

## QUALITY IN EDUCATION – SUCCESS OF MANAGEMENT OR SYSTEM. THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

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**Purpose:** The article attempts to discuss the qualitative perception of education in the context of the management of a modern educational institution. The purpose of the article is to show that quality and management converge, not only because of the competitiveness of the educational market, but also because of the relationship with the organization and the ways it is administered.

**Design/methodology/approach:** The paper is the result of a literature review.

**Findings:** The developed article, in its theory, points to the need to develop a modern view of the processes of educational quality and management in education. This is because they require a redefinition of the director's functions and competencies, as well as changes in education management training systems. In a slightly broader context, the perceived changes relate to the issue of systemic subordination of principals and schools, which does not translate into real quality education, but into dependence on official orders. Quality, is not just about meeting requirements, but also about meeting expectations, which, according to European assumptions, should lead to improvements in education. The proposed article, as a theoretical concept, is the basis for an in-depth study of the currently functioning quality of education and to fully clarify whether the changes we are experiencing will be the success of prudent management or the implemented system.

**Research limitations/implications:** Viewed from the perspective of the issues of quality and educational management, as a subject well-embedded in its discipline, there is a dearth of current publications on current changes in education. The article, as a theoretical and somewhat critical look, encourages further research and discussion.

**Originality/value:** The article is developed on the basis of contemporary knowledge of researchers of quality and management issues. The value of this article is to take a critical look at current developments, because in its theory it draws attention to the issue of necessary and in-depth research of this topic.

**Keywords:** education, quality, management, system.

**Category of the paper:** Conceptual paper.

## 1. Introduction

Changes and reforms of the educational system have outlined the specific nature of their functioning over the past years. The observed transformations, gradual but effective in certain periods, have always been identified with changing sectors of authority. However, over the last decade, the scope of school activities has been gaining a much faster pace as a result of the dynamics of reforms and social expectations. In this perspective, the question of the nature of supervised teaching quality, its authenticity and the effectiveness of school management arises. Not without significance in these circumstances is the autonomy of schools, teachers and parents who, on the basis of a legislatively referred requisition, are still looking for other, indirect ways to improve the quality of education and upbringing of the young generation. We now find these tasks not easy to accomplish, as they are carried out in the conditions of Polish educational law regulations and its standards. However, Lawn points out that education has become a field of audit, judgement and action, in which the goal is primarily the quality and effectiveness of education and the possibility of its comparison with world or European standards (Lawn, 2011, p. 264) to which the public has access. Assuming that the theoretical implications of the development of education are not fully reflected in its practice, looking from the perspective of the expectations of the 21st century, the effectiveness of these transformations is at an increasingly higher level. In the conditions of demographic decline, globalisation and constant changes, Cieśliński and Orzech are looking for another direction of change, that is: hypercompetition on the education market. According to their opinion, the school has become the subject of external pressure and manipulation (Cieśliński, Orzech, 2019, p. 180).

In such conditions, the expectations of the educational authorities and the subordination of schools to central management raise a number of doubts about the real and not artificially created quality of education and management of the institution.

## 2. Quality and educational services in the terminological and interpretative discourse

A qualitative view of education assumes that when dealing with some kind of objectivity, arguments for rational evaluation are constantly sought. As the terminology of quality itself is defined in various ways (Rusinko, 2005; Sower, Fair, 2005; Bielawa, 2007, 2011a; Mantura, 2011; Szczepańska, 2011; Blikle, 2014), Franciszek Mroczko points out that, like many concepts in the field of social sciences, it changes its meaning along with the development of civilization. It is a capacious, ambiguous concept, intuitively understandable, and its

interpretation depends on the context in which it will be used (Mroczko, 2012, p. 20). However, according to the concept of Kara et al. (2005) there are no universal definitions of quality (Kara et al., 2005, pp. 5-19). Therefore, for the purposes of this study, the concept of quality from the borderline of social sciences is adopted, which defines it as the sum of affective assessments made by each client in relation to each attitude object, that creates customer satisfaction, where the term customer is defined as any internal or external stakeholder of the organisation, and the attitude object is defined as a specific subject of interest. This definition refers to aspects of customer satisfaction other than strict definitions of process and service quality (Wicks et al., 2009, pp. 82-111), including educational services. In addition, the study assumes that the quality of education can be considered from two closely related perspectives. From one perspective these are "external" activities, which at various levels of the education system (macro, meso and micro) introduce strategies to ensure high quality of education in schools and organise educational situations that are conducive to this. As an alternative, it is their "internal" reception. The juxtaposition of the quality of school work (always in the broad context of the conditions of its work) and the quality of life of students/teachers creates the possibility of full insight into external - formal activities (institutions and people employed by them), as well as internal - informal, which are a subjective perception, motivating or not motivating for development, work on oneself and meeting the requirements of a rapidly changing world (Nowosad, 2010, p. 11). Despite definitional difficulties, UNESCO has identified the basic principles underlying the quality of education:

- the first concerns the cognitive development of students as the main, explicit goal of all education systems (the success of achieve this goal by systems is one of the indicators of their quality),
- the second emphasises the role of education in promoting the values and attitudes of responsible citizenship and in nurturing creative and emotional development (United Nations Educational..., 2004, in: Laurie et al., 2016).

Both the achievements of students, as well as all activities aimed at implementing socially expected attitudes, have become a priority in implementing a much higher quality of education. This assumption can be considered correct, but it seems incomplete due to the dynamically changing world. On top of that, Robert Laurie, et.al., based on the opinion of other researchers, describes three models of quality education. The prime, referred to as the economic model, indicates quantitative, measurable results, understood as a measure of quality - student retention rates, rates of return on investment in education in terms of earnings and cognitive achievements as measured by national or international tests (Barrtett et al., 2006). The second, concerns the humanistic approach and defines education as a process. Currently, humanistic approaches are described using terms such as learner-centred, participatory and democratic. Each of the two models takes into account contemporary issues related to human rights and environmental sustainability (Kumar, Sarangapani, 2004). The third of these is the literal 'learning as a connection' model, which involves local consideration as a model that combines high-quality

education, everyday knowledge with abstract and academic concepts, so that the two can be linked together. Learning as a connection model is based on a constructivist educational perspective (Barrtett et al., 2006).

The penetration of quality management models into educational policy, and consequently into school life, results in schools being forced to undergo many different processes. Cieśliński and Orzech emphasise that a modern school through these models also participates in marketing processes, which in turn leads to a situation where the teacher has become a service provider, while the student and his parents are their consumers (Cieśliński, Orzech, 2019, p. 180). Dobijański and Wyrębek, believe that referring to the definition process, we encounter certain problems in this terminology. It is extremely difficult to even translate most definitions of quality into the language of education. The mere use and determination of the meaning of the term client evokes great emotions, because it is used to describe both students, parents and bodies running and supervising the school (Dobijański, 2008, p. 11; Wyrębek, 2009). Uryga claims that on the wave of the dynamic development of the Western economy, patterns of economic thinking are becoming more and more popular. The "applicant" transformed into the role of the "customer" better suited to the new realities. Giving the school the characteristics of a service enterprise, and parents the characteristics of service recipients, has taken decades. In Poland, however, it happened quite abruptly, with the collapse of the socialist state (Uryga, 2021; Keddie et al., 2018). It should be emphasised that the explanation of this terminological relationship also results from the perception of the school as an organisation (Dorczak, 2015; Wyrębek, 2009) and the teachers working in it as a team. Hence, referring to many studies, one can notice the occurrence of this type of narrative (Farnicka et al., 2018, pp. 69-86; Jurczak, 2017, pp. 43-56; Górka-Strzałkowska, 2014).

### **3. Quality and freedom as commercialization in education - researchers' narrative**

Contemporary education, perceived through the prism of quality in the field of education, upbringing and management, imposes specific requirements on school institutions. Their scope results from a number of acts and executive regulations, but also from unusual duties and functions performed as part of the accepted cooperation with other institutions for the benefit of the school and partnership. For many years scientific discussions on the recognition of schools in the context of the free market have been undertaken. This fact opens a new way to increasingly broader polemics for the qualitative recognition of the needs and activities of these institutions.

Assuming that the use of the free market in education refers to classical economics, which is also confirmed by the researcher of this issue, Robert Pawlak. As specified by him, this concept guarantees freedom, development and competitiveness (Pawlak, 2015, pp. 232-233). This neoliberal approach shows how a number of benefits can be achieved, and they relate to:

- competition between schools, leading to an improvement in the quality of education (improvement of the didactic offer of schools, employment of the best teachers and dismissal of the weakest),
- funding schools along with the principle "money follows the student", limiting the excessive influence of officials and politicians deciding on the distribution of money to schools and transferring more power to parents,
- the possibility of choosing a school conducive to equal opportunities for children and youth from poor families and integration of society, but also the diversification of schools, the creation of new institutions and the liquidation of the weakest of them,
- teachers' salaries vary, and their amount is not determined by rigid and uniform pay systems, but by teachers' effort, teaching achievements and pedagogical skills (Pawlak, 2015, pp. 232-233).

From the perspective of marketization of education, the effect of these activities should be definitely higher quality of education, and the introduced competitiveness of educational institutions will be associated with the number of its customers and profits (Łuczyński, 2011). The contemporary reality of school management, unfortunately, is still a supervisory role, full of control, instead of autonomous coordination of educational, upbringing and social tasks. These changes are intensely felt today in the education system. They bring concerns about independence, but also a rational assessment of the educational services provided, top-down controlled and supervised by the education authorities. Is high quality education possible in these circumstances? From a theoretical point of view, it cannot be ruled out, but the measure of this assessment will not be the actual involvement of customers, a team or and/or the entire organisation, but the willingness to formally achieve the goals set from above. Furthermore, Uryga clearly points out that the role that a Polish parent of a school-age child receives for the production is understood as a fanciful collage of inconsistent elements. Coercion intertwines with voluntariness, subordination with partnership, commitment with marginalisation. Playing an educational role by thousands of Polish parents is proof of the existence of great amounts of their good will, as well as the overwhelming power of social adaptation (Uryga, 2021). The identification of education with the organisation and its qualitative view result from the fears brought by the current changes. Striving for independence, more efficient education and administration becomes a distant task in terms of practical implications. Rudnicki believes that education (in this study understood as an organisation) is a tool for making changes both in the individual and social dimension. It can also be an instrument for maintaining order, normalising and petrifying the rules of operation of the executive power. This duality contains the strength

of pedagogical activity, thanks to which we can prepare ourselves for both adaptive and emancipatory forms of participation in culture and society (Rudnicki, 2018, p. 56). However, as far as the rational and free identity of the organisation and its clients can be felt in this preparation, their doubts about the normative assumptions will require changes. Certainly, the autonomy or even freedom of the organisation from politics as the goal of reforming education becomes an important and key task not only for management, but also for shaping a much higher quality of functioning of education. Giroux rightly states that hardly anyone is interested in understanding pedagogy, education as practice for freedom. As schooling becomes more and more legislated, all traces of critical education are being replaced by training and the promise of economic security. This is critical reading of the world, but also intervening in the larger social order as part of the responsibility of the conscious citizen/client (Giroux, 2010) or organisation, that guarantees unconditional freedom and the possibility of criticism as a tool of democracy. Nevertheless, freedom also has responsibilities and privileges that Shah clearly sees. These include better access to information, more efficient administration, greater use of school resources, reduced workload, better time management and improved quality (Shah, 2014). Taking a closer look at the educational capital, we can see a rather personalised subject of its functioning subjected to constant criticism. Mazurkiewicz notes that today's expectations are higher than before, and unfortunately the criticism is stronger. It is difficult to deny this, because the modern world generates previously unknown problems that create a more complicated context for all educational institutions (Mazurkiewicz, 2012, p. 7). It is these unknown problems that cause and activate curiosity, the desire for change. The society does not want to look at the quality of education and its management from the perspective of returning to the past, but from the perspective of a clear, partnership and free future. This specific search for new intersubjective views on the quality of education raises a number of doubts in the field of management. This is due to the fact that we/customers (students/parents), organisations (schools, educational institutions) and teams (teachers) face inevitable changes in the coming future. The modern school must meet them. It can even be assumed that this will not be an easy task, because from the perspective of the current and upcoming transformations (Industry 4.0 - digital industrial revolution, Society 5.0), it is definitely more difficult to conclude that education is fully prepared to provide digital educational services at a high quality level.

#### **4. Quality in education and institution management - theoretical considerations**

The pressure exerted by the social and scientific achievements of the 21st century on the sphere of education relates to two directions of its functioning. The first refers to the quality of educational services provided, and the second to the management of an educational institution.

Thus, by combining the expected quality with management, we obtain the so-called "full" and socially desirable school. Referring to the very perspective of managing an institution/organisation, in this article I will not discuss management models (managerial, entrepreneurial, competitive, democratic, centralised, non-interfering (Sysko-Romańczuk et al., 2012, p. 25), but I will turn to the terminology and views of researchers on the subject.

According to Bielski, management is planning, i.e. organising the course of activities, acquiring and deploying the necessary resources (human and material), i.e. organising structures and controlling the achievement of goals (Bielski, 1997, p. 232). As perceived by experts in the field, it is a set of activities directed at the resources of the organisation and used with the intention of achieving the goals of the establishment in an efficient and effective manner (Griffin, 2017). Speaking of management as organising, controlling, achieving goals in an operative, creative and qualitatively high way by an organisation, the rightness of using this terminology in education was also noticed by Stanisław Kowalewski (1981, p. 7, in: Gawrecki, 2021, p. 25) and Jerzy Kurnal (1990, p. 22). They state the dependence of knowledge about management in education on the general theory of organisation. The school specificity is best described as a management method aimed at meeting the needs and giving educational benefits in a way that satisfies the service provider and the service recipient. In other words, it is about striving to achieve the internal and external goals of the school organisation by meeting the needs and expectations of all school stakeholders (employees, students and other entities) (Żebrok, 2015, pp. 107-121) in the best possible way. It is easy to observe the fact that also in defining or discussing this terminology we find signs of a qualitative approach to both the management of the institution and education itself. Szafran points out that as a consequence, there was a need to develop a modern view of management processes in education, to redefine the functions and competences of the headteacher, and to change the management training systems for schools. In a broader, European context, this problem was quickly noticed. In Poland the legal regulations developed in the early 1990s, despite the passage of more than 20 years, remained almost unchanged (OECD, 2012; Rada Unii Europejskiej, 2013, in: Szafran, 2018, p. 93).

## **5. Instead of a summary**

Reforming the education system (which we are currently experiencing painfully in Poland) will not improve the quality of school work in any way, will not have a positive impact on the quality of the core curricula, nor will it contribute to raising the prestige of the teaching profession, nor will it bring about a qualitative change in the perception of students (Chmura-Rutkowska et al., 2015; Hernik et al., 2014, in: Rudnicki, 2018, p. 58). The goals of educational reforms are not set for the comfort of students and teachers (not to mention parents), but for the

achievement of political and economic goals by educational, political and party authorities (Rudnicki, 2018, p. 58). Referring to the attempt to give a general definition of the term quality, quoted at the beginning, it should be said that not only new concepts, but also their definitions and interpretations, will constantly appear in the humanities and social sciences (Śliwerski, 2022, p. 22). The reason is the dynamics of intensive development in the sphere of science, technology, culture and their reception, which we are observing these days. Another argument is social possibilities and expectations, which in a specific way will co-decide, and even dare to say impose new approaches to quality, which social sciences will be forced to take into account and redefine. This welcome reinterpretation of contemporary quality in education also has practical implications. Szafran believes that looking at the contemporary Polish school, despite the world-renowned successes of our educational results, it is worth considering some issues a bit deeper and ensuring that the essence of education and upbringing (Szafran, 2018, p. 92), its quality and freedom in resource management are not lost in this market rhetoric. In conclusion, it is worth paying attention to the emerging doubts as to the implementation of new requirements in terms of quality, but also the management of an educational institution. They result not so much from the criticism of fundamental expectations formulated with regard to the education system, but rather from the observation of the often painful clash between policy assumptions and educational practice (Szafran, 2018, p. 92). As a society, we should think about the direction of changes and the effects we want to achieve in the future.

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