

EDUCATION IN ROMANIA TODAY: BETWEEN REFORM PROMISES AND SYSTEMIC STRUGGLES

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This paper examines the current state of the Romanian education system, focusing on the discrepancy between reform promises and systemic struggles. Using a combination of literature review and qualitative interviews with teachers, on management positions or not, the study highlights persistent challenges such as underfunding, teacher shortages, outdated curricula, rural-urban inequalities, and administrative burdens. The findings indicate that while reforms are frequently announced, their implementation is inconsistent and often disconnected from classroom realities. The paper concludes with recommendations aimed at bridging the gap between policy intentions and educational practice, with an emphasis on sustainable funding, teacher development, digital inclusion, and targeted support for vulnerable students.

Keywords: education, educational reform, policy

JEL Classification Codes: I21, I22, I28, H52, O15

INTRODUCTION

Education is widely recognized as a cornerstone of national development and social equity. In Romania, the transition from a centralized communist system to a democratic and market-oriented society has been accompanied by successive waves of educational reform. Each new government has sought to align Romanian education with European Union standards, modern pedagogical practices, and the requirements of a globalized labor market. Yet, more than three decades after the fall of communism, many of the same problems persist. Chronic underfunding, inertia, and persistent inequalities between rural and urban areas undermine the ability of the system to provide equitable, high-quality education. This paper seeks to analyze these challenges, drawing on both literature and qualitative data from stakeholders to offer insights into why reforms often fail to achieve their intended impact.

Education is widely regarded as a foundation for sustainable development, democratic participation, and social mobility. (Sipińska, G. and Sadowska, B., 2022) In post-communist Romania, it has also represented one of the most important instruments for aligning the country with European Union standards and global competitiveness. Since the 1990s, successive governments have launched numerous reforms designed to modernize the education system. However, despite these efforts, the gap between reform promises and practical realities remains significant.

Following 1990, the legislative framework of Romanian education underwent a profound structural transformation, table 1. The Education Law no. 84/1995 represented the first major post-communist reform, providing a unified framework for organizing the national



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education system. Published in the Official Gazette no. 167 on July 31, 1995, and republished in 1996 and 1999, the law was amended 37 times through 57 normative acts, reflecting the dynamic evolution of Romanian society. Key reforms included the introduction of the capacity exam, the creation of a National Curriculum for grades I–IX, alternative textbooks, the extension of compulsory education, and the digitalization of admission and tenure procedures.

This law was replaced in 2011 by the Law of National Education no. 1/2011, published in the Official Gazette no. 18 on January 10, 2011. The new framework marked a shift toward structural reform based on decentralization, competency-based curricula, and institutional accountability. Among its innovations were the introduction of the preparatory class, the implementation of video surveillance systems during national exams, the possibility of part-time doctoral studies, and a modular structure of the school year. However, the law underwent 120 amendments between 2011 and 2023, which reduced its coherence and predictability.

In 2023, the system was restructured through the adoption of two distinct acts: Law no. 198/2023 on Pre-University Education and Law no. 199/2023 on Higher Education, both published on July 4, 2023. These laws mark a “reset” of the Romanian educational framework, aimed at enhancing institutional autonomy, ensuring greater governance clarity, and aligning education with contemporary societal needs. The new pre-university law introduces mixed admission procedures for high school, an expanded baccalaureate examination, new subjects such as financial, environmental, legal, and health education, as well as measures to reduce school dropout and absenteeism. In higher education, reforms focus on strengthening university autonomy, promoting quality and excellence in research, supporting internationalization, enhancing teacher training, and advancing lifelong learning initiatives.

Table 1. Legislative framework of Romanian education

Period	Law / Normative Act	No. of Amendments
1978 – 1995	Law no. 28/1978 on Education and Schooling	
Established a unified legal basis for organizing and functioning of the education system; repealed in September 1995.		
1995 – 2010	Education Law no. 84/1995	37 amendments through 57 normative acts
Introduction of the capacity exam (1999); National Curriculum for grades I–IX; alternative textbooks; transition from trimesters to semesters; computerized admission to high schools; extension of compulsory education to 10 grades; restructuring of national exams; revision of the baccalaureate and tenure allocation.		
2011 – 2022	Law of National Education no. 1/2011	120 amendments
Structural reform emphasizing decentralization, competency-based curricula, and institutional accountability; introduction of the preparatory class; surveillance systems at exams; part-time doctoral studies; modular school year (five modules).		
2023 – present	Law on Pre-University Education no. 198/2023	9 amendments
Mixed high school admission (50% institutional exam, 50% computerized allocation); extended baccalaureate (8–10 exams); new subjects (financial, legal, environmental education, etc.); fines for parents not ensuring school attendance; student expulsion introduced as a sanction.		

2023 – present	Law on Higher Education no. 199/2023	10 amendments
Strengthening university autonomy; organization by domains (medical, military, artistic, dual); emphasis on internationalization, quality, research, and initial teacher training; new funding and ethics frameworks; focus on lifelong learning.		

Source: Authors' contribution

Yet, the introduction of new legislation does not automatically translate into improved educational outcomes. Romania still invests less than 4% of GDP in education (even less than 3% in 2025), far below the EU average, a financial reality that undermines infrastructure development, teacher remuneration, and access to modern teaching resources (World Bank, 2022). Persistent inequalities between urban and rural areas further aggravate the system, with rural schools lacking qualified staff, digital infrastructure, and even basic facilities. The result is an entrenched educational divide that perpetuates social and economic disparities.

Teachers, meanwhile, remain at the center of reform challenges. Although the new legislative framework calls for competency-based learning and digital inclusion, educators receive limited professional training and are burdened by low salaries that discourage young graduates from entering the profession. (European Comision, 2024; OECD, 2024, 2025). In learning process, students often focus on memorization rather than critical thinking, creativity, or civic engagement. These systemic weaknesses are reflected in Romania's continued underperformance in international assessments such as PISA, as well as in persistently high rates of early school leaving. UNICEF (2023) further highlights that more than 200,000 children are out of school, illustrating the scale of educational exclusion. (Eurostat, 2024; Serban, 2024; Petre, 2024)

This paper addresses the paradox of Romanian education today: a system subject to continuous legislative change and reform rhetoric yet still struggling with deep-rooted systemic issues. By combining a review of the existing literature with qualitative data from stakeholders, it seeks to examine why reforms often fail to achieve their intended impact and to propose actionable recommendations to bridge the persistent gap between policy frameworks and classroom realities.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Romanian education system has been extensively analyzed in both national and international research, with a consensus that despite ongoing reforms, systemic shortcomings continue to hinder progress. A recurring theme in the literature is the tension between ambitious policy agendas and weak implementation mechanisms.

One of the most significant structural changes in recent years has been the replacement of *National Education Law no. 1/2011* with two new laws: *Law no. 198/2023 on Pre-University Education* and *Law no. 199/2023 on Higher Education*. These reforms aim to strengthen institutional governance, modernize curricula, and increase the predictability of the education system (Eurydice, 2023). The OECD (2024) notes that the pre-university law introduces important changes to school governance, resource allocation, and evaluation, but cautions that implementation challenges remain substantial.

A critical issue consistently highlighted in the literature is **underfunding**. Romania has historically spent less than 4% of its GDP on education, placing it among the lowest in the European Union (World Bank, 2022). Eurostat (2024) reports that the country continues to lag behind EU averages in key indicators such as early school leaving and digital readiness. According to the European Commission (2024), Romania's educational investment shortfall affects school infrastructure, the provision of digital tools, and the capacity to deliver inclusive education.

Romania's early school leaving rate has consistently been among the highest in the European Union, reflecting its elevated in-work poverty rate. According to Eurostat, the early school leaving rate in Romania has remained relatively constant in recent years, declining slightly from 17% in 2013 to 16% in 2022, while the European average decreased from 12% to 9% (Eurostat, 2023). Spain, which in 2013 had a higher early school leaving rate than Romania, successfully reduced its rate from 24% in 2013 to 14% in 2022. In 2024, Romania's national rate reached 16.8%, reinforcing its position as the EU country with one of the highest rates of early school leaving (Eurostat, 2024).

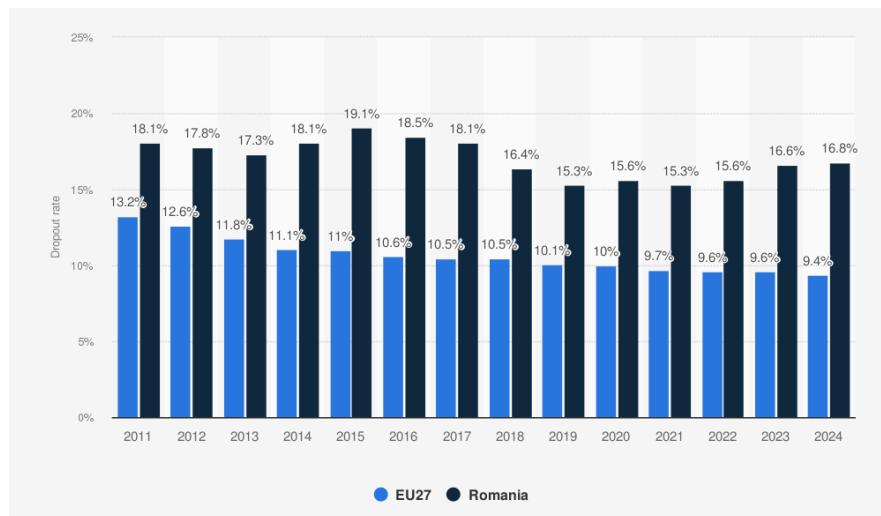


Figure 1. School dropout in Romania from 2011-2024

Source: Eurostat, 2024

Early school leaving in Romania exhibits significant regional disparities. While Bucharest maintains a relatively low rate of 7–8%, figure 2, other regions report higher rates, ranging from 11% in the West to 23% in the South-East and Centre regions (Eurostat, 2023). Over the past decade, regional early school leaving rates have remained largely stable, suggesting that governmental interventions aimed at reducing the phenomenon have had limited impact.

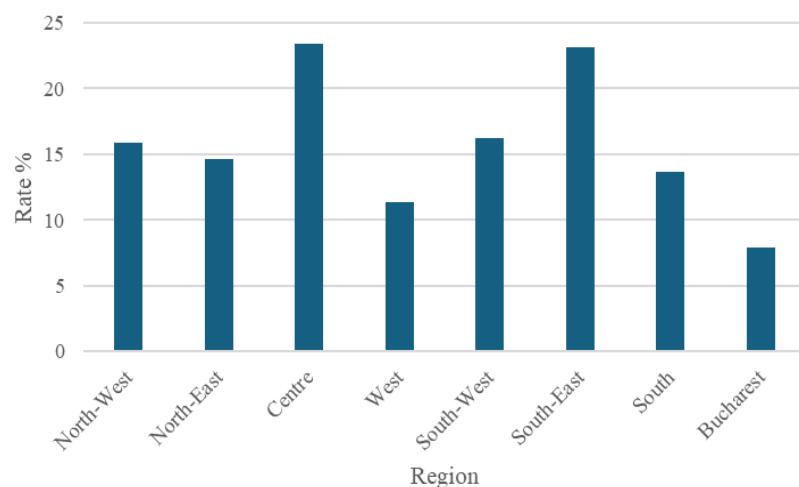


Figure 2. Early school leaving rate (%)

Source: Eurostat, 2023

The dynamics of early school leaving are closely associated with in-work poverty in Romania, defined as the proportion of employed individuals earning below the monthly poverty threshold. Romania's in-work poverty rate stands at approximately 14.5%, one of the highest in the EU and significantly above the EU average of 8.5% (Eurostat, 2023). Empirical research indicates a near-perfect correlation between early school leaving and in-work poverty, underscoring the role of ineffective educational policies in sustaining elevated levels of poverty even among the employed population. Moreover, many school leavers do not participate in formal employment; Eurostat EU-SILC data reveal that over half of Romanians who left education prematurely are currently neither employed nor seeking employment (Eurostat, 2024).

Another persistent concern is the **urban–rural divide**. OECD (2024) emphasizes that rural schools frequently lack qualified teachers, adequate infrastructure, and internet access, which exacerbates existing inequalities. The European Commission (2024) further stresses that socio-economic disparities and geographic isolation are among the strongest predictors of educational exclusion in Romania.

The issue of **early school leaving** has received particular attention. Romania had the highest share of early leavers in the EU in 2024, with 16.8% of young people aged 18–24 not completing secondary education (Eurostat, 2024). Șerban (2024) highlights that poverty, limited family support, and poor infrastructure contribute significantly to dropout rates, while Petre (2024) demonstrates how these dynamics manifest in suburban and rural contexts near Bucharest.

Teacher-related factors also dominate the literature. Low salaries and limited professional development opportunities reduce the attractiveness of the teaching profession. Although recent salary increases have improved earnings compared to previous years, OECD (2025a) shows that Romania's teacher pay still struggles to compete with opportunities in other sectors, despite salaries being relatively high compared to the general labor market. Moreover, the European Commission (2024) reports that most Romanian teachers receive limited pedagogical training during their initial education, which undermines the effectiveness of curricular reforms.

According to OECD data (2019), the average number of professional development activities in which teachers participate, figure 3, reflects both the individual commitment to lifelong learning and the capacity of the education system to provide diverse and accessible opportunities. Thus, significant differences between countries can be observed, which suggests the existence of very varied national contexts in terms of continuing training policies.

Places such as Shanghai (6.5), Kazakhstan (6.3) and the Russian Federation (6.2) stand out for their high level of involvement in professional development activities, which may indicate both a varied offer and institutional or cultural pressures for constant improvement. On the other hand, France (2.4), Chile (2.8) and Portugal (2.9) record low values, suggesting possible limits in the training infrastructure or a lower interest in participation on the part of teachers.

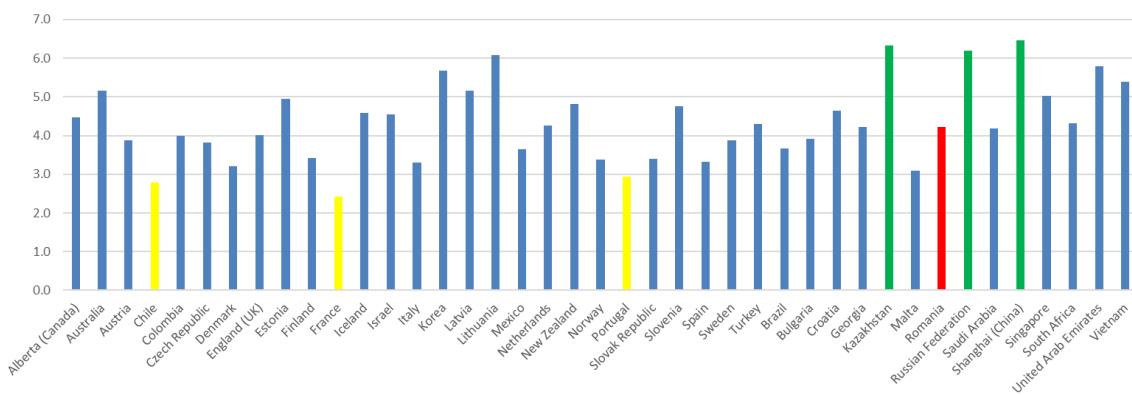


Figure 3. Average number of professional development activities attended by teachers

Source: OECD, 2024

Romania, with an average of (4.2) activities, is in an intermediate zone, comparable to countries such as Georgia, Saudi Arabia and England. This positioning indicates a potential to strengthen the culture of continuous training, but also the need to diversify the types of activities offered, in order to better meet the professional needs of teachers.

Analyzing Romania, which recorded an average above the average of European countries such as France (2.4), Portugal (2.9) or Italy (3.3), factors such as:

- *Favorable legislative framework*: given by the National Education Law no. 1/2011 and subsequent regulations that imposed periodic participation in continuing education programs.
- *Accessibility of training programmes*: Teachers had a wide range of training activities available, including online, thus facilitating participation.
- *EU-funded programmes*: the plethora of EU-funded projects, such as POSDRU and POCU, have provided free training opportunities and sometimes incentives for participation, significantly contributing to increasing teachers' involvement in professional development.

Finally, studies consistently critique the **curriculum and pedagogy**. While the government has attempted to introduce competency-based learning, institutional inertia and insufficient teacher training have slowed meaningful adoption (OECD, 2024). Students are often required to focus on rote memorization, limiting their development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills (European Commission, 2024).

Overall, the literature paints a complex picture: reforms are frequent and ambitious, but structural inequalities, inadequate funding, and weak implementation capacity prevent them from achieving their intended impact.

Key indicators illustrate the scope of the problem, showing Romania's early school leaving rate at 16–16.8% compared to the EU average of 9–9.5%, in-work poverty ranging from 10.9–14.5% versus 8.5–8.6% in the EU, and over 50% non-participation in work among school leavers. Regional maximum rates reach 23% in the South-East and Centre regions, highlighting the ongoing disparities that demand targeted policy responses.

Table 2. Key indicators

Indicator	Romania (2022–2024)	EU Average (2022–2024)
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Indicator	Romania (2022–2024)	EU Average (2022–2024)
Early school leaving rate	16–16.8%	9–9.5%
In-work poverty rate	10.9–14.5%	8.5–8.6%
Non-participation in work (school leavers)	>50%	N/A
Regional maximum rate (South-East/Centre)	23%	N/A

Source: Eurostat, 2024

2. METHODOLOGY

This paper uses a qualitative approach to complement existing statistical and policy analyses. Twenty semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers, on management positions or not, across different Romanian regions, ensuring that perspectives from both urban and rural areas were represented. The interviews focused on experiences with reforms, resource availability, digital access, and perceptions of educational relevance. Semi-structured interviews were chosen because they allow flexibility in exploring personal narratives while still maintaining a degree of comparability across respondents (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

These qualitative insights are supplemented by a literature review drawing on EU reports, national statistics, and scholarly publications, creating a multi-layered understanding of the education system. By combining interview narratives with secondary data, the study highlights both the policy-level challenges and the everyday experiences of stakeholders (Patton, 2015).

While the small sample size limits the broader applicability of the findings, the strength of this approach lies in its ability to illuminate how abstract policy measures translate into everyday realities. Such an approach provides depth and context that large-scale surveys or quantitative indicators alone cannot capture, highlighting the complexity of reform implementation and its uneven impact across social and geographic divides.

The interviews focused on experiences with reforms, resource availability, digital access, and perceptions of educational relevance.

The interviews were conducted between April and June 2025, in an online format (via Zoom or Google Meet), to facilitate participation from different regions. Each interview had an average duration of 25 – 45 minutes and was guided by a semi-structured interview, which included central themes such as: experiences regarding educational reforms; perception of curricular relevance; access to digital resources and equipment; professional motivation and institutional challenges. The interviews were audio-recorded (with the consent of the participants) and transcribed in full.

The sample included 20 teachers from all eight development regions of Romania, of which 12 were active in urban areas and 8 in rural areas. Of the total number of participants, 14 were teachers without administrative functions, and 6 held management positions (principals or deputy principals). This structure allowed for a comparative investigation of perceptions regarding educational policies, both from a managerial and a teaching staff perspective. The geographical distribution ensures national coverage, and the inclusion of rural areas provides insight into regional disparities and resource inequalities, frequently mentioned in the literature (OECD, 2024; European Commission, 2024).

Transcripts were analyzed using a systematic thematic coding process. To ensure accuracy and efficiency of the analysis, the Turboscribe.ai platform was used, an artificial intelligence-based tool designed for automatic transcription, identification of recurring themes, and visualization of connections between concepts.

The qualitative analysis of the twenty semi-structured interviews revealed five major themes that capture teachers' lived experiences and perceptions of the Romanian education system. These themes emerged through a systematic process of transcription, coding, and thematic synthesis using Turboscribe, which facilitated both the identification of recurrent patterns and the extraction of illustrative quotes.

Although participants differed in age, teaching experience, and regional background, their narratives converged around a set of shared challenges and frustrations regarding the current state of education. The themes reflect both systemic issues—such as policy inconsistency, resource allocation, and bureaucratic inefficiency—and classroom-level realities, including student disengagement and limited motivation among teachers.

The analysis highlights that reforms, while frequent, are often perceived as top-down and disconnected from everyday school realities, contributing to feelings of alienation among teachers. Similarly, low motivation and inadequate remuneration remain persistent barriers to professional satisfaction and retention in the teaching profession. The digital divide continues to exacerbate inequalities between urban and rural schools, particularly in access to technology and digital skills. Teachers also reported growing student disengagement, stemming from an overloaded and outdated curriculum that prioritizes memorization over creativity and problem-solving. Finally, the administrative burden imposed on school leaders and teachers alike diverts attention from pedagogical innovation and undermines the quality of instructional leadership.

Together, these five themes provide a nuanced understanding of how macro-level education policies translate into everyday experiences at the micro level of school practice. They underscore the importance of aligning reforms with teachers' realities, strengthening motivation and professional support, and addressing structural inequities that limit educational effectiveness.

1. Dissatisfaction with reforms

Teachers repeatedly expressed frustration with the frequency and superficiality of policy reforms. Many felt that new initiatives were imposed in a top-down manner without adequate consultation with those working in classrooms. One teacher commented: *"New policies come every year, but no one asks us what actually works in the classroom."* This sentiment reflects findings from OECD (2024), which note that implementation capacity in Romania remains weak due to insufficient stakeholder engagement and fragmented governance. The lack of teacher involvement in shaping reform has fueled a sense of alienation and contributed to a climate of reform fatigue.

2. Teacher motivation and salaries

Low teacher salaries emerged as one of the most pressing concerns. Young graduates in particular emphasized that teaching is not financially competitive compared to other fields such as IT, retail, or services. A young teacher explained: *"Why become a teacher when you can earn double elsewhere?"* This aligns with OECD (2025), which highlights that despite recent salary increases, teaching remains less attractive in Romania compared to other professions requiring tertiary education. Low wages, combined with limited career progression opportunities, weaken motivation and reduce the long-term quality of the profession.

3. Digital divide

The transition to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic revealed deep structural inequalities in digital access. Rural students often lacked devices, stable internet, or digital skills support. A teacher from recounted: *"During online school, some families had to choose which child would use the phone because thy only had one."* Such testimonies echo European Commission (2024) findings, which identify the digital divide as a key barrier to

equal learning opportunities in Romania. Without targeted investments in infrastructure and training, rural students risk falling further behind their urban peers.

4. Student disengagement / disconnection

Teacher expressed dissatisfaction with the relevance of the curriculum. A high school teacher noted: “*Students memorize information, but they don't make efforts in order to solve real problems.*” This critique reflects a broader concern in the literature that Romanian education overemphasizes rote learning at the expense of critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity (European Commission, 2024; OECD, 2024). Disengagement is not merely a classroom issue but one linked to higher dropout rates and reduced preparedness for labor market participation.

5. Administrative burden

School principals, teachers in management positions, highlighted the excessive bureaucratic workload as a major obstacle to effective school leadership. They reported being overwhelmed by reporting requirements and compliance checks that detract from their focus on pedagogical development. As one school director explained: “*I spend more time filling in forms than working and communicating with students and my colleagues.*” This observation is consistent with OECD (2024), which found that administrative centralization in Romania limits local initiative and discourages innovation in school management. Streamlining procedures and granting greater autonomy to school leaders would allow them to focus more on educational quality.

In conclusion, the analysis highlights that reforms, while frequent, are often perceived as top-down and disconnected from everyday school realities, contributing to feelings of alienation among teachers. Similarly, low motivation and inadequate remuneration remain persistent barriers to professional satisfaction and retention in the teaching profession. The digital divide continues to exacerbate inequalities between urban and rural schools, particularly in access to technology and digital skills. Teachers also reported growing student disengagement, stemming from an overloaded and outdated curriculum that prioritizes memorization over creativity and problem-solving. Finally, the administrative burden imposed on school leaders and teachers alike diverts attention from pedagogical innovation and undermines the quality of instructional leadership. Together, these five themes provide a nuanced understanding of how macro-level education policies translate into everyday experiences at the micro level of school practice. They underscore the importance of aligning reforms with teachers’ realities, strengthening motivation and professional support, and addressing structural inequities that limit educational effectiveness.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study highlight a persistent gap between reform rhetoric and educational realities in Romania. Although the country has introduced ambitious legislative changes, including the 2023 adoption of *Law no. 198/2023 on Pre-University Education* and *Law no. 199/2023 on Higher Education*, the interviews and literature suggest that systemic weaknesses continue to limit their impact. This discussion interprets these findings, situates them in a European context, and considers their implications for policy and practice.

The recurring dissatisfaction among teachers with the pace and nature of reforms illustrates a broader phenomenon of “**reform fatigue**” (Fullan, 2016). Frequent, top-down changes have undermined trust in policymaking, creating resistance among educators who feel excluded from the process. This aligns with OECD (2024) observations that stakeholder engagement is weak in Romania, leading to a gap between policy intentions and classroom

realities. The disconnect risks not only wasting resources but also discouraging teacher innovation and professional pride.

Teacher motivation emerged as a decisive factor shaping the success of reforms. Low salaries and limited career predictions reduce the attractiveness of the profession, a concern echoed in broader European analyses (European Commission, 2024). While OECD (2025) reports that teacher salaries have recently risen, they still fail to make the profession competitive with more lucrative fields. Without sustained investment in teacher development and professional recognition, Romania risks perpetuating a cycle of underqualified staff and declining educational quality. Lessons from Estonia highlight the importance of elevating the status of teachers as a central pillar for sustainable reform (OECD, 2024).

The digital divide remains a powerful driver of educational inequality. Interviews with parents and students revealed that lack of devices and stable internet in rural areas severely limited participation during online learning. This mirrors findings from UNICEF (2023) and the European Commission (2024), which note that rural students are disproportionately excluded from digital education. Beyond infrastructure, the absence of systematic digital training for teachers further widens the gap. As other EU member states invest heavily in digital literacy as a core competence, Romania risks falling further behind in preparing students for a knowledge-based economy.

Student disengagement reflects deeper **curricular and pedagogical challenges**. Despite policy commitments to competency-based learning, implementation has been slow and uneven (OECD, 2024). While many education systems have articulated policy commitments to competency-based learning, the translation of these policies into classroom practice has been slow, fragmented, and inconsistent. This gap between policy and practice contributes to a misalignment between students' learning needs and the instructional approaches they encounter. As a result, learners may perceive schooling as irrelevant to their personal goals or future pathways, reinforcing patterns of disengagement and low motivation.

The administrative burden reported by school leaders highlights a structural governance issue: centralization. Excessive reporting obligations undermine school leadership and distract administrators from pedagogical priorities. OECD (2024) emphasizes that effective school systems balance accountability with autonomy, enabling leaders to adapt resources to local needs. Romania's rigid administrative structures reflect an incomplete decentralization process, limiting innovation and responsiveness at the school level.

Collectively, these findings suggest that Romania's education system faces a paradox: frequent reforms coexist with persistent stagnation in outcomes. Overcoming this requires shifting reform focus from legislative novelty to sustainable implementation. Lessons from high-performing systems such as Estonia show that successful reform depends on aligning legislation with adequate funding, empowering teachers, reducing inequalities, and maintaining a long-term strategic vision (OECD, 2024). Without addressing these systemic barriers, Romania risks perpetuating cycles of disillusionment and inequality that undermine both social cohesion and economic competitiveness.

Although this study offers valuable insights, its qualitative design, limited sample size and the category of respondents (only teachers, not all stakeholders) restrict the extent to which the findings can be generalized. Future research should combine large-scale quantitative surveys with in-depth case studies across diverse Romanian regions to capture the full range of experiences. Comparative analyses with other EU member states could also illuminate transferable lessons for improving the effectiveness of Romanian educational reforms.

7. CONCLUSIONS, POLICIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Romanian education system faces persistent systemic challenges despite the continuous reforms implemented over the years. Analysis of teachers' experiences indicates that the gap between reform promises and practical realities affects both educational equity and the country's broader social and economic development. Dissatisfaction with frequent top-down reforms, low teacher motivation, excessive administrative burdens, student disengagement, and digital inequalities create a complex context in which the success of reforms depends on coherence, continuity, and the genuine involvement of educational stakeholders.

To address these challenges, it is essential to ensure sustainable increases in education funding, reaching at least 6% of GDP, with predictable and equitable allocations that prioritize rural school infrastructure, building modernization, and access to utilities and digital resources. Competitive salaries and clear opportunities for continuous professional development for teachers should be complemented by relevant, practical, and contextually adapted training programs, including digital competencies, inclusive pedagogies, and socio-emotional management. Curriculum modernization should focus on developing transversal skills, critical thinking, problem-solving, and civic competencies while offering flexibility to adapt to students' needs and community contexts. Reducing bureaucratic workloads and increasing school autonomy will allow school leaders and teachers to focus on the quality of educational processes and stimulate pedagogical innovation.

Addressing the digital divide remains a strategic priority, and universal access to the internet and digital devices, combined with digital literacy programs for students, teachers, and communities, is essential to reduce inequalities between urban and rural areas. Expanding social support programs for disadvantaged students, including scholarships, school meals, counselling, and mentoring, contributes to preventing early school leaving and increasing participation in the education system. Implementing integrated educational and social programs in disadvantaged regions, which combine preventive interventions, financial support, and community involvement, can reduce the economic pressures that force students to leave school prematurely and strengthen their engagement in learning.

Educational interventions must be complemented by labour market reforms, including increasing the minimum wage, expanding access to vocational training, and promoting apprenticeships, facilitating the transition from school to work, particularly for students at risk of dropping out. Inclusive employment policies targeting vulnerable groups, including the Roma community, contribute to reducing social and economic inequalities and provide meaningful opportunities for formal employment.

Effective implementation of these measures requires establishing digital monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to track student attendance, dropout rates, and labour market outcomes, enabling real-time adjustment of strategies and evidence-based decision-making. Investments in rural education infrastructure and community engagement initiatives, including mobilizing families and local stakeholders, are essential to reduce regional disparities and strengthen social cohesion. National strategies, such as the National Poverty Reduction Plan, should be updated to include specific objectives for preventing early school leaving and to ensure coordination among the ministries of education, labour, and social welfare. By implementing coherent, integrated, and evidence-based policies, Romania can reduce school dropout rates, promote social inclusion, and support the economic resilience of young people, thereby ensuring a lasting impact on the country's social and economic development.

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