

# HISTORICAL SCIENCES

## THE FINANCING OF THE ROMANIAN PRE-UNIVERSITY EDUCATION SYSTEM DURING THE INTERWAR PERIOD

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### ABSTRACT

The evolution of the interwar pre-university educational system is a complex subject, stirring interest not only among researchers, but also in the civil society. This interest is primarily due to the important changes made in Romanian society after the First World War. In this context, there is a tendency to present a more accurate analysis of the educational traditions and values promoted during the respective period, of the numerous theoretical and practical accumulations achieved in this field, considered of particular importance in the process of consolidating the young Romanian national state. The fundamental problem that we try to answer in this article is related to the impact registered by budget allocations on the evolution of the interwar pre-university educational system. This aspect is achieved through an introspective analysis of the government's actions regarding the financing of the education system in the period 1919-1939, in the context in which, as we have shown, all political forces supported the theory that the educational reform must be thought out and adapted to the new political, economic and social conditions.

**Keywords:** the interwar period, pre-university education, budget allocations.

The evolution of the interwar pre-university educational system is a complex subject, stirring interest not only among researchers, but also in the civil society. This interest is primarily due to the important changes made in Romanian society after the First World War. In this context, there is a tendency to present a more accurate analysis of the educational traditions and values promoted during the respective period, of the numerous theoretical and practical accumulations achieved in this field, considered of particular importance in the process of consolidating the young Romanian national state.

The fundamental problem that we try to answer in this chapter is related to the impact registered by budget allocations on the evolution of the interwar pre-university educational system. In our opinion, it is important to specify whether the action declared by the political class, to strengthen the national state through education and democracy by creating a society capable of using the electoral law in an informed manner (reducing illiteracy) and to develop this society by modernizing the agricultural processes following the agrarian law (increasing agricultural production), has benefited or not from special attention regarding the basic financing of the educational process. This aspect is achieved through an introspective analysis of the government's actions regarding the financing of the education system in the period 1919-1939, in the context in which, as we have shown, all political forces supported the theory that the educational reform must be thought out and adapted to the new political, economic and social conditions existing after the Union of 1918.

We are convinced that the study and analysis of official data will provide us with important details regarding the actions taken by the governors on the way of financing the education system, which will contribute to creating an overview of the reforms carried out in this field. We aimed to highlight the dynamics of statistical data regarding the construction of school units and the number of students and teaching staff. From the

perspective of the general methodological approach, the study method used throughout the chapter is qualitative research, resorting to the deep analysis of official statistical data, archived documents and general works in the economic and statistical field for the respective period.

The sources used for this chapter are primary and secondary literature. The first category includes, in particular, the "*Anuarele Statistice ale României*" (Statistical Yearbooks of Romania) for the period 1919-1940, produced by the Institute of General Statistics of the State and the archive documents found in the funds of the Ministry of Public Instruction and Religion - 1918-1940, located within the Central National Historical Archives. The second category includes general works and especially specialized works in the economic and statistical fields. A reference work for the researched topic is "*Școala românească. Structura și politica ei. 1921-1932*" (Romanian School. Its structure and politics. 1921-1932), published by Iosif Gabrea in 1933. In this work, Gabrea makes "an overall critical reflection" regarding "the pretense that the Romanian school went through", based on official data provided by the Ministry of Public Instruction. The importance of this work in the theme proposed by us emerges precisely from the organization of official statistical data, Gabrea appreciating "that you cannot conceive of a healthy school organization and policy without sufficient and reliable statistical information" [18, p. 7]. Calling on statistical data and school legislation, Gabrea creates a new work in which he analyzes the education system. In the volume "*Din problemele școlii românești*" (From the problems of the Romanian school), Gabrea draws the conclusion that "between the structure of the school and the Romanian society there is a deep disagreement, both from a social and national point of view" [17, p. 37].

Constantin Angelescu, Minister of Public Instruction on several occasions during the interwar period, published numerous studies on the issue under discussion. Two of these are particularly important in terms

of the official data provided and the arguments presented in support of the educational policies promoted by the interwar liberal governments. In the first work, published in 1926, "*Activitatea Ministerului Instrucțiunii. 1922-1926*" (Activity of the Ministry of Education. 1922-1926), Angelescu presents the reform legislation adopted during this period, justifies the public policies promoted by the results obtained in the development of the organization of the educational system and expresses his vision on the staged development of the educational system. The second work, "*Evoluția învățământului primar și secundar în ultimii 20 de ani*" (Evolution of primary and secondary education in the last 20 years), published in 1940, constitutes an important synthesis of the period spent at the head of the ministry. Angelescu analyzes the evolution of the education system after the First World War, dividing the 20-year interval into four periods: the first between 1919 and 1928; the second between 1928 and 1933; the third between 1933 and 1937, and the fourth between 1937 and 1940, depending on the legislation adopted in the educational field.

Dimitrie Gusti, appointed Minister of Public Instruction, Cults and Arts in the midst of the economic crisis, addressed numerous issues related to the education system in published works or in materials presented on the radio, or published in specialized magazines or in the daily newspapers of the time. Gusti deals with topics such as: the role of the reforming teacher in the education system, school attendance, the importance of primary school in the development of the people's culture, the budget allocated to public instruction or the efficient organization of the school timetable. At the end of the mandate, Gusti publishes an extensive synthesis, in which he makes a diagnosis of the national education system. The work published in 1934, "*Un an de activitate la Ministerul Instrucției, Cultelor și Artelor. 1932-1933*" (A year of activity at the Ministry of Education, Cults and Arts. 1932-1933) represents, for the topic discussed by us, a special importance, both from the perspective of the official data presented, and from the perspective of the arguments offered regarding the support of the Gustian vision on the development of the national education system. Along with the objectives that each educational level should pursue, Gusti presents his vision regarding the role that education should play in the development of the nation. He demonstrates the close connection between education reform and national culture, showing that the ideal of the Romanian school is "the cultivation of the people, its transformation into a nation that represents a superior spiritual-social unit."

In order to analyze the statistical data provided by the education system, in a manner similar to that carried out by Iosif I. Gabrea, the work "*Evoluția centenară a învățământului în România*" (Centennial evolution of education in Romania), published in 2018, represents an important source of information. The work was intended "to be a monograph in data and figures", which would provide "statistical information in close correlation with the historical facts and events of the Romanian education system in the last 100 years." Presented by the authors as "the first complex appearance of this

kind that has seen the light of printing in Romania," the work only partially realizes the correlations between the statistical data and the interwar educational and socio-political legislative context (this was done in a manner documented in the work to Iosif I. Gabrea, previously presented).

Published in 2018, the work "*Învățământul din România în perioada 1919 - 2017*" (Education in Romania in the period 1919 - 2017), is a statistical analysis of the progress made by the education system, being published under the auspices of the Romanian Academy, by Florin Marius Pavelescu. The statistical analysis of the evolution of the educational system is also present in the volume "*Un secol de istorie. Date statistice. 2018*" (Romania. A century of history. Statistical data. 2018), published on the occasion of the centenary of the Great Union and coordinated by Andrei Tudorel. In the chapter on education, Silvia Pisciă, Bogdan Murgescu, Andrei Florin Sora and Nicoleta Alexandru-Caragea, carry out a statistical analysis of the evolution of the school population and the school network.

Regarding the analysis of statistical data in an economic context, we used the work published in 2010 by Bogdan Murgescu, "*România și Europa. Acumularea decalajelor economice. 1500-2010*" (Romania and Europe. The accumulation of economic gaps. 1500-2010), which presents the evolution of Romanian society compared to the evolution of other European states. In the same direction, we also used the estimates made by Angus Maddison in the work "The World Economy. Historical Statistics", published in Paris in 2006. For the evolution of the Romanian economy in that period, we used the estimates made by Victor Axenciuc in the works "*Produsul intern brut al României. 1862-2000. Serii statistice seculare și argumente metodologice*" (Gross Domestic Product of Romania. 1862-2000. Secular statistical series and methodological arguments) and "*Avuția Națională a României. Cercetări istorice comparate. 1860-1939*" (Romania's National Wealth. Comparative historical research. 1860-1939), published in 2000, as well as the work coordinated by Gheorghe Dobre, "*Economia României în context european-1938*" (Economy of Romania in European context-1938), published in 1996.

In the interwar period, the development of pre-university education was based on three defining principles, provided in the fundamental law of 1923. The first principle, of education policy, formulated in the Constitution of 1866 and preserved in the Constitution of 1923, with non-essential changes, is the principle of freedom of education [20, p. 76]. In Article 24, the legislator specified in the 1923 Constitution that "Education is free under the conditions established by special laws and as it will not be contrary to good morals and public order. Primary education is compulsory. In State schools this education will be given free of charge. The state, counties and communes will give aid and facilities to students without means, in all levels of education, to the extent and in the manner provided by law" [14, p. 8]. This vague wording regarding the freedom of education, under the conditions established by the specific laws to be implemented, leads to the idea that

the legislator has taken a step forward towards accepting the neoliberal conception of this principle, but only at the level of intention.

The second principle of education policy was compulsory education, with a limited application to primary education. The formulation of this principle in the 1923 Constitution was, unfortunately, laconic. The legislator preferred to avoid a clear wording, by which to identify mandatory elements in this case: the authority that imposes the principle of obligation or for whom primary education becomes mandatory. The vague wording of Article 24 shows an indecision in the legislator's intention to fix the obligation of primary education for each partner in the educational process: parent, student, local or central public authority.

The third defining principle was free education. Through the wording of this principle, the Romanian state assumes two forms of gratuities in the field of education. The first form was represented by free primary education, and the second form was represented by indirect support, through aids and facilities, given to students lacking material possibilities, throughout the educational process (paragraphs 3 and 4 of Article 24). This formulation of the principle of free education shows an important assumption by the legislator regarding the development of primary school and the support of the educational path, in all grades, for poor children, which represents an important progress compared to the fundamental law of 1866. However, the legislator did not assume by this formulation the extension of the gratuity also to teaching materials and supplies. Without full support, poor students could hardly have consistent attendance and good results at school. The wording regarding the aids and facilities granted to students without means, at all levels of education, was too general to impose on the state authorities effective support for poor students throughout the educational process.

With all these specified limits, the Constitution of 1923 represented a progress in terms of assuming the financing by the state of the educational process, especially in the case of primary education, by extending the gratuities offered.

After the First World War, Romania encountered numerous difficulties regarding the financing of pre-university education. One of the main problems was the limitation of the budget for education, influenced by the poor economic conditions and the political priorities of each ruling party. This has led to limited resources for education, to difficulties in covering salary and construction costs for schools, but also those necessary to equip school units with didactic materials.

Expenditure on education relative to the state budget after the First World War varied over time, but remained relatively low compared to other countries in Europe [18, p. 9-10]. During the two interwar decades, the transformations made in the field of education in terms of the institutional-legislative framework, were applied under the conditions of significant fluctuations in budget expenditures.

In the period 1920-1921, large budget deficits were recorded and, although budget revenues increased 13 times compared to the pre-war period, expenses in-

creased 18 times. In the years 1921-1923, the percentage of the general state budget allocated to education was 9.5%. This percentage increased slightly, up to 8.4% in 1925, reaching 17.8% in 1939 [11, p. 68].

For the period 1921-1932, the average percentage of the general budget allocated to the Ministry of Education and Religion was 12.5%. This percentage was much lower than the budgetary allocations for education in other European states. If we look at the expenses made for education in 1932, we notice that Romania allocated 17% of the state budget without the autonomous governments, while countries like the Netherlands or Denmark allocated more than 20% of the total state budget [18, p. 9]. This aspect also results from the gross domestic product per inhabitant, calculated in the interwar period in international dollars. Countries that have shifted their economies towards industry and services have generally experienced significant growth in gross domestic product. Denmark made an increase from 4,598 in 1926 to 5,762 in 1938, while Greece progressed from 2,180 in 1926 to 2,677 in 1938. On the other hand, countries where agriculture remained the main economic branch had a weaker economic performance, with a modest increase in gross domestic product. Thus, in Yugoslavia the gross domestic product per inhabitant increased from 1,263 in 1926 to 1,356 in 1938, while in Romania it decreased from 1,258 in 1926 to 1,242 in 1938 [1, p. 478].

The gap recorded between the Romanian economy and the economy of European countries is also highlighted in terms of comparisons regarding another economic indicator: the national income per inhabitant. It was mainly used in the interwar period, but in general the data are sufficient to make a relevant comparison with the other European countries only for the end of this period.

As for Romania, for the year 1938 the value of the national income showed a rather important fluctuation, depending on the opinions of several researchers, ranging from 65-70 dollars to 110 dollars. But the value argued by critical analysis and divergent estimates of the national income per inhabitant was accepted by specialists at 76 dollars [12, p. 216-127]. In comparison, in Denmark this indicator reached the value of 318 dollars in 1938, in Poland the value of 104 dollars, and in Greece 80 dollars [16, p. 138].

The economic difficulties recorded after 1929 were directly reflected in the dynamics of budget expenditures allocated to education. During the economic crisis of 1929-1933, the budget of the Ministry of Education and Religion was significantly reduced in real terms from 38,350,000,000 lei in 1928 to 20,452,000,000 lei in 1934/1935 [10, p. 663]. Unfortunately, the economic recovery from 1934-1938 did not lead, in real terms, to the recovery of the level of budget allocations from 1928. Although there was an increase in the share of the budget allocated to the Ministry of National Education in the state budget expenditures, in 1938 that indicator represented only 97.3% of the level reached in 1928 [15, p. 6]. This aspect shows the fact that, at least in the second decade of the interwar period, the activity carried out by the Ministry of National Education was based on budgetary austerity.

The budget of the Ministry of Education and Cults was made on two expenditure groups: personnel and material, each group being divided by education category. The ministry's expenditure on personnel comprised the following categories: primary school, normal school, secondary school, trade school, trade school, vocational school and higher education. The expenses for the material domain included the same categories, to which two others were added: dormitories and canteens, as well as university scholarships. The Ministry allocated to the first category the largest expenditures for primary education, while to the second category the largest expenditures were made for the support of normal schools, with the maintenance of students. Staff costs for primary education increased steadily in the interwar period, closely related to the efforts of the governors to reduce the phenomenon of illiteracy and increase access to education for all social categories.

If in the school year 1921-1922 the ministry spent for primary schools the amount of 272,926,165 lei, in 1931 the amount spent reached 2,754,204,410, following that in the school year 1933-1934 these expenses were reduced to the amount of 1,750,187,256 lei. The expenses made for secondary schools followed the same fluctuation, from 107,998,522 lei allocated in the school year 1921-1922 to the most important budget allocation in 1930, in the amount of 749,143,300 lei, because in the school year 1933-1934 this amount to decrease to 362,877,658 lei [18, p. 12 - 13].

At the same time, the expenditures made by the ministry for the material category, allocated to primary education, decreased in a significant proportion, because the material maintenance of school units was, from a legal standpoint, the responsibility of the communes. In this context, the amount allocated by the ministry for the material support of primary schools decreased constantly from 22,599,620 thousand lei in the school year 1921-1922, reaching the amount of 1,779,990 thousand lei in 1929.

The ministry's policy towards supporting access to education for all social categories is also highlighted by the material expenses incurred for the operation of school dormitories and canteens. If in 1921-1922 the sum of 6,722,800 lei was allocated for this purpose, in 1929, the sums allocated increased to 51,596,900 lei, so that in 1933-1934 the sum allocated for the maintenance of canteens and dormitories would decrease significantly, at 7,337,423 lei [18, p. 11]. This oscillating evolution was influenced both by the economic crisis that imposed certain budgetary constraints, and by the policy of the political parties that came to power towards normal and secondary education.

However, this aspect does not reflect the evolution of government policy regarding the construction of new premises for primary education. In the school year 1920-1921, in the educational network of the Ministry of Education and Religion, there were 6,508 primary schools (6,047 in rural areas and 461 in urban areas), 44 high schools, 17 gymnasiums, 10 seminaries, 53 normal schools (33 for boys and 20 for girls), 18 secondary schools for girls and 145 commercial, agricultural or vocational schools. In comparison, in the school year 1937-1938, in the public system, there were 2,151

kindergartens for children; 15,663 primary schools; 726 secondary schools; 23 seminaries and 73 agricultural schools. We can affirm that this concern regarding the construction of new school units remained constant in the policy of the ministry, if we take into account the fact that in 1921-1922 there were 8,739 primary schools, of which 5,341 had their own premises, and in 1932-1933 14,753 primary schools were operating, of which 11,235 have their own premises [18, p. 19].

Relevant in this direction was also the concern of the ministry to support the development of primary education in rural areas. Of the 5,341 primary schools with their own premises that operated in 1921-1922, 4,924 units were in rural areas and 417 in urban areas, and in 1928-1929, out of the 11,551 primary schools with their own premises, 10,695 were in rural areas and 856 in urban areas.

Thus, the ministry's policy to increase access to education for students from all social categories also emerges from the interpretation of statistical data on the increase in the number of primary schools, depending on the area of origin. Thus, if in 1922-1923 out of a total of 12,431 primary schools, 1,004 operated in the urban environment and 11,427 in the rural areas [4, p. 426-429], in 1928-1929 out of a total of 14,780 primary schools, 1,040 operated in the urban areas and 13,740 in the rural areas [5, p. 328-332]. From this point of view, the evolution is ascending, registering, in the school year 1937-1938, a total number of 15,663 primary schools, of which 1,272 operated in the urban area and 14,391 operated in the rural area [10, p. 252].

The ascending evolution of the number of pre-university school units must also be analyzed in the context of the demographic growth recorded after the Union of 1918. The number of children reviewed and enrolled in primary schools has increased constantly. In 1921-1922, 1,435,845 students were enrolled in state primary schools (1,245,914 in rural schools and 189,931 students in urban schools) [18, p. 22-23], and in 1931-1932 the number of enrolled students increased to 2,054,283 (1,795,037 students in rural schools and 259,246 students in urban schools) [7, p. 320-322]. The increase was constant throughout the interwar period, the number of students enrolled in public primary education reaching 2,358,059 in the school year 1937-1938 (2,074,039 students in rural areas and 284,020 students in urban areas) [10, p. 252].

A fluctuating development has been registered with regard to secondary education. The statistical data show the inability of the ministry to support the development of secondary education in the rural environment, so that the statements regarding the reduction of inequities between the urban secondary school and the rural secondary school remained mere political actions. The number of students enrolled in rural secondary schools increased from 63,340 students in the school year 1921-1922 to 99,332 students in the school year 1927-1928. However, with the outbreak of the economic crisis, the number of students enrolled in rural secondary schools registered a constant decrease, reaching 55,568 students in the school year 1931-1932. For urban secondary schools, the statistical data show the same oscillating development, influenced by the

economic crisis. In the year 1921-1922, 63,069 students were enrolled in urban secondary schools (with 271 students less than in rural secondary schools), so that in the year 1927-1928 they reached 107,255 students enrolled (with 7,923 students more than in rural secondary schools). After 1928, the evolution was also downward in this case and in the school year 1931-1932 it reached 88,754 enrolled students (33,186 students more than in rural secondary schools) [18, p. 52-53].

The governmental financing policy of pre-university school units must also be analyzed from the perspective of the difference between the number of children reviewed and the number of those enrolled in various forms of education or who attended classes regularly, in close connection with the declared action to eliminate illiteracy. Thus, immediately after the war, in the school year 1920-1921, a number of 1,516,198 students were enrolled in public primary schools, to which were added 26,973 students enrolled in private primary schools. According to the statistical data, only 1,169,790 out of the 1,516,198 students enrolled in the public system attended primary classes regularly. Thus, in this school year alone, 346,408 children from those enrolled in primary schools remained outside the educational system [3, p. 235-237].

The issue of including all school-age children in the compulsory primary cycle seemed intractable for the governing political parties. Despite the declarations regarding the interest in combating illiteracy, the need to ensure equal opportunities, offered by the Constitution of 1923 to all children of school age, did not register a significant positive evolution in the interwar period. According to statistics, in the school year 1927-1928, 1,673,882 students were enrolled in primary schools, of which only 1,302,814 students attended classes regularly [4, p. 420-425]. Compared to the school year 1920-1921, the number of children who remained out of primary school was higher, registering a total of 371,068 students who did not attend classes regularly in the school year 1927-1928. This gap increased significantly during the economic crisis, when out of the 1,973,949 children enrolled in the school year 1930-1931 in primary schools, only 1,451,800 students attended classes regularly [6, p. 344-350]. The number of those who did not regularly attend school thus increased to 522,149 children in that school year. The difference also increased in the school year 1932-1933, when out of the 2,171,196 children enrolled in the state's primary schools, only 1,493,294 students attended classes regularly, while the remaining 677,902 children attended school classes sporadically [8, p. 404-411].

The magnitude of the problem represented by illiteracy among school-aged children (5-18 years) is also highlighted by the comparative analysis of the statistical data recorded in the interwar period regarding the number of children reviewed and the number of children enrolled in primary and secondary schools. In this context, for the school year 1930-1931, 3,854,623 children were reviewed [18, p. 24], of which 1,973,949 children were enrolled in public primary schools, 136,849 children were enrolled in private primary schools, 2,319 children were homeschooled, 153,239

students were enrolled in public secondary schools, 27,820 students were enrolled in private secondary schools, while 15,030 children were home-schooled [9, p. 210-249].

For the school year 1937-1938, 4,460,586 children were reviewed, of which 2,358,059 students were enrolled in public primary schools, 133,184 students were enrolled in private primary schools, 2,319 children were homeschooled, 171,065 students had been enrolled in public secondary schools, 35,922 students were enrolled in private secondary schools and 11,760 children were homeschooled. The difference recorded between the two indicators grew alarmingly in real terms (although it decreased in percentage by 0.9%), for the period between the school years 1930-1931 and 1937-1938, from 1,545,417 children (40.1% ) who were not included in the education system, in 1,748,277 children (39.2%). When we refer to these two indicators, in order to analyze the problem of illiteracy, we must take into account the fact that the data collected by the Ministry of National Education for the number of children of school age reviewed (by age categories: 5-7 years; 7-16 years and 16-18 years) [10, p. 241-287], does not distinguish between those who have attended primary school and those who have not (given that primary school is usually completed at the age of 12-14). For this reason, the resulting difference between the reviewed children and the number of enrolled students did not represent the number of illiterates. However, this analysis highlights the way in which the Ministry of Education and Cults has really managed the problem of including school-aged students in a form of education, which would contribute to the achievement of the goal of reducing / eliminating illiteracy.

There was a close relationship between the number of children enrolled in public schools and the number of teachers registered in state primary and secondary schools. In the interwar period, the issue of providing qualified personnel to school units in the pre-university system was managed with great difficulty. In the school year 1920-1921, a number of 25,744 teachers were registered in public primary schools, who looked after 1,516,198 students. An analysis by historical provinces highlights the fact that the situation of teachers was as follows: in the Old Kingdom there were 11,731 teachers in the rural area, with an average of 61 students per class, and 1,945 teachers in the urban area, with an average of 57 students in class; in Basarabia, 2,422 teachers worked in the rural environment, with an average of 49 students per class, and 516 teachers in the urban area, with an average of 33 students per class; in Bucovina, 2,056 teachers worked in rural and urban schools, with an average of 51 students per class; 7,074 teachers worked in Transilvania, with an average of 62 students per class [2, p. 231-234].

Considering the policy of combating illiteracy promoted by the government authorities through the development of the primary school, the situation of the teaching staff improved in general, to an important extent, in terms of the average number of students they had to work with in the classroom. In the school year 1927-1928, in public schools, a number of 1,673,882

students were registered (1,474,708 students in the rural areas and 199,174 students in the urban areas), for which the state ensured the financing of 37,338 positions (31,929 in rural areas and 5,409 in urban areas). With an increase in the number of students enrolled in primary schools of 157,684 students, there was an increase in the number of teaching posts by 11,594 teachers. The effort situation in terms of the number of students a teacher was required to work with, on average, improved in all provinces: in the Old Kingdom, 16,951 teachers worked in rural area, with an average of 46 students per class, compared to 61 students, the average of the school year 1920–1921, and 3,019 teachers in the urban area, with an average of 37 students per class, compared to the previous one of 57 students; in Basarabia, 5,680 teachers worked in rural schools, with an average of 45 students per class, compared to the average of 49, and 860 teachers in urban schools, with an average of 39 students per class, compared to the previous one of 33; In Bucovina, 1,956 teachers worked in the rural areas, with an average of 40 students per class, and 562 teachers in the urban areas, with an average of 28 students per class (the urban/rural ratio is 37.5 students per class, against the average of 51 students); in Transilvania, 7,342 teachers worked in rural schools, with an average of 47 students per class, and 968 teachers in urban schools with an average of 38 students per class (the rural/urban ratio is 46.3 students per class, against the average of 62 students) [4, p. 420-429].

Budget constraints during the economic crisis of 1929-1933 severely affected government policies regarding the development of primary education. One of the ministry's actions was to increase the number of students in a class, in order to save on staff costs. Thus, in the school year 1930-1931 the situation was so difficult that all the achievements made in terms of optimizing the number of students in a class, which had aimed to ensure a quality instructional-educational process, were cancelled. In this school year, 1,973,949 students were enrolled in public primary schools (1,730,115 students in rural areas and 243,834 students in urban areas), for which the state financed only 34,754 teacher positions (29,326 in rural areas and 5,428 in urban area). Compared to the school year 1927-1928, 300,067 more students were enrolled in public primary school. However, in the school year 1930-1931, 2,584 fewer positions were funded than in the school year 1927-1928. This policy of reducing the number of posts in the primary school had the effect of returning to the large number of students that a teacher had in the classroom. In the Old Kingdom there were 14,094 teachers in rural schools, with an average of 63 pupils per class (compared to 46 pupils in the school year 1927-1928 and 61 pupils in the school year 1920-1921), and 3,030 teachers in schools urban, with an average of 46 students per class (compared to 37 students in the school year 1927-1928 and 57 students in the school year 1920-1921). And in the other provinces, the situation was similar: in Basarabia, 5,402 teachers worked in the countryside, with an average of 55 students per class (compared to 45 students in the school year 1927-1928 and 49 students in the school year 1920-1921), respectively 759 teachers in the urban environment, with an average of

44 students per class (compared to 39 students in the school year 1927-1928 and 33 students in the school year 1920-1921); in Bucovina, 1,939 teachers worked in rural schools, with an average of 46 students per class, compared to 40 students in the school year 1927-1928, and 587 teachers in urban schools, with an average of 32 students per class, compared to of 28 students in the school year 1927-1928 (compared to the rural/urban average recorded in the school year 1920-1921 of 51 students and 37.5 students in the school year 1927-1928, in the school year 1930-1931 it was recorded an average of 42.7 students per class); in Transilvania, 7,891 teachers worked in the rural environment, with an average of 58 students per class, compared to 47 students in the school year 1927-1928 and 1,052 teachers in the urban area, with an average of 47 students per class, against 38 students in the school year 1927-1928 (compared to the rural/urban average recorded in the school year 1920-1921 of 62 students and 46.3 students in the school year 1927-1928, in the school year 1930-1931 of an average of 56.5 students per class was recorded) [6, p. 344-352].

Overcoming the economic crisis has determined a positive evolution of the problems related to the large number of existing students in a class of public primary education. This evolution was different from province to province and was not the result of a coherent policy for the development of primary education and the regulation of existing discrepancies between the regions of the country. In the school year 1935-1936, a number of 2,339,892 students were enrolled in the public primary school (2,061,002 students in the rural areas and 278,890 in the urban areas), for which 43,181 teaching positions were financed (36,656 in rural areas and 6,525 in urban areas) [10, p. 252]. The situation of the existing teaching staff in each province was as follows: in the Old Kingdom, 19,605 teachers worked in the rural areas, with an average of 55.4 students per class, and 3,930 teachers in the urban areas, with an average of 43.2 of students in class; in Basarabia, 6,026 teachers worked in the rural areas, with an average of 51.7 students per class, and 809 teachers in the urban areas, with an average of 39.3 students per class; in Bucovina, 2,071 teachers were registered in the rural areas, with an average of 53.2 students per class, and 545 teachers in the urban areas, with an average of 39.3 students per class; in Transilvania, 8,954 teachers worked in the rural areas, with an average of 61.7 students per class, and 1,241 teachers in the urban areas, with an average of 47.4 students per class [9, p. 210-211].

The positive evolution continued in the school year 1936-1937, the last year to which we can refer to the historical provinces (in the school year 1937-1938 the statistical data are reported in accordance with the new administrative organization of the country, respectively by lands). Although the number of students enrolled in public primary schools decreased by 1,041 in the school year 1936-1937, compared to the school year 1935-1936, the number of teaching staff in primary education increased by 1,979 teachers (from 43,181 to 45,160). Thus, in the Old Kingdom, 20,167 teachers worked in rural schools, with an average of 54.2 students per class, and 3,913 teachers in urban schools,

with an average of 41.7 students per class. In Basarabia, 6,271 teachers worked in the rural environment, with an average of 50 students per class, and 802 teachers in the urban environment, with an average of 38.6 students per class. In Bucovina, 2,173 teachers worked in rural schools, with an average of 51.2 students per class, and 574 teachers in urban schools, with an average of 37 students per class. In Transilvania, 9,850 teachers worked in rural areas, with an average of 55.2 students per class, and 1,410 teachers in urban areas, with an average of 42.8 students per class [17, p. 210-211]. In the school year 1937-1938, 2,358,059 students were registered (2,074,039 in the rural areas and 284,020 in the urban areas), with 19,208 students more than in the school year 1936-1937. In this situation, however, the number of teaching staff increased by only 609 teachers (from 45,160 to 45,769). At the level of the 10 provinces, in 1937-1938, 38,759 teachers worked in the rural area, with an average of 53.5 students per class, and 7,010 teachers worked in the urban area, with an average of 40.5 of students in class [10, p. 252-253].

After the economic crisis, the government policy regarding this issue failed to substantially reduce the differences recorded between rural and urban schools. According to the analysis of the statistical data, the situation continued to be quite difficult for teachers to manage, given that the average number of children in a class at the end of the interwar period was very high, at even higher values than those before the great economic crisis.

Compared to the school year 1930-1931, in the school year 1937-1938 the number of registered students was higher by 365,943 students, and the number of teaching staff increased by 11,015 teachers. In this context, the average number of students in a class decreased in rural areas from 59 students to 53.5 students, and in urban areas from 45 students to 40.5 students. However, comparing the data recorded in the school year 1927-1928 with those recorded in the school year 1937-1938, it results that in the primary school, in the rural areas, the average number of students in a class increased from 46.2 students to 53.5 students, and in the urban area the average number of students per class increased from 36.8 students to 40.5 students.

The presented percentages rather give the picture of a failure of the educational policies supported by the government authorities in terms of reducing illiteracy among the school-age population and increasing the quality of the educational process, as well as in terms of reducing the existing gaps between the provinces of the country and the discrepancies recorded between the primary school in the urban area and the rural primary school, respectively ensuring equal opportunities for the young generation.

#### Conclusions

The role played in the Romanian society by the pre-university education system, within the new socio-political realities existing in the interwar period, was continuously in the attention of the political class. The Romanian school was considered the foundation on which the project of building national identity and consciousness had to be built. This aspect determined the

appreciation of the Romanian School as an essential institution of national morality. The national character of education and the aspirations of interwar education were transposed in the Constitution of 1923 and respectively in the education laws adopted during this period. Starting from these limitations, with all the effort made by the Ministry of Public Instruction, it is important to state that in 1930, the share of illiteracy among the population that had passed the age of entry into the educational system was 43% (or 54.3% of the whole population) [12, p. 310].

The Romanian state granted a significant budget to the Ministry of Public Instruction in relation to the state budget. The percentage of 17%, granted in 1932, was above what neighboring states allocated to Romania: Bulgaria 15%, Poland 14.3% and Hungary 14.2% [18, p. 9-10]. For a correct analysis of budget expenditures, it is important to state that after 1930 the budget allocated to the Ministry of Public Instruction was reported to the state budget, without the budgets of autonomous state companies. If reporting were done to the general state budget, the percentage allocated to the Ministry of Public Instruction would have a lower value. This would represent the budgetary allocation at a percentage closer to the real value with which the state supported the education system. In order to have an image as close as possible to reality, in this case, we must also take into account two other, very important aspects. The first refers to the fact that after the administrative organization of 1924, the material maintenance of primary schools was entrusted to the local authorities. The second aspect refers to the fact that regarding the organization of professional and technical education, there were many school units financed from the budgets of other ministries. In 1926, for agricultural education, out of the 192 pre-university education units in this field, 93 schools were financed by the Ministry of Public Instruction, 94 schools were financed by the Ministry of Agriculture and Fields and 5 school units were financed by other ministries [4, p. 456-457].

In the interwar period, the role of the school was to prepare the individual for integration into the social community, to build social solidarity and to achieve "national soul unification and bringing back to the nation those alienated from it" [19, p. 8]. Beyond the divergences caused by the different visions expressed by the political forces and the different way of organizing the national education system itself, almost all politicians agreed on the fact of focusing pre-university education around the idea of the homeland. This aspect did not mean the deviation of the education system "from its natural path of instruction but the association of a national goal, a target" [13, p. 10]. Considering this constant in the expression of educational policies and the data on budget allocations compared to the financial effort made by other European states, it can be stated that, unfortunately, in Romania, the reform of the interwar pre-university education system was supported more at the declarative level and less financially. After comparing the data provided by the allocation of expenses to the education system for the year 1931-1932, as we have shown in this chapter, we note that Romania allocated 17% of the general budget for the Ministry of

Education, while Denmark allocated 21%, and Netherlands 25% of the general budget [18, p. 9-10]. This situation is quite relevant in terms of the government's interest in the successful implementation of educational reforms, taking into account the fact that the illiteracy rate for the school-age population in Romania was 43% in 1930, while in Denmark the phenomenon had been almost eliminated in the beginning of the 20th century (in 1901 the percentage was about 4%) [12, p. 310].

This aspect had a negative role in the implementation of reform projects, regardless of the political color of the government or the pedagogical vision of the initiator of the educational reform, contributing essentially to the failure of the objectives proposed in the electoral programs regarding educational policies. Despite the efforts made, the structure of the national income in the interwar period did not undergo important changes related to the two main fields of activity. Thus, if in the years 1920-1924 agriculture represented 38.9% of the national income, in the years 1935-1939 the percentage experienced a slight increase reaching 39.4% (while in Denmark, in the years 1920-1924 agriculture represented 25% of the gross domestic product, in the years 1935-1939, the percentage registered a significant decrease to 18%). Industry represented a 30.7% share in Romania's national income in the years 1920-1924, registering an increase of almost 4 percent in the years 1935-1939, thus reaching 34.5% (while in Denmark the increase is much more significant: from 24% in the years 1920-1924, to 32% in the years 1935-1939). Regarding the increase in labor productivity in agriculture, Romania's situation was equally poor, in 1938 it reached a level of 80 dollars/person employed in agriculture, while in Bulgaria the value was 110 dollars, in Czechoslovakia \$200, and in Denmark \$440/person employed in agriculture [12, p. 241-283].

After analyzing the official data on the financing of Romanian pre-university education, we can conclude that, compared to the general situation at the beginning of the 20th century, in the interwar period significant progress was recorded in several significant areas such as the number of school units, the number of students per class, the number of teachers or the number of students enrolled in the primary cycle. However, if we refer to the objectives set by the educational policies and the existing financial situation in other European countries, we observe an increase in the gap recorded between the performances of the Romanian pre-university educational system and the educational systems implemented in the respective countries.

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