and research activities or policy-making, so higher education is a very important factor and a key area of activity. Education and culture are essential to the development of a more inclusive, more united and competitive Europe. Higher education and its links with research and innovation play a fundamental role in the progress of individuals and society, as well as in the formation of a highly skilled human capital and the citizens involved, which Europe needs to generate jobs, growth and prosperity. Also, higher education institutions are therefore crucial partners in implementing the European Union's strategy to stimulate and maintain sustainable economic growth. The Europe 2020 strategy has an ambitious goal - that by 2020, 40% of young Europeans should have a higher education diploma. Turning education into a development factor requires sustained and substantial investment. Member State authorities remain responsible for the way they organize and provide higher education in their countries. The objective is to give those who study or teach in universities the opportunity to learn from each other and to work together on joint projects, to develop effective teaching and learning methods, to do research at a high level and to promote innovation. The European Commission has also repeatedly expressed its interest in the development of higher education, as it advocates: reducing future skills mismatches and promoting excellence in skills development, strengthening inclusive and connected higher education systems, guaranteeing the that higher education institutions contribute to innovation, supporting efficient and effective higher education systems.

In general, the European Union is very much focused on these policies that support and encourage the education and career development of the individual on the labor market. Since investing in research and innovation means investing in the future of the European Union. These investments help us compete globally and preserve our unique social model. They improve the daily lives of millions of people here in Europe and around the world, contributing to solving some of our major societal challenges. European Union support for research and innovation brings added value by encouraging cooperation between research teams in different countries and sectors, which is vital for making revolutionary breakthroughs. The objectives of the European Union on education and innovation are: open innovation, open science, openness to the world. The European Union also aims to: Promote and protect children's rights, fight child poverty and social exclusion and provide equal opportunities for all children, regardless of their social, cultural, ethnic or other background, are fundamental objectives of The European Union. The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union provides for children's right to the protection and

care necessary to ensure their well-being and the fact that in all actions relating to children, whether carried out by public authorities or private institutions, the best interests of the child must be considered to be primordial. Investments in the development of pre-school children are extremely cost-effective as they prevent future public spending to counteract the consequences of the lack of education, skills and unemployment, leading to poverty and social exclusion. Combating poverty and social exclusion among children and promoting the well-being of children requires a multidimensional and integrated approach based on three main pillars, namely access to adequate resources, access to affordable financial and quality services and the right of children to participate as is set out in Commission Recommendation 2013/112 / EU entitled "Investing in Children: Breaking the Vicious Circle of Disfavour".

## 7. Conclusion

The results of our study show an upward trend regarding the implementation of educational research programs at the European Union level. In order to make these programs more efficient, it is very important to have a high involvement at local level.

EU Member States have managed to develop in an educationally significant manner over the years, which can be seen in terms of a much higher number of implemented educational research programs and also a higher labor market participation rate at European level in recent years. This evolution is also due to the policies and strategies that have been adopted to support this process.

For the sustainability of the measures that will lead to an increase in the number and quality of the educational research programs, an important role have all the stakeholders: The European Commission, EU Member States, public or private educational institutions.

Moreover, we propose measures to be taken in consideration regarding the harmonization of policies for the educational research programs at the level of EU member states.

Following the research, we recommend new educational research programs to be created that will take into account both the harmonious development from the educational point of view of individuals and the facilitation of access to the labor market in Europe and beyond.

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