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The Impact of Specific Social Factors on Changes in Education in Serbia

ANA PEŠIKAN*¹ AND IVAN IVIĆ²

≈ The political and economic changes that followed the adoption of the *Strategy for the Development of Education in Serbia 2020* essentially betrayed the basic ideas and intentions of the strategy, creating a systematic threat to education and its role in the development of Serbia. This created an almost experimental situation for analysing the impact of political and social factors on changes in education. In the sphere of politics, new trends have emerged (centralisation of power; marginalisation of democratic institutions; encouraging foreign investment in companies with a low technological level, etc.) that strongly influenced changes ('reforms') in education (great centralisation in education, the strong influence of politics on education, imposing of some lower-level forms of education, reducing professional autonomy, etc.). The basic mechanism of transferring the general policy to education is changing the role of the most important national institutions in defining and implementing education policy: the National Education Council, the National Council for Vocational and Adult Education, the National Council for Higher Education, and the National Accreditation Body. The adoption of new education laws (2017) radically changed their status and competencies, resulting in a reduction of their independence and professionalism and strengthening the role of the ministry, through which the influence of the ruling political regime is transferred. Also, the role of the Chamber of Commerce in education has been strengthened. Such a system endangers the autonomy of educational institutions and teachers, as well as the quality of education. Consequently, these changes have a clear impact on the country's development and its international position.

Keywords: education policy, social change, political influence on education

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Vpliv posebnih družbenih dejavnikov na spremembe v izobraževanju v Srbiji

ANA PEŠIKAN IN IVAN IVIĆ

☞ Politične in gospodarske spremembe, ki so sledile sprejetju *Strategije razvoja šolstva v Srbiji 2020*, so pravzaprav izdale osnovne ideje in namene te strategije ter s tem ustvarile sistemsko grožnjo izobraževanju in njegovi vlogi pri razvoju Srbije. To je proizvedlo skoraj eksperimentalni položaj za analizo vpliva političnih in družbenih dejavnikov na spremembe v izobraževanju. Na političnem področju so nastali novi trendi (centralizacija oblasti, marginalizacija demokratičnih institucij, spodbujanje tujih naložb v podjetja z nizko stopnjo tehnološkega razvoja itn.), ki so močno vplivali na spremembe ('reforme') v izobraževanju (velika centralizacija izobraževanja, močen vpliv politike na izobraževanje, vsiljevanje nekaterih nižjih stopenj izobraževanja, zmanjševanje strokovne avtonomije itn.). Osnovni mehanizem prenosa splošne politike v izobraževanje je spreminjanje vloge najpomembnejših državnih institucij pri določanju in izvajanju izobraževalne politike, tj. Državnega sveta za izobraževanje Republike Srbije, Državnega sveta za poklicno izobraževanje in izobraževanje odraslih, Državnega sveta za visoko šolstvo in Akreditacijskega telesa Republike Srbije. Sprejetje novih zakonov o šolstvu (2017) je korenito spremenilo njihov status in pristojnost. Posledica sprememb pa je zmanjšanje njihove samostojnosti in strokovnosti s sočasno krepitevijo vloge ministrstva, prek katerega se prenaša vpliv vladajočega političnega režima na šolstvo. Prav tako se je okrepila vloga gospodarske zbornice v izobraževanju. Tak sistem pa ogroža avtonomijo izobraževalnih ustanov in učiteljev pa tudi kakovost izobraževanja. Posledično imajo te spremembe jasen vpliv na razvoj države in njen mednarodni položaj.

Ključne besede: izobraževalna politika, družbena sprememba, vpliv politike na izobraževanje

Introduction

The literature asserts that the state context and politics are significant influences on the course of education and play an important role in shaping education policy, including the translation of policy into practice (Cooper et al., 2008; Fuhrman, 1989; Youdell, 2010). Analysts have discerned the importance of the political context, defined as the distribution of power and the structure and function of various groups, exerting a key influence on the state choice of mandates, inducements, or other strategies to influence local behaviour (Fuhrman, 1989). The relationship between education and social change is profoundly reciprocal. Social and political changes cause changes in education because it is deeply socio-culturally conditioned; conversely, quality education can be an agent of change in the socio-economic development of a society. People, banded in communities of practice, intentionally or unintentionally, adopt new socio-cultural realities and attempt to realise them. In such a way, these changes in practice enable changes in the lives of individuals (and their identity) and the course of social change (Vygotsky, 1980). The present work is, unfortunately, a sad story about the negative effects of new trends in the ruling politics on the quality of education in Serbia, and thus on the country's chances for future development.

Contentious political moves in education in Serbia

In our previous work (Ivić & Pešikan, 2012), we presented relevant reform waves in Serbia after the country's major political changes in the year 2000, finishing the review with the adoption of the Strategy of Education Development in Serbia to 2020 (SEDS, 2012). This paper aims to show how education has been influenced by general policy in the country since 2012, which has deviated from SEDS and well-established and developed trajectories of education development in Serbia. We will not systematically present the changes that have occurred in education in the country but will focus on the analysis of the basic mechanism of transferring political influence to education, on the major changes that this has brought to education and the consequent implications of these changes on (reducing) chances for the country's development.

The 2012 elections brought a coalition of the Serbian Progression Party (a national-conservative and right-wing populist) and the Socialist Party of Serbia (a left-wing nationalist and populist political party) to power. The ruling coalition was dominant in the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia when the SEDS was adopted. Since 2012, in the sphere of politics, massive

changes have been made in relation to the development of the country and its democracy: centralisation of power; marginalisation of democratic institutions and practice; complete control of media; instead of investment in research and development (as emphasised in the SEDS and the action plan for its implementation) the main strategy is encouraging foreign investment in companies with a low technological level; providing economic incentives to foreign ICT companies while killing domestic capacities and encouraging a new wave of 'brain drain' (i.e., the departure of young educated professionals from the country) and similar. All this has had a significant impact on education, either direct (such as favouring a dual model of vocational education as a priority in education) or indirect (non-investment in science and higher education leads to a reduction in the quality of the workforce, less innovation and weaker international competitiveness of the country; or proven plagiarism of doctoral theses of some politicians in high positions destroys basic academic values, such as honesty and integrity, and ruins the reputation of higher education in society³, and confirms the practice of political employment, and similar).

The spirit of new political trends in Serbia is embodied in **the package of educational laws** (or their amendments) adopted from 2017 onward.⁴ These include the Law on the Education System Foundations⁵, the Law on Preschool Education, the Law on Primary Education, the Law on Secondary Education, the Law on Dual Vocational Education and Training, the Law on Textbooks, the Law on Higher Education, Law on Adult Education, Law on the National Qualification Framework, Law on Educational Inspection, Bylaw on Students Assessment in Primary Education, and the Bylaw on the Continuous Professional Development of Teachers. The changes were explained by the need to harmonise the relevant laws with SEDS 2020, as well as other regulations in the field of education, personal data protection, and public sector funding. Unfortunately, the reality is that the spirit of the new laws and the novelties they brought into education is quite contrary to the trends, intentions, and solutions elaborated in the SEDS 2020. This is reflected in the way these laws were drafted and the nature of the measures they adopted.

3 Despite the rhetoric that accompanied the enactment of the new law that the Law on Higher Education wants to increase the relevance of HE considering economic and social aspect; acquire functional knowledge and competences.

4 The set of new laws in education is published in the Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia 88/2017.

5 The law that regulates the basics of pre-school, primary, secondary, and adult education.

Key characteristics and implications of the adopted measures

The adoption of the new laws established new education policy and practices, changing the needed modern education trends into the means of greater political influence. Such large measures and the rather radical proposals they contain usually are based on some new education policy. In this case, this general concept is implicit (or is hidden), not explicit; therefore, it was necessary first to analyse all these individual measures and examine them as a whole, in order to decipher their general meaning (Education Forum, 2017). Based on such an analysis, our goal is to illustrate their intentions, the meaning of the adopted measures and their consequences on key examples.

The way the new laws were drafted

The work on the package of educational laws from 2017 was characterised by the following:

- Non-transparency: there is no data on the working groups that drafted these proposals (the structure of working groups was a secret, it was not possible to know who the members of the working groups are and what their expertise is, by what criteria they were selected, as well as the transparency of their work; frequent changing of working group members);
- Non-participatory work in isolation:
 - None of the institutions important for education (National Education Council of the Republic of Serbia; National Council for Vocational and Adult Education, and National Higher Education Council of the Republic of Serbia, trade unions, higher education, and research institutions) was involved in the preparation of new measures;
 - the content of the proposal could not be obtained publicly until the beginning of the public hearing;
- Formalism: the necessary democratic procedures have been formally respected, but essentially their meaning has been acted out: participants in the hearing could communicate their objections online with prior identification, which, with good reason, was perceived as a form of pressure on the participants in the hearing; extremely short deadlines for public hearings (deadlines were even shorter because it was not easy to find a proposal and read it); the discussion on the legal proposals was limited by the fact that the form for submitting objections asked for a specific article of the draft law to which the objections refer, which excluded the discussion on the general spirit and concept of the draft law;
- Partial approach: Instead of a comprehensive and balanced approach to

education, partial problem solving, isolated and without a ‘big picture’ in mind, without insight into the process of solving other issues and at other educational levels;

- No general conception explained and publicly communicated: There is no general conception or strategy for the development of education behind these new solutions; it was not elaborated and explicit;
- Non-systematic and absent internal compliance: without an explicit general conception of education, the selection of educational priorities were without a substantiated basis, selected on some other (political) reasons (e.g., dual education as a priority instead of the declared priorities in the SEDS, see later in the text);
- Chaotic: Practical solutions are neither interconnected nor based on theoretical approach and empirical evidence (for example, there was no concept of changes (much less reform) of general high school (gymnasium), changes in curricula were introducing for each grade separately, without a general picture, and the concept of graduation examination (*Matura*) was prepared before these changes and without an idea of their natures).

The preceding may sound like harsh statements. However, if we imagine a situation in which the needs and ideas of the leading political parties in the country should be implemented through education, then each of these characteristics suits the context well and becomes comprehensible. If we keep in mind the etic vs emic approach⁶ (Murphy, 2018), what happened in Serbia from 2012 to 2020 indicates that educational changes in the meantime have been conducted in accordance with an etic approach (Ivić, 2001; Ivić & Pešikan, 2012), the changes have been led (or dictated) externally and imposed on the education system. Thus, the way the new laws were drafted is just one of the manifestations of the translating the politics into education policy, the next, essential manifestation is the nature of the measures adopted by the new laws.

Centralisation of the education system

Changing the roles of the most important national institutions. A crucial mechanism of transferring the new governing policy to education was changing the roles of the most important national institutions in defining and

6 In 1954, linguist Kenneth Pike first introduced the terms ‘etic’ and ‘emic’. More recently, these two terms have been adopted to describe two distinguished approaches for understanding human social behaviors: emic: from within, and etic: from the outside. The etic tends to study behavior from outside a particular system. In contrast, the emic tends to study social behavior from inside the system (Pike, 1967, p. 37).

implementing education policy: the National Education Council of the Republic of Serbia (for preschool, primary, general secondary and arts education) and the National Council for Vocational and Adult Education. The adoption of the new laws has substantially changed their status and competencies: first, the procedure for their constitution and the structure of their members, and secondly, their role, the nature of their work. Previously their members were representatives of the stakeholders elected by the National Assembly; now, the minister submits a list of candidates to the government, which elects them. This reduced the independence of these bodies and enabled a greater impact of politics on education. Their role has changed from that of a decision-maker to an advisory body for a minister. Previously, they had much more professional autonomy, and they were the body that made the relevant decisions in education. For example, the National Education Council of Serbia was established in 1885; until 2017 (even during the socialistic one-party system), it was an independent educational body that made the decisions in education, among others as follows:

- determining: the course of development and improvement of the quality of preschool, primary, general secondary and secondary arts education; general and special achievement standards; competence standards for teachers, preschool teachers and their professional development; competence standards for managing directors; quality standards for textbooks and teaching tools; standards for the conditions for delivering special programmes in the field of preschool education; institution operation quality standards; the need for new textbooks;
- adopting: the fundamentals of the preschool education programme, curricula and syllabi for primary, general secondary and secondary arts education, part of the curriculum and syllabus for vocational secondary education and adult education (pertaining to general education subjects), and the fundamentals of the programme for early child development and care (EDC).

Thus, the competencies of these professional institutions are transferred to the minister, the ministry, or the government, which are political entities. This completely suppresses competence as a basic criterion in determining the holders of competencies. The great danger that follows from that is even greater politicisation of even purely professional educational measures.

As we have said, these national bodies were previously independent of the ministry and were a control mechanism for the implementation of education policy. With the new laws, the independence and professionalism of these bodies are reduced, as is the professional autonomy of schools and teachers. The

new education policy and governance could be characterised as highly centralised and completely regulated by the Ministry of Education of Serbia (MoES). With this top-to-down approach the role of the MoES is strengthened (i.e., the governing policy). The professional autonomy given to schools and teachers by the set of educational laws from 2017 is negligible, because the MoES makes all key decisions, especially regarding admission, curriculum, school management, employment of teachers and principals, service contracts and financing. On the one hand, the state professes a desire to professionalise teaching, and on the other, it constricts responsibilities attached to teachers' roles through the laws.

The fact is that an education system under centralised circumstances undermines the role of school and teacher and, consequently, the quality of education (Brooks, 1991; Erss, 2015; Gerrard & Farrell, 2014; Griffin, 1991). In a centralised school system, the ministry of education treats all schools as similar for control purposes, and there is little interest in understanding specific school cultures and supporting teachers' professionalism. Such an approach affects the initiative of teachers, and they feel far less professional in this system.

Teachers in such systems are beginning to feel that they are trusted neither to develop or select curriculum nor to teach it appropriately. This message is rather disheartening for many teachers since academic freedom and autonomy are two of the precious few jobs satisfiers which offset for them a multitude of dissatisfies, such as the perceptions of relatively low pay, inadequate working conditions, misbehaving students, critical parents, and a general lack of public support.' (Brooks, 1991, p. 153).

'In this de-skilled model of teaching [...] the teacher becomes little more than an assembly-line worker, performing mechanical tasks' (McNeil, 1988, p. 335), instead of their full active participation in the decision-making related to the implementation of an innovative curriculum (Ben-Chaim et al., 1994).

The literature indicates that teacher has a critical role in the implementation of the curriculum in the classroom (e.g., Fullan, 2001; Roehrig & Kruse, 2005; Roehrig et al., 2007). The teacher's perception of their role as specified in the curriculum affects the way they translate the curriculum into practice. The shift towards centralisation means a decreasing of local responsibility and freedom, particularly for the professionals (i.e., teachers and school leaders) to choose the best methods to attain the centrally formulated goals. Teachers think that the centralised curriculum attributes a strict role to them and views them as a presenter in the classroom (Kaya et al., 2012). Thus, progressive educational changes are significantly threatened. A change, an improvement of

teaching and learning process has to be initiated, planned, and implemented at the local level, and to involve educators in that process in such a way that they feel respected and that they are ownership of changes in school (Fullan, 2014; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2015). If teachers have an opportunity to influence the process of teaching and learning, then teachers and schools do matter for students, they do make a change in student's life, and how a student performs and feels. Schools and their teachers can actually make a difference not only for student cognitive performances but also for a wide range of students' social-emotional outcomes, including student school behaviour, interest in school, self-concept and education aspirations. Differences in school average performances represent a bit more than 30% of the total variance in student performances, irrespective of the subject domain, on average across countries and economies participating in PISA and TALIS (OECD, 2021). A teacher who is not a competent and autonomous professional cannot educate his/her students to be critical thinkers and responsible decision-makers (Ivić, et al., 2003; Ivić, 2008; Pešikan, 2020). Principals are an important factor who influence the quality of the school work and students achievements. The procedure of election of the school principal is 'slightly' changed by the new laws. Based on the list of all candidates who meet the conditions and proposal for the election of the principal, the minister *elects* the principal of the institution and makes a decision on his appointment (Article 123 of the Law on the Education System Foundations), instead of the previous solution in which the ministry *approves* the school proposal for the election of the principal. Here, the avenues open for greater political influence on the work of the school and teachers, '[...] for indoctrination and for imposing obedience. Far from creating independent thinkers, schools have always, throughout history, played an institutional role in a system of control and coercion' (Chomsky, 2017, pp. 27–28).

Insufficient independence of the National Accreditation Body. The National Accreditation Body was established by the Law on Higher Education 2017 (LHE 2017) as an independent agency for quality assurance in higher education to be harmonised with the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and to become a member of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). Within the ENQA report from 2018, the connection of the Commission for Accreditation and Quality Assurance (in Serbian: KAPK) with the National Higher Education Council of the Republic of Serbia (NHEC) and the MoES was analysed in detail. The fact that KAPK does not have its own bank account and depends on the administrative and financial services of the ministry is recognised as a limiting factor for planning, management, and efficiency in the work of the Commission. In the period after this ENQA report, the NAB

was established⁷ as an independent legal entity for accreditation and quality assurance of HE in Serbia that has its own bank account and would provide its own financing (not yet realised), independent of the MoES. The ENQA report from 2020 (ENQA Agency Review, 2020) pointed out that although NAB was granted the status of an independent legal entity, its independence is not fully clearly described in the LHE 2017, nor in the standards adopted by the NHEC, nor in the NAB's Statute. Concern was expressed about the fact that the ministry appoints seven members of the NHEC and (through the NAB Steering Board) all seventeen members of the KAPK, which does not fully ensure that there is no government influence on the work of the KAPK and its subcommittees (Pešikan & Parojčić, 2020). Also, a list of reviewers is selected by the NAB Steering Committee on the proposal of the NHEC. Concerns were reiterated, as expressed in previous ENQA reports, that the NHEC should not be in charge of establishing the KAPK at the same time and be the body to object and appeal against KAPK decisions. It was commented that the existing practice is not in line with the practice of other European agencies and that it harms the independence and integrity of the central body of NAT. Of particular concern was the possibility that, under the current appeals procedure, the NHEC's position would prevail over a decision made by the KAPC. It was concluded that it is necessary to additionally support the independence of the work of the NAB (Pešikan & Parojčić, 2020). Therefore, the NAB was established as an independent institution, but the NHCE has a key influence on its work, and through it, the MoES and the minister - because it has become advisory body to the minister.

Changing priorities in education in Serbia

The package of laws passed in 2017 also includes a completely new law, the Law on Dual Vocational Education and Training. Dual vocational education and training refers to work-based training: 'The student attends school and learns through work with the employer, in accordance with the qualification standard and the curriculum' (Article 9 of the Law). 'The scope of learning through work is at least 20%, and at most 80% of the total number of hours of vocational subjects, in accordance with the appropriate curriculum.' (Article 6 of the Law). For the 2019-2020 school year, 2,533 students were enrolled in the first grade of secondary school (84% of places filled), while the total number of students was 7000. The total number of dual educational profiles is 37, the number of secondary vocational schools in the dual system is 104, while the number

7 The Government's decision no. 02-371/2018-1 as of January 31, 2018 regarding to the establishment of the National Accreditation Body, the *Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia*, No. 9, dated February 2, 2018.

of interested companies in the process of accreditation is 880.

Here, with a known employer, students are “learning” about real work, acquiring the knowledge that a particular employer needs, and who will provide them with jobs after graduation. But what if the employer fails? Or the technology changes? Then follows retraining, new learning, courses... In schools designed in such a way, students do not really acquire any knowledge, but rather more instruction, skills and routines needed to perform certain jobs currently required in the job market.’ (Šuvaković, 2019, p. 29).

When looking at MoES’s activities in relation to everything else, it is obvious that dual education has become a priority of education policy. Why is this a problem? The introduction of dual education is not a problem in itself, because this form of education is valid. The problem is, first of all, that too much importance has been given to this marginal form of education (that has no developmental character) under political pressure (Šuvaković, 2019). The adoption of this law was accompanied by extremely extensive promotional activities and great efforts were invested in persuading students to enrol in this type of secondary education. Second, dual education as the priority in the education policy is not in line with the strategy even with the measures for improving vocational educational training (VET) that it envisages. The future development of the country relies on the validity of the priorities chosen for the following decade. The strategic documents see quality higher education as the country’s main development resource (SEDS, 2012). Like all educational documents in the developed world, SEDS insists on the longest possible (measured by the number of years of schooling) and the highest quality education. The focus of SEDS is on serious reform of high schools as a way to develop and nurture the country’s future intellectual and cultural elite (SEDS, 2012). Only that elite can help keep Serbia from being a backward, developing country. The share of ‘smart’ jobs in global development and economic prosperity and the share of classic industries or physical jobs is incomparable. For example: job projections predict continued growth in professional, business, and scientific services sectors, including computer systems design and related services as well as management, scientific, and technical consulting services. The manufacturing sector is projected to lose 444,800 jobs, the most of any sector over the next decade. This sector also contains 12 of the 20 industries projected to have the most rapid employment declines. Factors contributing to the loss of manufacturing jobs include the adoption of new productivity-enhancing technologies, such as robotics, and international competition (U.S. Department for Labor, 2019, p.5). Most of the projected employment growth will be in jobs that require some kind

of higher education. In this light, the demand for raising the level of education of citizens and increasing higher education in the country is quite justified and means a completely different priority of education policy from dual education.

With the dual model of vocational education, the role of the Chamber of Commerce in education has been strengthened. The manner of allocating students in dual educational profiles is prescribed by the minister in cooperation with the Serbian Chamber of Commerce (Article 7 of the Law on Dual Education). Representatives of the Chamber of Commerce are also members of the Management Board of the NAB. The intention is good: strengthening the connection between higher education and the needs of the country's economy. The MoES declare that higher education need to 'connect with the economy', the need for some studies will be decided on the basis of market demand for particular professions, that 'human capital' must be trained to contribute to economic growth, the competitiveness of the country in the world, increasing the employment rate, creating new jobs, and similar. However, that is just one of the purposes of education. Global capitalism has placed education at the forefront of national competitiveness, and governments have created education policies primarily designed to serve the needs of the market. Certainly, enabling the young generations to earn a living and support the economic development of the country is a necessary part of education but not its only purpose and goal (Pešikan, 2020, p. 445). Such education dehumanises young people, quantifies their 'value' in economic terms and ignores the multidimensionality of their needs as evolving social and emotional human beings who, in partnership with critically enlightened teachers, have the capacity to be a factor in their destiny (McGregor, 2009).

Uzelac points out that 'the Bologna system' reduces man to *homo economicus*, and that 'the principle of appreciating knowledge as knowledge no longer rules, but only practical application'. Or, as Chomsky nicely put it: 'In the early stages of education, they prepare you for a social life where you need to understand the need to support government structures, primarily corporations - business classes.' (Chomsky, 2017, p. 29). The competency cited is not the only one that has been declared compulsory in secondary education in Serbia but it can be said to be crucial for the pro-systemic neoliberal socialisation of high school students. (Šuvaković, 2019, p. 18).

Digitalisation of education in Serbia: Yes, but for what purpose?

In Serbia, it seems that digitalisation has been introduced more as a fashion (as a tribute to the spirit of the times), and many of the initiatives (e.g., the creation of digital classrooms, the preparation of digital textbooks, and the

digital school diary) are not guided by a clear insight into the goals of digitalisation, what problems in education we are trying to solve with it, what the advantages of digitalisation in education are. More importantly, Serbia does not have enough experts in the application of digitalisation in education, and digitalisation promoters are not aware of the real risks of it (Ivić, 2019). Recent research findings on the effects of learning in online environments (LOE) are inconsistent and contradictory,⁸ so the application of LOE was carrying out carefully and reasonably in education in developed countries, mostly in higher education. The progressive integration of technology into schooling includes the following: in the lower grades of primary school, priority should be given to direct encounters of children with the world and other living beings and the use of simple technological tools in the classroom; computers and other virtual learning environments should be gradually introduced into the curriculum in the older grades of primary and secondary school; in higher education, digital technologies should be given a prominent place in the learning process and in later years significant time should be devoted to helping students develop the technical skills they will need when they graduate (Desrochers & Gentry, 2004, p. 572). The present paper is not the place to analyse the process of digitalisation in education in Serbia, but in light of the above, measures that should be mentioned include the introduction of the compulsory subject of Informatics from the 1st grade of primary school or programming from the 3rd grade of primary school; without providing information on the assumptions on which these innovations are based or on what preconditions need to be met and the like.

Without going into detail, in the context of this paper, we want to point out one simple fact: that the process of digitalisation of education in Serbia is not managed by experts in education, education policy, or improving the quality of teaching and learning. The centre for the management of the digitalisation process in education is not in the MoES but in the Prime Minister's Office. Hence, at the cabinet of the prime minister creates activities in this area and makes decisions that should be implemented by certain bodies in the Ministry of Education (MoES). Thus, an important issue of education policy that is closely related to the quality of education is addressed in a political rather than an educational context. Even if the prime minister had highly competent advisers, experts on these specific issues (and there are none), they would not be able to replace the system (i.e., the Ministry of Education), which would have to be authorised to create and implement education policy. Thus, digitalisation in education in Serbia is carried out according to political and not educational needs.

8 e.g., see: Bates, 2004; Boulton, 2008; Ivić, 2019; Law et al., 2008; Lin, 2018; McCutcheon et al., 2015; Means et al., 2013; Nguyen, 2015; Ni, 2013; Pešikan, 2020.

Conclusion

It was necessary to make changes in education during the social transition because education can be a catalyst for the social change and the development of both individuals and countries. Precisely because of its role in the development of society and the state, education must not be a place for the implementation of politically motivated measures. In this paper, we have endeavoured to show the main mechanisms and ways in which the governing politics in Serbia is implemented through education. The new important trends in politics (such as centralisation of power; marginalisation of democratic institutions; encouraging foreign investment in companies with a low technological level, etc.) have been transferred to education by adopting the new educational laws (2017). Serbian education has been seriously affected by key characteristics and implications of the adopted measures resulting, among others, in the centralisation of the education system; changing the role of the most important national institutions in defining and implementing education policy, reducing their independence and professionalism, and strengthening the role of the ministry; and changing priorities in education in Serbia. The shift towards centralisation in education has many implications, and one important is the decreasing of responsibility and professional freedom of teachers. The professionalism of teachers is, in fact, the empty rhetoric of policy-makers. They are calling for the greater professional status of teachers; however, there has been an increasing tendency of the legislation and education policy to limit the decision-making scope of teachers, thereby diminishing their professional status. This fact is undoubtedly to the detriment of the quality of education, and the only question is how severe that damage will be.

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