A SHORT ANALYSIS OF THE EDUCATIONAL TRANSFORMATIONS ACROSS EUROPEAN UNION MEMBER STATES

Andreea Elena LUNGU
Valahia University of Targoviste
E-mail: andreealungu200@gmail.com
Ștefan Laurențiu PRAHOVEANU
School of Advanced Studies of the Romanian Academy, Romania
E-mail: stefanprahoveanu@gmail.com

Abstract. *Over the last two decades, the educational systems within the European Union (EU) have experienced important transformations, determined by a confluence of socio-economic, technological, and political drivers. This paper presents a brief analysis of the educational transformations occurring across European Union (EU) member states, with a focus on the post-pandemic context and the acceleration of digital innovation analyzing the recent literature and comparative data from the main statistical sources to present a framework of the evolving educational landscape. This research extends the ongoing discussion regarding educational transformation within EU member states taking into consideration aspects as digital transformation, and regional cooperation within European educational frameworks. The study highlights both shared trends and country-specific responses, offering a comparative perspective on the future of education in a rapidly changing European landscape.*

Keywords: *education, digitalization, transformation, policy framework, reform.*
JEL Classification*: I21, I28.*

1. Introduction

Over the past several decades, the education systems across European Union member states have undergone significant transformations. As Noelke& Mueller (2011) argues the aim of these transformations is to establish an education landscape that is not only inclusive and equitable but also adaptive to the rapidly evolving global context.

The historical context of education in European Union member states is marked by diverse and complex developments shaped by cultural, political, and socio-economic forces (Safonov et al., 2022). Understanding these transformative periods necessitates a look at the broad tapestry of educational evolution across centuries. In medieval Europe, education was primarily dominated by religious institutions, with monastic and cathedral schools laying the groundwork for higher education in universities. The Renaissance ushered in a newfound appreciation for classical knowledge, broadening curricular focuses beyond religious teachings to include the humanities.

The Protestant Reformation in the 16th century catalyzed significant educational reforms, emphasizing literacy and individual access to scripture, which contributed to the gradual secularization of education. The Enlightenment further propelled educational transformation, advocating for reason and scientific inquiry. This era underscored the need for universal education, laying seeds for the development of state-sponsored systems. The Industrial Revolution necessitated the emergence of schools that could equip populations with skills suited to industrial economies, prompting widespread educational reform across Europe.

The 20th century experienced profound transformations driven by two World Wars and significant socio-political shifts. Post-World War II reconstruction efforts emphasized education as a vehicle for economic recovery and political stabilization. The formation of the EU amplified collaborative educational policies, promoting exchange programs and fostering integration through knowledge-driven economies. The Maastricht Treaty further entrenched

the EU's role in supporting educational advancement, focusing on a cohesive framework for lifelong learning and fostering a knowledge-based society.

The historical context of educational transformations in EU member states reflects an ongoing journey marked by adaptation and reform, influenced by ideological shifts and pragmatic needs. This intricate progression underscores the enduring importance of education in shaping societal trajectories, remarkably overcoming obstacles and embracing opportunities for collaboration and innovation.

2. EU Education Policy Frameworks

The European Union has long recognized education as a cornerstone for fostering integration, economic growth, social cohesion, and the promotion of democratic values across its member states. Policy frameworks within the EU provide a dual-layered structure, integrating both supranational strategies and national policies to balance unity with diversity (Halász, 2015). At the EU level, a robust policy architecture seeks to coordinate efforts and establish shared objectives, while individual member states maintain agency over the design and implementation of their respective education systems. This interplay underscores the complexity of achieving convergence in educational priorities amid varying historical, cultural, and socio-economic contexts.

Centrally, the EU disseminates its aspirations for education policy through programs such as the framework, later succeeded by the initiative, which sets targets for mobility, inclusivity, and lifelong learning by 2025. These frameworks serve not as mandates, but as guiding instruments grounded in a voluntary but structured approach built upon best practices and peer review. Outputs include benchmarks, progress indicators, and collaborative platforms facilitating knowledge-sharing among member states. While policymaking authority remains decentralized, strategic funding mechanisms enable transnational cooperation, innovation, and reforms by bridging institutional and financial gaps that might impede educational development.

At the national level, member states negotiate the integration of EU benchmarks with localized needs, often using EU funding and guidelines to modernize curricula, enhance teacher training, or strengthen digital inclusion.

The European Union's education policies represent a sophisticated framework designed to harmonize and enhance educational systems across member states. Initially formalized through the Treaty of Maastricht in 1992, the EU's role in education policy is to support, coordinate, and supplement national actions, thereby respecting the autonomy of individual countries to define their educational content and organization as it is presented by Cowen (2009). This cooperative approach enables the EU to facilitate the sharing of experiences and dissemination of best practices, fostering an environment conducive to cross-border academic exchange and innovation. Key initiatives such as the Erasmus+ program epitomize the EU's strategic objectives in education. Erasmus+ is not only about higher education student mobility but also covers vocational education, school education, adult learning, and youth activities. By providing financial support for millions of participants to study or train abroad, Erasmus+ seeks to improve skills, employability, and cultural awareness throughout Europe. Complementing these efforts is the European Education Area, envisaged to be fully realized by 2025, which aims to break down barriers to learning and improve educational standards through enhanced cooperation. This initiative underscores the EU's commitment to fostering inclusive and quality education for all citizens, a recurring

theme resonating through the broader discourse on educational transformations within the union (Constantinou, et al., 2025). Moreover, the EU education policies underscore the importance of digital readiness and inclusivity in education, especially in the wake of global challenges like the COVID-19 pandemic. Initiatives targeting digital education aim to address the digital divide and promote skills necessary for the digital age.

3. Case Studies of Successful Transformations

In examining successful educational transformations within the European Union, it is imperative to spotlight specific initiatives that have heralded remarkable improvements in educational outcomes. These case studies provide nuanced insights into how different educational systems can be restructured to address both prevailing and emerging challenges (Jessop, 2004). Each of these examples reflects a distinctive approach to reform, deeply influenced by cultural, economic, and social contexts, yet sharing overarching goals of enhancing educational equity, quality, and efficiency.

3.1. German and Finland Education Model

Finland stands as a paradigmatic case of educational excellence, often attributed to its holistic principles that prioritize educator autonomy, student well-being, and equitable access to resources. This model eschews traditional standardized testing in favor of fostering creativity and critical thinking, successfully balancing rigorous academic pursuits with personal development. Significantly, Finnish reforms emphasize teacher training and professional development, ensuring that educators are well-equipped to adapt curricula to individual learner needs, thus promoting a more personalized learning experience. This commitment to teacher empowerment and a student-centered approach has resulted in consistently high performance in international assessments, reflecting both depth of knowledge and breadth of skills.

Germany's dual vocational system demonstrates another successful transformation, providing a pragmatic illustration of the integration of academic education with vocational training. This system is deeply rooted in partnerships between educational institutions and industry stakeholders, affording students the opportunity to acquire both theoretical knowledge and practical skills in real-world settings as (Zutavern and Seifried, 2022). The dual model exemplifies adaptability, meeting labor market needs while reducing youth unemployment rates. German vocational training is not merely a parallel educational route but a fundamental component of lifelong learning, ensuring that learners can transition smoothly into various career paths, thereby aligning educational outcomes with economic demands (Turchyn et al., 2022).

Sweden, meanwhile, offers a compelling case of inclusive education policies that strive to dismantle barriers to learning for all students, particularly those from diverse backgrounds and varying abilities. The Swedish model is characterized by its legislative and institutional frameworks that promote equality and inclusion, ensuring that education is accessible to every child regardless of their socio-economic status or special needs. Through sustained governmental investment and commitment to diversity, Sweden has cultivated an educational environment where differences are celebrated and learning is tailored to accommodate individual needs, fostering an equitable and cohesive society.

Finland's education model stands as a paradigmatic example of transformative success within the European Union, characterized by its innovative approach to learning, equity, and development. Central to this model is its commitment to equal opportunity, ensuring every child receives high-quality education irrespective of socioeconomic background as it is described by Brewis, (2025. This egalitarian ethos is manifest in the lack of tuition fees across its education system, even in higher education, promoting accessibility and inclusivity. Further distinguishing Finnish education is its emphasis on teacher autonomy and respect, which fosters a culture where educators are entrusted with significant control over curriculum and pedagogical methods, allowing them to tailor learning experiences to better cater to individual student needs (Jahnukainen et al., 2025). Delving deeper, the model champions a holistic approach to education that balances academic and holistic personal development. Finnish schools prioritize a stress-free environment, eschewing the pressure of standardized testing that dominates other systems. This divergence from conventional minimalism focuses on enhancing students' creative and critical thinking capacities over the rote memorization of facts. Furthermore, the integration of vocational elements alongside academic curricula prepares students for real-world challenges by equipping them with practical skills. A distinctive feature remains the extensive teacher education required: Finnish teachers typically undergo rigorous training, supported by robust university programs, ensuring they are equipped with the knowledge and skills needed to foster student growth. The Finnish model's success is reflected in its consistently high rankings in international assessments, which evaluate educational attainment across various countries. Its approach, grounded in sustainability, equity, and adaptability, offers insightful lessons for EU member states seeking effective educational reform.

3.2. Sweden's Inclusive Education Policies

Sweden's approach to inclusive education has long been heralded as a paradigm of progressiveness and equality within European Union member states (Högberg and Lindgren, (2023). The foundation of this comprehensive system was laid in the late 20th century, aligning with Sweden's broader national policy of fostering social inclusivity and equality. Central to these policies is the principle that all students, regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, or linguistic backgrounds, are entitled to equitable educational opportunities within the mainstream education system. This reflects a significant commitment to the ideals of integration rather than segregation.

One of the core components of Sweden's inclusive education policy is its robust legislative framework, underscored by the Education Act. This legislation mandates that all schools must adapt their curricula and teaching methods to accommodate the diverse needs of students. A pivotal aspect of this approach is the individualized education plan, which is developed in collaboration with teachers, parents, and special educators. This plan ensures that the specific needs and potential of each student are recognized and met, emphasizing personalized learning strategies and support services. Furthermore, the widespread availability of special educational needs coordinators in schools aids in executing these plans effectively.

The Swedish model places a strong emphasis on teacher training, equipping educators with the necessary skills and understanding to support a diverse classroom environment. Continuous professional development programs are integral to ensuring that teachers remain adept at employing inclusive pedagogical strategies. Another noteworthy aspect is the role of

technology in Swedish classrooms, which enhances learning experiences for students with disabilities, offering tools that facilitate interaction and engagement in various subjects (Barow and Berhanu, 2021).

This comprehensive approach to inclusivity not only reduces educational disparities but also fosters a culture of acceptance and mutual respect. In comparison to other EU models, Sweden's policies exhibit a seamless integration of governmental, institutional, and community efforts in nurturing inclusive educational environments. This collective endeavor highlights the importance of collaboration and shared responsibility in achieving a system where every learner, regardless of their circumstances, can thrive. The Swedish experience thus serves as an exemplar within the EU, illustrating how inclusive policies can transform educational landscapes and contribute to broader societal goals of equity and solidarity.

4. Future Trends in European

Educational reforms across the European Union encounter a multitude of challenges, each complex in nature and significantly influencing the trajectory of transformation efforts. These difficulties often emerge from the intricate interplay of political, economic, and societal factors, each presenting distinctive hurdles that reformers must navigate to achieve meaningful progress. One primary challenge is the political resistance, which can stem from entrenched interests and ideological differences that oppose or slow down reform initiatives. Policymakers may face opposition from various stakeholders, including political parties, educators, and unions who may have vested interests in maintaining the status quo or who disagree with proposed changes. The process of consensus-building becomes essential yet arduous, requiring negotiation and diplomacy to reconcile differing viewpoints and garner the necessary support for implementation. Compounding these political intricacies are economic constraints that limit the feasibility and scope of educational reforms. The allocation of sufficient resources—both financial and human—is often a critical barrier, as budgetary restrictions can curtail the ambition and effectiveness of reform initiatives. During periods of economic austerity, educational sectors regularly experience cuts or stagnation in funding, which may hamper efforts to improve infrastructure, training, and curricula development. This financial strain is exacerbated by the need to balance investment in education with other pressing governmental expenditures, often leading to short-term priorities overshadowing long-term educational objectives. Consequently, reformers must strategically innovate within these limitations, seeking alternative funding models, utilizing technology efficiently, and in some cases, prioritizing specific areas of reform to maximize impact. In essence, the pursuit of educational reform in the EU must grapple with these multidimensional challenges, where political opposition and economic barriers are interwoven with broader societal objectives. The successful navigation of these challenges is pivotal, demanding a cohesive strategy that aligns diverse interests and leverages resources judiciously. Educators, policymakers, and civil society must engage collaboratively to drive reforms that are both resilient and adaptive, ensuring they can withstand the pressures from these entrenched challenges while advancing the overarching goal of educational betterment across Europe.

As European education systems move toward the future, they are poised at a crossroads characterized by significant and dynamic transformations. At the heart of these changes is an embrace of lifelong learning, which foregrounds the necessity for education systems to pivot from traditional methodologies confined to early life stages. The burgeoning concept of lifelong learning signifies an environment where individuals, irrespective of age or

previous educational attainment, have continuous access to learning opportunities. By promoting flexible learning pathways, Europe aims to address the rapid evolution of skill requirements driven by technological advancements and labor market shifts. As such, educational frameworks are increasingly incorporating digital platforms and alternative credentialing methods, which not only enhance accessibility but also cater to diverse learning styles and paces. These efforts align with broader objectives of fostering inclusivity, adaptability, and cross-continental educational mobility.

Parallelly, sustainability has emerged as a central theme, reflecting the growing awareness of environmental challenges and the intergenerational responsibility to address them. Educational institutions are progressively integrating sustainability into their curricula, thereby equipping students with the knowledge and skills necessary to navigate and mitigate ecological issues. This shift is not merely a curricular adjustment but a holistic transformation encompassing sustainable campus practices, research priorities, and community engagement. By doing so, education becomes a catalyst for a broader cultural shift towards environmental stewardship, ensuring that future generations are prepared to contribute positively to a sustainable future.

The increased focus on mental health represents a profound rethinking of educational priorities. Recognizing that mental well-being is fundamental to academic success and personal development, there is a concerted effort to de-stigmatize mental health issues while embedding supportive frameworks within educational settings. Initiatives range from integrating mental health education into curriculums to establishing robust support systems for students and educators alike, anchored in accessibility and sensitivity to diverse needs. These measures are critical in fostering environments that support resilience and emotional intelligence, key components of student success in an increasingly complex world. As European education evolves, the confluence of lifelong learning, sustainability, and mental health emphasis articulates a comprehensive strategy that seeks to nurture more holistic, adaptable, and empowered individuals poised to meet the challenges of tomorrow.

5. Conclusions

The examination of educational transformations in European Union member states reveals shared aspirations and diverse challenges as they navigate modern education. At the heart of these changes is a commitment to inclusive and equitable educational environments catering to diverse student populations. These transformations are driven by socio-political, economic, and technological factors influencing policies across the region. Strategic frameworks and initiatives guide member states toward a cohesive approach, but implementation reflects each nation's unique cultural and historical context.

The rise of digital technologies has transformed traditional educational methods, pushing institutions to include digital literacy and competencies in their programs. This change is vital for equipping students to succeed in a digital world and compete globally. While digital transformation offers innovation, it highlights the necessity to tackle inequalities in technology access and infrastructure. Closing the digital divide is crucial for ensuring that all European students benefit from advancements.

Collaboration among EU member states has profoundly impacted educational transformations through shared best practices and cross-border initiatives aimed at balanced education and lifelong learning. The success of these transformations hinges on policy adaptability to global challenges like climate change, migration, and economic shifts. Despite

uncertainties, there remains a strong commitment to a resilient education system ready to meet the demands of 21st-century learners.

References
1. Barow, T. and Berhanu, G., 2021. Inclusive education in Sweden: Policy, politics, and practice. In: *Dialogues between Northern and Eastern Europe on the development of inclusion,* pp. 34-51. Routledge.
2. Brewis, E., 2025. *Higher education and the public good in Finland. Higher Education*, 89(1), pp.205-222.
3. Constantinou, E.K., Flynn, P. and Verchier, Y., 2025. Defining the teaching profiles of academic staff across a European universities alliance: Lessons learned after the pandemic and the way into the future. *International Journal of Innovative Research and Scientific Studies*.
4. Cowen, R., 2009. The transfer, translation and transformation of educational processes: and their shape-shifting? *Comparative Education*, 45(3), pp.315-327.
5. Halász, G., 2015. E ducation and Social Transformation in Central and E astern Europe. *European Journal of Education*, 50(3), pp.350-371.
6. Högberg, B. and Lindgren, J., 2023. From a crisis of results to a crisis of wellbeing– education reform and the declining sense of school belonging in Sweden. *Comparative Education*, 59(1), pp.18-37.
7. Jahnukainen, M., Hienonen, N., Lintuvuori, M. and Lempinen, S., 2023. Inclusion in Finland: myths and realities. In: *Finland's famous education system: Unvarnished insights into Finnish schooling*, pp.401-415. Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore.
8. Jessop, B., 2004. *The European Union and Recent Transformations. The state of Europe: Transformations of statehood from a European perspective*, 75.
9. Noelke, C. and Mueller, W., 2011. Social transformation and education systems in Central and Eastern Europe. Making the transition. *Education and labour market entry in Central and Eastern Europe*, 1-28.
10. Safonov, Y., Usyk, V. and Bazhenkov, I., 2022. Digital transformations of education policy. *Baltic Journal of Economic Studies*, 8(2), pp.127-136.
11. Turchyn, A., Kashuba, O., Kravchuk, T., Navolska, H. and Derkach, H., 2022. The dual model of practical professional and pedagogical training of future teachers for vocational schools in Germany. *Journal of Education Culture and Society*, 13(2), pp.713-728.
12. Zutavern, S. and Seifried, J., 2022. Vocational education and training in Germany: Benefits and drawbacks of the dual approach as preparation for professional employment. In; *Research Approaches on Workplace Learning: Insights from a Growing Field,* pp. 347-365. Cham: Springer International Publishing.