



Innovative Perspectives on Educational and Social Policies

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Abstract

This paper aims to present an innovative perspective on social and educational policies, in accordance with changes at the European and international levels. A multidimensional analysis of the concepts of social and educational policies is carried out, on the one hand, as well as the main general and specific guidelines, on the other hand. The framework of educational policies is approached in an integrative vision, in which content, context, process, stakeholders, and process are closely correlated. Social policies are described as a set of regulations, measures, and activities aimed at promoting individual, family, and community well-being. The pillars of educational and social policy are also described both at a general level (social security, health, education, employment, housing) and under a specific aspect (pensions, sustainable development). The directions of action of educational policies in the context of the Romanian education reform are captured. Therefore, a holistic perspective on social and educational policies is offered to respond to the challenges of the current curricular reform.

Keywords: EFL students; English teaching; gamification; grammar skills

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1. Introduction

Education represents a strategic goal for all nations, and education policy reflects the orientation of societal evolution as a whole. It is necessary to analyze the major impact of globalization on educational and social policies, as a result of the considerable increase in external challenges to the educational system (Railean, 2015). The decision-makers involved in this process will exercise a series of duties aimed at ensuring the coordination of the development, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of policies at the sectoral, local, or institutional level, for education policies to be effective. Studying education policies involves addressing the way in which the distribution of power and decision-making affects educational outcomes. Educational policy has curricular, cultural, and relational meanings for all participants in the schooling process. The analysis of reductionist policies is a priority because they refer to the management of the process of change and innovation in the educational system.

The knowledge-based economy, the long-term effects of globalization on society have foreshadowed the concept of a learning society, which mobilizes resources to support daily practices and a lifestyle that allows for a high quality of existence. In the current context, educational policies are oriented towards decision-making and action fields related to educational management and leadership, curricular reforms, professional development strategies, educational quality assessment, entrepreneurship and social innovation strategies, the economics of education, labor market insertion, and the challenges of globalization and internationalization of education (Pescaru, 2024). It is a priority that the reconceptualization of educational and social policies becomes a basic objective for educational science specialists.

Identifying the main pillars of educational and social policies is a complex endeavor that depends on the social context and the spatio-temporal, cultural framework. Pop (2002, p. 599) poses the question from which he starts the attempt to identify the pillars of social policies in the current context, namely, "What is the principle that legitimizes social policies? Or, in other words, on what basis are people granted the right to benefit from social protection by the state? *Fairness, social justice, equality* are ways of determining how and to what extent individuals are to be protected, how much and to what end they are provided for by the state through redistribution". Concerning the guidelines on the pillars of social policy, the general foundations are identified in the foreground, while in the background, several specific approaches are identified regarding different aspects of social policy (pensions, health insurance, sustainable development, etc.). Thus, the path of analysis of the foundations of social policies evolves from general to specific. Concerning the European and national contexts that determine the pillars of social policies, the main directions that have helped to define them are highlighted. Based on this complex analysis, a new vision of the social policy pillars emerges, and even a multidimensional representation of them.

In the first part of the paper, the concepts of educational and social policies are defined and analyzed according to different authors, and in the second part, the innovative perspectives are highlighted, both based on an overview of the main guidelines in this field and on the European and national dimensions. The role of determining the foundations of educational and social policy is to theoretically highlight the most significant principles and to signal to practitioners the essential values that underpin all actions and strategies from a pragmatic perspective. The pillars, therefore, become the roots that guide and support the whole edifice on which policies are built. This results in a holistic and topical perspective on the dimensioning of the foundations of educational and social policies.

2. Defining the concepts of educational and social policies

Educational policies represent a set of principles, procedures, and action processes established in statute, administrative code, and institutional regulations that determine the state and orientation of the population's educability (Crețu et al., 2011). Educational policy represents a

set of theoretical and applied concerns that synthesize the fundamental options regarding the efficient training of members of a community (Crișan, 2003). In a narrow sense, educational policy refers to central-governmental actions, through decisions objectified in official documents (laws, government decisions, ministerial regulations, etc.). In a broad sense, educational policy can be assimilated to educational plans or programs, designed at the policy levels of the university, the school, and the classroom (Jones, 1977). The transfer and multiplication of the decision is ensured through decentralization, up to the institutional level. In concrete terms, policies are visualized in principles, projects, and action processes established by statute, interpreted by administrative code, operationalized by institutional regulations, and supported by legislation. The understanding and knowledge of all social phenomena have been closely linked to the unprecedented contributions that have allowed the establishment of a complex field, that of educational policy. Being a predominantly interdisciplinary field of study, its starting point refers to the "multidisciplinary valorization of the relatively distinct research of other disciplines" such as philosophy, history, sociology, and political science.

The analysis of educational policies is carried out according to several categories of generality levels: international, national, local, regional, institutional; global (for example, education policy in Romania or in a pre-university or university education institution); sectoral, at which level only one or several dimensions can be explored: policies in the fields of curriculum, student evaluation and examination, education for categories of students with special needs, educational partnership policies, initial and continuous training policies for teaching staff, etc. Jie (2016) determined the educational policy framework, which focuses on content, context, process, stakeholders, and process (Figure 1).

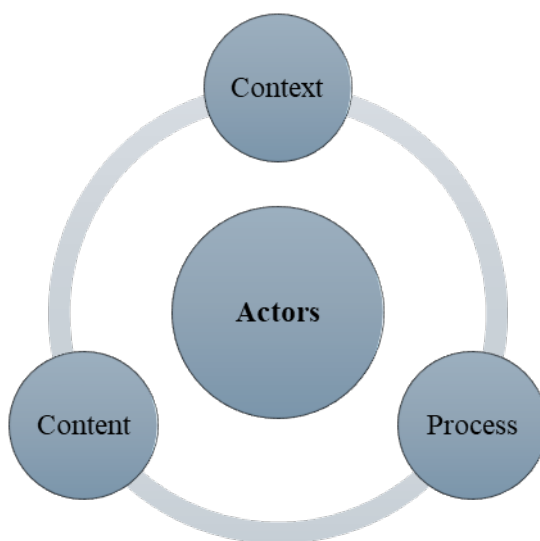


Figure 1. The Educational Policy Framework (Jie, 2016)

Actors are at the center of educational policy development, playing an important decision-making role. These actors fulfill specific roles in shaping educational policies (Dawson-Amoah et al., 2024). The content of educational policy aims at the organization of the education system, the functioning of institutions at all levels, the financing of education, evaluation, management, curriculum, selection, training, improvement, and promotion of teaching staff. The context includes systemic factors of different categories (political, economic, and social), both national and international, that can have an impact on educational policy. The process underlying educational policies involves policy development, implementation, and evaluation. Educational policy implementation is a deliberate and multidirectional process of change, aimed at putting a

specific policy into practice and which can affect an educational system at multiple levels. Viennet and Pont (2017) consider that the implementation of educational policies represents a multidirectional change process, which determines the application in practice. There are different perspectives on the definition of social policy (Hill, 1997; Mărginean, 2000; Mihuț & Lauritzen, 1999; Poede, 2002; Pop, 2002; Preda, 2002). Zamfir & Zamfir (1995, p. 22) consider that social policy is "the set of regulations, measures, and activities undertaken mainly by the state (but possibly also by other interested agents) to change the parameters of the social life of a community in a direction considered desirable at a given time." According to Hill (1997, p.19) and Birkland (2019, p. 24), social policy is an area of activity established and implemented by the government, a course of action that involves a system of decisions rather than a single decision. Mihuț and Lauritzen (1999, p. 4) state that social policy is "a response to the social problems of a particular community or of certain groups that are more exposed to different risks." According to a definition elaborated by Mărginean (2000, p. 10), social policy "takes the form of specific legislative provisions, administrative decisions and regulations, social programs, income transfers (taxes, fees, pensions, allowances, grants, scholarships, etc. from the social insurance and social assistance systems), financing, production and provision of social goods and services for the population". Pop (2002, p. 598) defines the term social policies as "activities or actions carried out by/through the state (strategies, programs, projects, institutions, actions, legislation) that aim to promote or influence the well-being of the individual, family or community in a society, as well as the well-being of society as a whole". As stated by Blakemore and Warwick-Booth (2013), social policies reflect the norms and values of a society. Preda (2002, p. 15) considers that social policies consist of "activities carried out through the state that influence the well-being of the individual, family, or community in a society". As Poede (2002, p.6) and Clemons & McBeth (2020, p.33) conclude, social policies comprise "societal activities and principles that guide how the state intervenes and regulates relationships between individuals, groups, communities and social institutions". Following the analysis of the definitions, the essential elements of social policies can be extracted and represented in an integrative view, as shown in Figure 2.

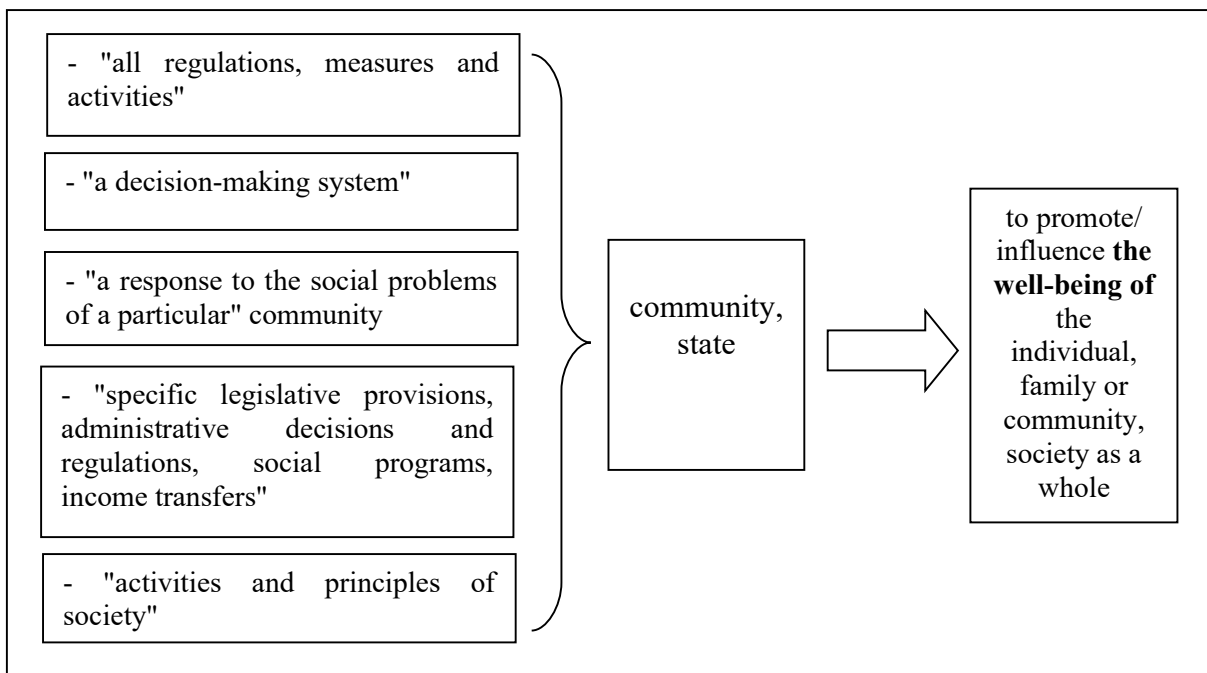


Figure 2. Key elements of social policies

There is a strong correlation between educational and social policies. The goals of education are found in the degree of integration of graduates into the labor market. Through collaboration between different actors, the aim is to create an educated and responsible generation. Due to social and economic problems, an increasing number of students are leaving the education system before completing the compulsory cycle. The effect of this situation will be an increasing exclusion not only from education, but also from a wide range of economic and social activities. The importance of social policies is seen in their long-term impact, as investments in education improve the quality of life. These actions reduce inequalities and promote social justice. Education can be a powerful tool for reducing social disparities. Social problems generate the need to clearly identify external factors that block education reform measures, permanently monitor the evolution of these factors, quickly adopt laws and regulations, and introduce flexible solutions. Through education, individuals can acquire skills and knowledge that allow them to improve their living conditions.

3. Between equity, underfunding, and Europeanization: the story of Romanian educational policies (1990–2024)

The early years of Romania's post-communist history represented a critical stage of reconfiguration and structural reform of the education system, "a period of departure and distancing from communism" (Birzea, 1996) and from inherited educational structures. The changes introduced had a profound impact on the curriculum, which was reoriented from a "socialist-patriotic" education to a universal, pluralistic, and democratic one. High schools and specializations with a humanistic, scientific, technical, and pedagogical orientation were established, education in the mother tongue was ensured for all ethnic minorities (Barzea, Fartușnic, 2003), and the duration of compulsory education was reduced from ten to eight years. Education Law No. 84 of 1995 redefined the institutional structure and enshrined modern principles such as universal access to education and partial decentralization of decision-making. National evaluation bodies were also created to provide a framework for monitoring and controlling the quality of education. Modernizing the education system in the context of a problematic macroeconomic situation and governmental instability was not without challenges and difficulties. Chronic underfunding of the education sector limited the effective implementation of reforms, with school infrastructure and material logistics falling far short of European standards. Ambiguity and frequent legislative changes generated institutional uncertainty, and limited financial resources exacerbated implementation difficulties (Mitulescu, 2017).

Between 1995 and 2010, educational policies in Romania were strongly influenced by the process of European integration and the need to align the education system with international standards and trends (Vlădescu, 1997). The curriculum was reformed to emphasize the development of key competences (critical thinking, digital skills, language skills), and vocational education was expanded in response to labor market demands. Romania began participating in international student testing (Programme for International Student Assessment, Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study, Progress in International Reading Literacy Study) and started collecting empirical data on student performance compared to other European Union countries. The decentralization process continued, with some administrative responsibilities being transferred to local authorities, but the real autonomy of schools remained limited (Dumbrăveanu, 2015). Despite the obvious progress made during this period, reports from international bodies indicate that the Romanian education system faces major structural challenges, including large gaps between urban and rural areas, a lack of school infrastructure, and insufficient levels of professionalization, continuing education, and teacher motivation (OECD, 2024).

Between 2010 and 2020, the educational agenda was structured around pillars such as quality assurance, promoting inclusion, and accelerated modernization of the system, reflected in

the implementation of evaluation criteria, funding, and educational management (Nicu, 2016). European recommendations led to the introduction of educational policies focused on reducing school dropout rates, increasing access and equity, developing a “culture of evaluation,” and improving performance on PISA tests. Particular emphasis has been placed on the professionalization of teachers, with initial and continuing training programs, the use of digital tools (especially after 2018), the prioritization of funding for disadvantaged schools, and the inclusion of students with special educational needs in the general curriculum (Bonciliică, 2023). Pilot projects for “inclusive schools” have also been introduced, funded by the Ministry of Education, European funds, or NGOs. Despite these positive developments, international reports highlight persistent challenges such as chronic underfunding, legislative fragmentation, reactive responses to change, and considerable variations in implementation at the regional and local levels. As a result, the positive impact of reforms has often been limited, and educational inequality has particularly affected rural areas and students from vulnerable groups (OECD, 2024).

Table 1. Evolution of Romanian educational policies in pre-university education (1990-2024)

Period	Main educational policies	Additional details
1990–1995	Restructuring and the beginning of the democratization of the system, depoliticization of the curriculum	High schools and humanities programs were reopened, ideologically oriented subjects (scientific socialism, scientific and dialectical materialism) were eliminated, and new subjects were introduced (computer science, foreign languages, civics, psychology, philosophy, etc.). The duration of compulsory education was reduced from 10 to 8 years, and post-secondary education was reintroduced. Education Law No. 84 of 1995 established the basic principles: education as a national priority, equal opportunities for all students, education in the spirit of respect for human rights, dignity, and tolerance, and the cultivation of respect for nature and the environment. The law introduced the principle of free and compulsory education, clearly defined the three levels of the pre-university system (primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary), introduced a structured aptitude test at the end of lower secondary school, and introduced the baccalaureate in a structured form. primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary), introduced a structured end-of-lower-secondary-cycle examination and the baccalaureate. The principle of administrative decentralization was introduced.
1995–2010	Curriculum reform, European alignment, and external evaluations	Law No. 128 of 1997 regulated the status of teaching staff. Emphasis on standardized evaluation, correlation of the curriculum with new skills, inclusion of remedial programs, and development of international testing Expansion of technological and dual education programs. Programs such as “Second Chance” (for people who have left the education system and wish to continue/complete their primary or secondary education) and “Corn and Milk” were introduced.

2010–2020	Policies for modernization, quality, and inclusion	Projects were initiated for digitization, teacher training, additional funding for at-risk students, and diversification of educational pathways. Law No. 1 of 2011, the National Education Law, establishes the legal framework for the education system in Romania, ensuring the exercise of the right to lifelong learning under the authority of the state. It also defines the set of state, private, and religious educational institutions authorized and accredited in the education system and establishes as a financing principle that “financial resources follow the student.” National strategies to combat school dropout, digitization, and the professionalization of teachers Introduction of a preparatory class (taken from kindergarten). The “Educated Romania” project (2016) - a strategic plan for national education reform. Adaptation of the curriculum to European standards and extended participation in European mobility programs. Development of the key competences framework, piloting of new curriculum models, and expanding access to ICT in schools. Policies for the professionalisation of school management and teaching staff (modular training, requirements for tenure, and professional development).
2020–2024	Accelerated digitization (post-pandemic), integrated policies for vulnerable groups, differentiated funding, focus on equity and performance	Increased access to the internet and technology in most schools. National remedial learning program and introduction of the national pilot program “School after School” in 2021. National anti-bullying programs officially debuted in Romania in 2020. The Ministry of Education launched projects under the National Recovery and Resilience Plan to fund interventions aimed at reducing early school leaving.

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the shift to digitalization, forcing the education system to rapidly adopt online learning, distribute IT equipment, and develop digital content for all students. Policies have focused on reducing digital divides, supporting students without access to resources, and helping teachers adapt to new teaching practices (European Commission, 2025). National projects with differentiated funding were launched for schools at high risk of exclusion, expanding access to psycho-pedagogical counseling and targeted tutoring for disadvantaged students. (Marin, 2025). Particular emphasis has been placed on the professionalization of teachers and the use of digital tools, especially since 2018. The Ministry of Education has introduced the National Register of Continuing Education Programs for the professional development of teachers, including courses on digital skills, online teaching, digital assessment, inclusive education, and educational management. Universities have offered conversion and university training programs with a digital pedagogy component, and the Teacher Training Centers in each county have expanded their continuing education offerings to include courses on digital skills, hybrid teaching, and the development of open educational resources. Calls for national projects funded by the PNRR and structural funds were launched, focusing on the development of digital skills, the use of online platforms, and access to modern digital infrastructure, supported by the SMART.Edu Strategy. By Order No. 4800/2022, the subject “Digital Education” was introduced as an optional subject at the high school level, and continuing

education for teachers acquired a mandatory digital component in professional standards and competency assessments. Digital educational platforms and public-private partnerships have been developed. Projects such as PROFEDU, Kinderpedia, Adservio, Google for Education, and Microsoft Teams have been integrated at the national and local levels, facilitating online training and professional collaboration among teachers (OECD, 2025).

The evolution of pre-university education policies in Romania is marked by a transition from policies aimed at closing post-communist gaps to the implementation of modern European strategies for quality and inclusion. Despite sustained efforts and notable progress in legislation, digitization, and equity policies, scientific literature and international reports show that major challenges remain: underfunding, policy fragmentation, regional disparities, and insufficient adaptation to modern socio-economic requirements.

3. Current approaches to social policy

The guidelines in the field of social policies from the perspective of outlining the foundations are structured along two main lines: either the pillars of social policies are described based on an overview of general and specific theories, or the basic principles of European and national social policies are analyzed.

One of the current general benchmark approaches was developed by Hudson et al. (2008). The authors provide a clear and concise overview of the five pillars of social policy: social security, employment, education, health, and housing. Within the five pillars, the main problems are identified: insufficient income with social security; lack of employment opportunities concerning employment inadequate educational opportunities in the field of education; limited access to health services; and low quality of housing conditions. Another topical overview of the foundations of social policy is constructed by Dwyer and Shaw (2013). The pillars around which the whole field of social policy revolves cover issues such as well-being, social justice, diversity, and well-being.

Specific approaches are built based on determining the social policy regarding different issues: pension issues (Robson, 2001; Van Dalen et al., 2019); sustainable development (Murphy, 2012). Robson (2001) discusses the issue of pensions by using the metaphor of three pillars to describe a comprehensive pension system: the security that you will be protected against poverty in old age, the system will stimulate active employment to have the income to support pensions, and legislation to reduce double taxation. The first pillar is envisioned as a safety net and addresses issues of social assistance and in-kind services for the poor, programs to protect citizens from circumstances that are unpleasant and life-threatening. The second pillar, maintaining lifestyles, is about compulsory contributions to the social security system, requiring all eligible citizens to purchase a basic package of benefits, such as unemployment insurance. The third pillar involves tax decreases and regularizations that provide a framework for individuals, focusing more on personal insurance. The main elements of public pension policy in Canada cover these pillars.

The idea of the pressure facing pension systems is also illustrated by Van Dalen et al. (2019). Their study in the Netherlands presents Dutch employers' perceptions of public pension reforms. The researchers present employers' positions towards increasing the retirement age, taking into account the fact that the life expectancy of citizens has also steadily increased, the possibility of lowering the retirement age for those working in physically demanding, toxic, or dangerous working conditions, and a flexible retirement age. The study points out that employers prefer policies that recognize the diversity of older employees' work capabilities and believe that a one-size-fits-all approach is not sustainable.

Murphy (2012) believes that there is a need to ensure a clearer understanding of what is meant by the social pillar of sustainable development. The social pillars of this particular approach are: public awareness, equity, participation, and social cohesion. This framework can be

used to examine how countries and organizations understand the interaction between the social pillars and the environment, monitor it, and identify emerging problems and possible solutions to address them (Arora, Fatima, Mishra et al., 2018). Living conditions for people have deteriorated due to major problems (environmental pollution, land degradation, global warming or climate change, lack of drinking water supply, storms, droughts or floods, loss of biodiversity). States must invest as quickly as possible in identifying and implementing green solutions that are accessible to as many people as possible (natural alternatives for food production, green fuel, water resource management, clean energy, sustainable economic growth, sustainable employment opportunities, pollution management, green cities, sustainable production of consumer goods). Table 2 provides a systematic presentation of the main pillars deriving from the general and specific orientations analyzed.

Table 2. A summary overview of the pillars of social policies according to general and specific approaches

Approaches		Social policy pillars	Authors
a. general		social security, employment, education, health, housing	Hudson et al (2008)
		Well-being, social justice, diversity, health, and well-being	Dwyer and Shaw (2013)
b. specific	b.1. pension issues	security, maintaining lifestyle, lower taxes, flexible retirement age (higher for countries with higher life expectancy, lower for physically demanding jobs).	Robson (2001), Van Dalen et al., 2019
	sustainable development	public awareness, equity, participation, social cohesion; sustainability and green biotech solutions	Murphy (2012), Arora, Fatima, Mishra, et al., 2018

Blakemore and Warwick-Booth (2013) review the key elements of social policy ideologies and approaches (Table 3).

Table 3. Ideology and social policy approaches (Blakemore & Warwick-Booth, 2013)

Ideology	Key elements of the approach	Policy examples
1. Conservatism	- Wants to maintain the traditional order in society. - Sees the state as having a minimal role, and avoiding paternalism and welfare dependency is desirable. - Emphasizes the private sector in service delivery.	- In the UK, the coalition government tends to minimize the role of the state. The policy is to allow people and communities to have more power. For example, the government is keen to inaugurate public services to be run by local communities.
2. Liberalism	- Sees freedom of choice and the value of the individual as central to the construction of politics. - Individuals are perceived as beings who must behave responsibly. - Neo-liberalism is a global economic approach that encourages less state and public intervention and promotes privatization.	- UK Liberal Democrats believe in equality of opportunity. In an educational context, it means a progressive deal and system.

3. Socialism	- Broad ideology with different meanings. - Left-wing normative principles include, among other things, the idea of equal outcomes for people. - Current socialism involves politicians' attempts to reform the state and less state involvement in intervening in service provision.	- Cuba is a country that is often seen as socialist, thanks to the revolution of the 1950s, the communist rule for many years, for the country's heavy-handed government, planning the state's economy.
4. Nationalism	- It's more than an ideology, it's a belief system. - Nations are seen as independent and must govern themselves: for example, Scottish nationalism. - Providing a national identity is crucial from this perspective, in the idea of promoting social cohesion.	- The English National Assembly adopts a nationalist approach and encourages a move towards national identity, arguing that immigration is a serious threat, which means tightening control. Similar arguments have been heard in similar contexts, as in Australia. Some countries have taken more radical decisions to protect their national identity. France banned the burqa in April 2011 and fined women who continued to wear it in public.

4. Pillars of European and national educational and social policies

The European and national frameworks of social policies have promoted a set of specific principles that derive from the approaches and models developed. The pillars of social policies at the European level can be derived from the following approaches:

- the European social model, whose main feature is social cohesion, which implies the implementation of sets of actions to ensure opportunities for all citizens of the European Union and, consequently, to reduce the risk of social exclusion;
- Luxembourg process (1997), which sets out four pillars of European social policies: employment, entrepreneurship, adaptability, and equal opportunities (*The European Employment Strategy. Investing in People*, 1999);
- the approach to the formation of a European system of industrial relations (Streeck, 1992, p. 314), which emphasizes five pillars of the workforce: strong and publicly guaranteed trade unions; participation in tripartite political arrangements based on formal rights; a higher level of universally defined and publicly guaranteed social rights; a degree of wage-setting solidarity based on sectoral coordination; a reasonably generalized arrangement of information, consultation, and, perhaps, joint management at the firm level, based on workers and trade union rights.

Full employment policy has been a key pillar of educational and social policy in Romania. The main direction of employment has been to make jobs permanent and to provide job security. In addition to employment, social reform covers all the foundations of social policies, such as health, education, housing, and the improvement of the social security system. Developing a new approach to the pillars of social policies in the current context is a complex and reflexive process, since it depends, as can be seen from the analysis of the approaches, on the historical, social, European, or national context in which they evolve. According to Figure 3, it can be seen that underpinning educational and social policies is a solid set of pillars that define a particular approach (general, specific, European, national), which aims to determine and influence the well-being of the individual, the family, the community, and even society as a whole. The naming of the pillars takes shape according to the social policies concerned, so that different

representations may result, in which the values and principles that define them have a central place.

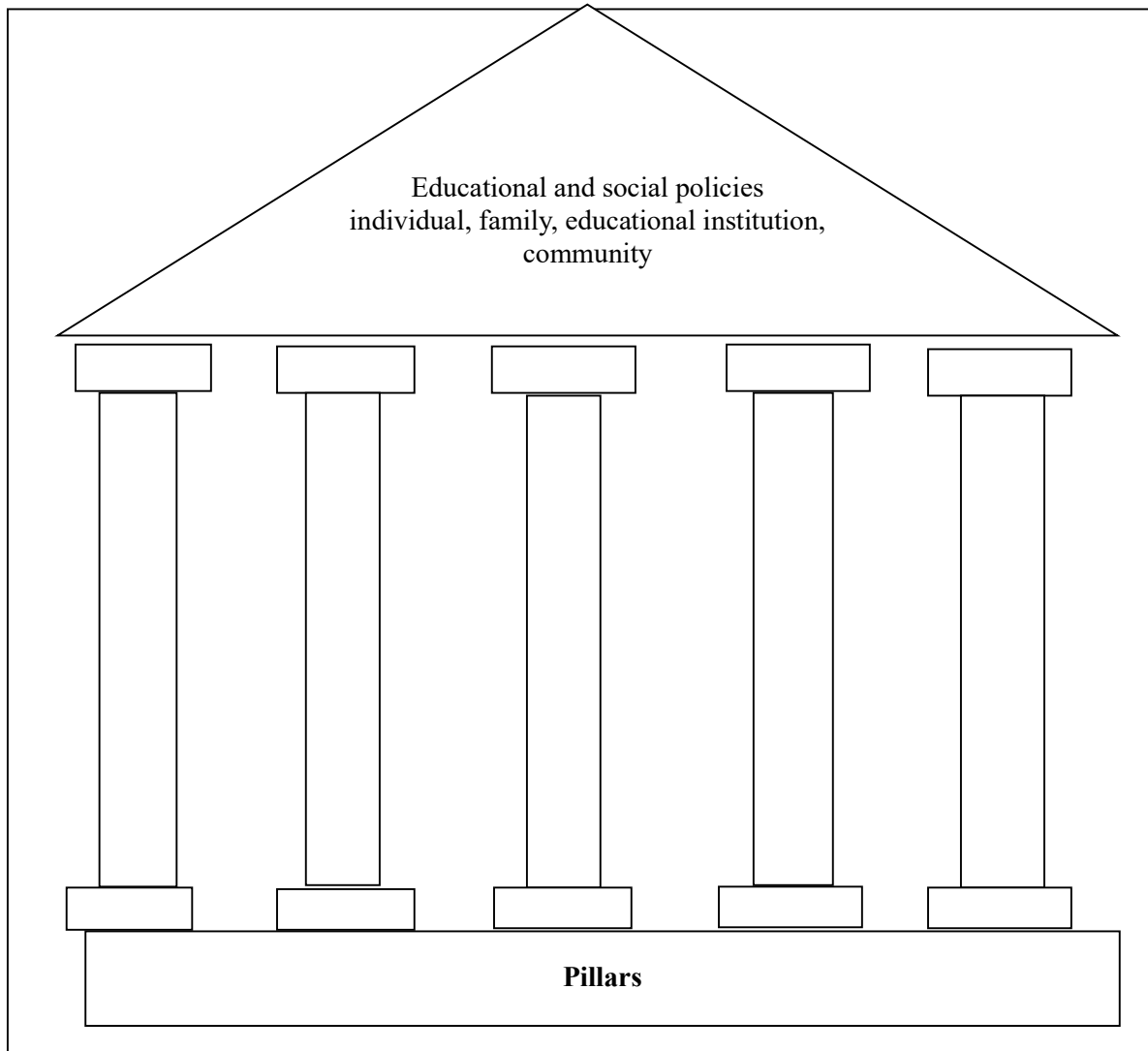


Figure 3. Pillars of social and educational policies

The analysis of the main approaches in the field of educational and social policies has contributed to a comprehensive picture of the pillars that define them. The first conclusion to be drawn from this analysis is that there is on the one hand a set of general, universally valid fundamentals, out of a desire to explain what social policies are (Dwyer & Shaw, 2013; Hudson et al., 2008), and on the other hand a set of principles and values that are characteristic of distinct domains, such as pension issues (Robson, 2001; Van Dalen et al., 2019) and sustainable development (Arora et al., 2018; Murphy, 2012). However, it can be found that there are very few approaches in this area, which emphasizes the need to undertake new theorizing on the determination of social policy pillars. Concerning the importance of social policies, researchers (Căprioară, 2011, p. 266; Reinl & Wallaschek, 2024, p. 78) consider that their existence is necessary for a state, but their level must be balanced. According to the cited authors, "their absence leads to poverty and social inequality, just as their oversizing implies apathy and demotivation among various categories of citizens".

Conclusions

Educational policies are the result of actions, such as problems and solutions, that provide concrete and real answers that are discussed before adopting a decision. The consequences of educational policies depend on complex social-human interactions and the interests of decision-makers. The sphere of educational policy includes the interests and aspirations connected to the education system, but it is also a strategy, an action plan for it. The analysis of the pillars of educational and social policies is necessary to reflect on the principles, names, and values that define social policies from different perspectives. Knowledge of the pillars enables a clear representation of both the general ideology of social policies and of specific areas such as pensions, health insurance, sustainable development, etc. Reflection on the pillars becomes a process that is constructed and redefined in the light of the new restructuring of social policies.

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