

IMPLEMENTATION OF INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION BASED ON SOCIAL INTEGRATION OF ROMA (ROMANI) POPULATION IN ROMANIA

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Abstract: *The main objective of this research article is to investigate the implementation of intercultural education based on social integration of Roma (Romani) population in Romania. Romania has one of the largest Roma (Romani) populations in Europe but the exact number of indigenous Romani population cannot be accurately estimated. In essence, an arrogant approach defines in trivial mode the Romani population as nomadic people or nomads or just Gypsies but they are considered uncivilized and rather impossible to civilize even if it is one of the largest minorities in Romania. However, the very condition Romani people living in Romania implies a social stigma despite government programs preventing growing discrimination, racism and xenophobia. Roma (Romani) minority have free access to education in Romania in order to improve social integration and to prevent and reduce school dropout among Roma children.*

Key words: *Roma (Romani) minority, discrimination, racism, xenophobia, nomadic people, social integration, education, poverty.*

1. Introduction

The main purpose of this research is to investigate relevant aspects regarding intercultural education based on social integration of Roma (Romani) population in Romania. Multicultural education provides a comprehensive framework for diversified reality. In other words, there are a number of ethnic minorities in Romania that differ by specific traits, but that does not make them different compared to the majority of the nation's population.

The Roma (Romani) population's origin is considered to be in the region of Northern India. In Romania there is no uniform culture, but on the contrary it is a conglomerate based on several ethnic minorities, several cultures, several customs, several religions and certain cultural behaviours. Practically, multiculturalism highlights a number of beneficial aspects but there are also some disadvantages. Ethnic groups exhibit characteristic features such as native language, skin color, traditions, customs, religion.

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Intercultural education is a viable alternative to human behaviors based on discrimination, racism and xenophobia generated by ignoring the relevant aspects of ethnic minorities in Romania. However, in countries across Europe, including in Romania, Roma (Romani) population is often discriminated, stigmatized and socially marginalized.

2. Literature Review

A literature review provides an expanded framework on the subject under consideration based on other research. Moreover, an exhaustive analysis is an effective alternative to achieving the research goal. Crondahl and Karlsson (2015) have conducted research regarding Roma empowerment and social inclusion based on qualitative data and have revealed a series of essential contributions for a better understanding of this ethnic minority.

Voinea (2012) investigated the importance of intercultural education in defining the system of individual values and concluded that it is essential in “shaping and confirming the individual’s system of values”. Moreover, the concept of intercultural education was also analyzed by Jarcău (2014) who has highlighted the positive implications of intercultural adult education based on transnational cooperation and cultural knowledge. Sani (2015) investigated the impact of intercultural education in developmental age and revealed interesting aspects about the manifold implications of the syntagm “those that are different” in a multicultural society.

Márquez García, Prados Megías and Padua Arcos (2017) investigated controversial and seemingly inaccessible aspects to the general public regarding Roma women experiences in the Spanish education system focusing on the two major research directions, namely academic culture and emancipation. Pasca (2014) has conducted relevant research on integration of the Roma population and provided a range of alternative solutions to achieve educational progress. Powell (2016) investigated a wide range of fundamental issues regarding Gypsy-Traveler/Roma groups in Europe and argued that they have preserved their “own group identity and cultural continuity under intense pressures to assimilation and conformity”.

Hajioff and McKee (2000) have conducted research regarding the health of the Roma people based on a review of the published literature and suggested that despite the fact that the overall impression is negative about the health of Roma people “these inequalities remain largely unresearched”. Furthermore, Parekh and Rose (2011) discussed important issues about health inequalities of the Roma people in Europe and concluded that it is a “higher prevalence of communicable and non-communicable diseases within the community and significantly shorter life expectancies than national averages”. It is obvious that the Roma (Romani) population is marginalized and exposed to poverty and social exclusion.

On the other hand, Fésüs, Östlin, McKee and Ádány (2012) have performed a complex analysis regarding policies to improve the health and well-being of Roma people and stated that “the Roma constitute the largest ethnic minority in the European Region”. Koupilová, Epstein, Holcík, Hajioff and McKee (2001) investigated relevant aspects on

health needs of the Roma population in the Czech and Slovak Republics and concluded that “communicable disease among Roma is high and diseases associated with poor hygiene seem to be particularly important”.

Rusnáková, Rosinský, Šramková, Čerešníková, Samkoe and Rochovská (2015) have analyzed key issues regarding Roma communities in Slovakia and concluded that “education can be a good choice to avert poverty”. Kósa, Daragó and Adány (2011) discussed the issue of segregated habitats of Roma people in Hungary and provided an interesting perspective. Ortuño García and Muñoz Sánchez (2017) have provided a very interesting perspective on poverty and social exclusion of the gypsy woman in the neighbourhood of Los Rosales, in El Palmar (Murcia).

3. Conceptual Approach and Empirical Analysis

The implementation of intercultural education based on social integration of Roma (Romani) population in Romania is a significant challenge, especially in the context of globalization. The 2011 Romanian National Census indicates that about 10.5% of Romania's population is represented by ethnic minorities of which the most numerous are Hungarians and Roma (Romani) population. Intercultural education leads to the analysis of the similarities and differences between the citizens (inhabitants) of the same country.

Accordingly, the concept of intercultural education has not been widely used in the case of Romania's Roma population. The present society is less concerned about the deep understanding of human particularities but increased attention is being devoted to virtual socialization or artificial day-to-day relationships.

The social integration of Romania's Roma population is a fairly controversial objective that has only been achieved to a very small extent over the years in Romania. On an emotional level, the minority population is expected to integrate to a much more significant extent, so that the results can be quantified. However, specific culture and almost intact preserved past nomad habits are essential characteristics of Roma (Romani) population.

Discrimination against Roma (Romani) populations in education is a multidimensional phenomenon with strong negative impact in the long and medium run especially in the context of globalization. Romanian communities of ethnic minorities have their own cultural and religious habits.

In addition, in Romania immigrants arrived who left their homes for economic, political, financial or security reasons. A special case concerns the Syrian refugees and Muslim immigrants relocated on the basis of EU relocation mechanism policies. Immigration policies in Romania are not very elaborate and the legislation is not very mature and unequivocal in this regard. The intercultural dimension of education provides an innovative approach that can be an effective solution for social integration of Roma (Romani) population.

The very condition of Romani people living in Romania implies a social stigma despite government programs preventing growing discrimination, racism and xenophobia. Roma (Romani) minority have free access to education in Romania in order to improve social

integration and to prevent and reduce school dropout among Roma children.

The parliamentary group of the national minorities in the Romanian legislature (2016-present) represents ethnic minority interests. Technically Roma (Romani) population should be entitled to the same human rights as other minorities in Romania, such as the Hungarian minority. In fact, the Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament in Romania is structured based on several Parliamentary groups which can be comprised of at least 10 deputies, including the parliamentary group of the national minorities.

The interests of the ethnic minority community are very heterogeneous and many of them require urgent resolution. Moreover, according to the official website of the Chamber of Deputies of the Parliament in Romania, the parliamentary groups plays an essential part “both regarding the constitution of the working and leading bodies, and regarding the definition of the deputies' political attitude and position in connection with the draft laws subject to debates”.

School dropout and absenteeism are two very common phenomena in the case Roma children. Unfortunately, school dropout rate is very high among Roma children. The high risk of school dropout is a significant impediment to achieving government goals regarding implementation of intercultural education based on social integration of Roma (Romani) population in Romania.

On the other hand, unemployment among the Roma (Romani) population in Romania is also very high. Moreover, it is important to highlight that early school dropout inevitably leads to a poor prospect regarding the absorption into the labor market. The labor market absorption of Roma (Romani) population in Romania is a controversial and very sensitive subject.

4. Conclusions

The main objective of this research article is to investigate the implementation of intercultural education based on social integration of Roma (Romani) population in Romania. Romania has one of the largest Roma (Romani) populations in Europe but the exact number of indigenous Romani population cannot be accurately estimated. In essence, an arrogant approach defines in trivial mode the Romani population as nomadic people or nomads or just Gypsy, but considered uncivilized and rather impossible to civilize even if it is one of the largest minorities in Romania. In this regard, educational programmes for Roma (Romani) people are very important in achieving an optimal social integration threshold.

Discrimination against Roma (Romani) population is a negative phenomenon with repercussions in the long and medium run. However, marginalization and social exclusion against Roma (Romani) population are relatively common in Romania. Moreover, the high criminality rate among Roma (Romani) population contributes to the general public perception. Ordinary people are more reluctant and less open to concepts such as social inclusion or intercultural education. Women, children and elders are more exposed to discrimination. Romani children are actually condemned to a life without real chances of progress.

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