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EFFECTIVENESS AND USEFULNESS OF EDUCATION AS SOCIOLOGICAL CATEGORIES

Summary

In the article, an attempt has been made to conceptualize the problems of effectiveness and usefulness of education by examining the quality of teaching from an operational perspective. The effectiveness is understood as a level of attainment of educational objectives being related to the social functions of education; the usefulness is defined as the benefits of realization of these functions to individuals and groups. Effectiveness and usefulness, when treated as aspects of the quality of education, are placed in an evaluative context consisting of: the education objectives, social actors interested in training and their expectations, the normative sphere (with respect to education problems) as well as areas, directions and methods of assessment.

Keywords: effectiveness of education, usefulness of education, quality of education, social functions of education

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The effectiveness of education is the degree to what the objectives of an educational project are achieved. Formulation of educational goals with specific characteristics (type, level, nature and intensity of changes in awareness, habits, etc.) presents a separate sphere of problems, well described in theory, from the classical concept of Bloom's [1956], but in educational practice in general handled formalistically and in educational policy, especially concerning higher education, dominated by general pedagogical slogans, ideological declarations, full of good will postulates of wishful thinking, the viability and the actual implementation

of which are not assessed on the basis of empirical evidence [Szczepański, 1971, 1976; *Strategia rozwoju...* 2009]. Educational goals, in theory, should be formulated rationally, based on objectivized diagnosis of social needs and in accordance with the logic of the functioning of that part of social life to which the specified educational process refers. In practice, objectivized diagnosis of educational needs is very difficult to obtain, if at all possible. Allegedly objectivized diagnoses of learning needs are either based on incomplete data or express an ideology of a group which pursues its own interests, or are simply an expression of the dominant education ideology (sometimes referred to as an educational paradigm). Moreover, all or some of these factors occur simultaneously. It must be remembered that appropriate modifications of the educational objectives (in other words, the manipulation of these objectives) can result in increasing or decreasing the education effectiveness, as well as make its measurement easier, less complicated – or more difficult, more complex. The selection, accuracy and reliability of the measurement of the degree of achievement of the objectives is another group of problems, also susceptible to the non-substantial influence and various manipulations.

An important concept applicable to the assessment and description of the educational system and the implementation of any plans of change in this system is the general category of usefulness, colloquially understood as the property of benefiting, being practically applicable, or being needed for something. Generally speaking, it can be said that it is the ability to meet a certain need. In the social sciences (primarily in economics) usefulness is defined more precisely as the efficacy, or as the satisfaction gained by an individual as a result of the consumption of a commodity, of attaining the objective pursued or of choosing a particular action [Marshall 2004: 413].

The usefulness of education consists in various benefits to social actors (individuals or groups), potentially or actually interested in educating.

It is worth noting that both in the ordinary sense as well as in the socio-economic definition, the usefulness of some process, action, phenomenon or a state of affairs may be a particular aspect (also a consequence of) the effectiveness of such process, action, phenomenon or state. Provided that certain conditions are met, the usefulness can therefore be regarded as a practical verification of effectiveness. This also applies to the sphere of education, whose effectiveness has been defined above as the degree of achievement of pre-formulated educational objectives, while one of the goals of most general nature and essential importance may be providing pupils (students or learners) with the knowledge

and skills which are useful and, in particular, capable of bringing specific benefits in professional practice.

The sociological meaning of the concepts of effectiveness and usefulness of education consists, generally speaking, in making more realistic the description and making easier the analysis of how the system of education is fulfilling its attributed social functions.

Views on the role of education in a society are derived from a wider system of beliefs about the nature of social reality, therefore, various authors suggest slightly different sets of social functions of education [see eg. Spencer 1979: 404–407; Goodman, 1997: 201–203; Ballantine 2001: 29–57]. However, several functions of higher and postgraduate education can be reconstructed.

a) *Socialization function*: learning how to be a productive member of society (including groups such as professional and socio-professional). This function is realized in particular through:

- transferring the elements of culture (civilization) in the form of the so-called general knowledge,
- transferring and, consequently, internalizing certain values,
- social integration (including, for example, integration within socio-professional groups),
- determining social position, in particular through its reproduction (this also applies to the position in the socio-professional group); establishing social relationships with others,
- enforcing specific rules in the process of social control.

b) *Selection and training function* (situating individuals in specific locations of the socio-professional structure, providing qualified employees to social subsystems). This function is implemented through formal processes of transfer, acquisition, preservation and improvement (refreshing) of the professional competence (appropriately selected elements of knowledge, skills and attitudes).

c) *Certification function* associated with the importance attributed to formal diplomas or certificates of completion of schooling cycles. Some sociologists of education (particularly the supporters of the theory of conflict) note that education – especially higher and postgraduate level – is becoming more commonly considered as a need or necessity of more social than individual-development nature. In the Anglo-American sociology, attributing particular importance to formal qualifications is defined as credentialism, to emphasize that the evidence, certificates, these “credentials” certifying a certain level or type of education are often a prerequisite for employment, regardless of whether any actual skills and

knowledge are behind them and whether the knowledge and skills acquired in the training are really necessary to perform the job.

d) *Innovation and development function.* Introducing changes, especially innovative ones, is a widely expected function of education. Sociologists emphasize that actual implementation of the innovative features can only be expected of higher education (although such expectation is often futile, especially in our country). The question of the innovative potential of different levels of education remains open, although various doubts prevail here, concerning real possibilities of carrying out this function by compulsory stages of education. Within the function of innovation and development, there are two, generally coexisting, consistent types of motivation to acquire education:

– autotelic, where participation in the educational process is treated as an end in itself (in special cases it may be a personal development, self-realization, self-improvement, etc.)

– instrumental, where the acquisition of education is a means to achieve other objectives, an economic investment, etc. (in particular, such an objective may be the change a specific section of social reality).

One of the functions of education emphasized in the book by Metta Spencer [1979: 404] is “babysitting” – taking care of children, dealing with them during a part of the day, allowing parents, mostly mothers, to carry out their work. The author intended that this function referred to the early stages of education, but it can be reasonably assumed that a similar function is fulfilled by the mass and marketized higher education (also, in part, on the postgraduate level). This function, this is occupying a large number of young people with educational activity. On the one hand, it postpones their entry into the labor market, not very receptive in the macroeconomic scale, and on the other hand, it increases a chance of more satisfying (for all) implementation of the above-mentioned selective/distributive function.

In this context, the effectiveness of education as a sociological category is the degree of achievement of the objectives optimized for their performance of different social functions of education, while the usefulness of education is the range, types and importance of different types of benefits associated with successful implementation of these functions¹. In the sociological sense, the effectiveness and usefulness of the education are used to describe and analyze the social real-

¹ The belief that it is possible to gradually achieve the ideal of a truly effective and useful education is a singular “founding myth” of the hundred-year-old egalitarian ideology of the repair of the social world through an increasingly universal access to all levels of education. For some time, this ideology has been successfully challenged by the cultural reproduction theories and theories which speak of the system of education reproducing the existing social structure. These

ity in the field of education, in particular, to identify discrepancies between the actual situation in this sphere and its various “ideal types”, in other words – the distance which separates the actual state of the educational system fulfilling its social function, firstly, from the ideal state in this respect, and secondly – the state established in the planning process of social change. It must be remembered that the education process applied to the community can be recognized in itself as a social intervention – a deliberate action aimed at introducing a relatively stable change in the fragment of social reality defined by the characteristics of this group, or as an activity conducive to other social changes, sometimes viewed in terms of social modernization [see Buchner-Jeziorska 2005].

One of the components of the sociological semantic field of the concepts of effective-ness and usefulness of education is their socio-technical meaning. It consists in the fact that during the educational process, foundations of a positive response to social changes can be formed, based on the results of scientific research and fulfilling, to a greater or lesser extent, the premises of the so-called “purposeful action procedure” [see Kubin 1978; Podgórecki 1996]. One of important socio-technical issues emerging in the field of sociology of education is therefore a question of whether and how effective training with specific characteristics is useful in the above meaning, that is, whether and what benefits it brings to social actors involved in the implementation of such changes and to these ones to which these changes relate.

It may be worth reminding a passage from a speech by the rhetorician Libianos in honor of Julian the Apostate, quoted in an article by Czapów and Podgórecki,: “it is difficult to issue useful laws because reason is needed for that purpose” [Czapów, Podgórecki 1972: 9]. One might add that useful laws are such which benefit those who observe them and / or the legislators. And further, the usefulness is the result of reason (wisdom?) but the wisdom (reason?) does not have to – although it may – strive after usefulness understood as a general benefit to all members of a society or some substantial part of it. Whether the reason – in a sense of the mind formed in the course of education – will have such striving is largely dependent on the socialization processes, mainly on education. Its effectiveness in achieving well defined objectives and its social usefulness are thus decisive in the success of purposeful actions undertaken by the initiators of social changes².

theories are supported by studies showing a relatively minor impact of educational system on eradicating social inequalities.

² It can be assumed that the objectives of education – from a general social perspective – may be more or less useful for different segments of a society; it is difficult to imagine the lack of any

Effectiveness and usefulness of education in the sense of bringing benefit to society as a whole or to certain segments of society are undoubtedly constitutive features of the purposeful action procedure in the sense that once has been given to this notion by Adam Podgórecki. Education, especially understood as a structured formal and administrative system of education should strive to maximize its usefulness in this very sense. It should also pursue the optimum level of realization of the targets set on the basis of a reliable diagnosis of needs and having taken into account the socially acceptable system of values (in a pluralistic society – socially accepted systems of values) – and thus to be as efficient as possible.

In its essence, the usefulness of education cannot be reduced to general statements about the social benefits from the existence of the educational system and the periodic³ participation of all members of the society in it. The main issue here is the question of the criteria of usefulness, and therefore also of its types, varieties or variants. Thus, a fundamental issue appears of different perception of the usefulness of education by different social actors involved. Also very important are the mutual relations between the usefulness of education and its effectiveness. All these issues have important socio-technical aspects in terms of consequences for actions undertaken in order to amend certain parts of social reality.

The process of education, or, in broader terms – the functioning of the education system divided into grades or levels of education, in particular into compulsory and optional education, paid directly and paid from the state budget, is an example of a highly complex macro-social process. The ability to meet a variety of conditions is vital for whether – if at all – this process is moving in the direction of maximizing its effectiveness and usefulness. Any reforms of the educational system should be analyzed from this point of view. In this context, the manipulative aspect of socio-technique should also be remembered, relating to the public opinion: in order to see particular kinds of education as useful (or useless), actions are sometimes undertaken, directed at shaping the stereotypical views. The usefulness of education can thus be persuaded, particularly the usefulness which is somewhat potential, expected and anticipated at the beginning of a particular educational cycle.

The issue of effectiveness and usefulness of education is, in fact, a particular approach to the analysis of education quality.

socially useful aspect of educational objectives, no matter how they might be formulated. It can also be expected that a completely ineffective educational cycle is only a rare pathology in education.

³ In recent concepts of education an increasing role of “life-long learning” can be seen, which may mean also a gradual increase in periods of participation by individuals in various forms of socially-controlled education.

In order to consider issues of effectiveness and usefulness of the educational system or of various educational projects (including broader reformatory projects in this area), one must be aware for whom, from whose (or what) point of view the educational system and projects carried out within its scope are effective and useful. These problems are the focused in the concept of the client of the educational system or cycle (the recipient of education services).

According to the general guidelines of ISO 9000, the most important measure of quality, including quality of education, perhaps more important than the concept of quality as maximizing and optimizing desired characteristics of an item or service, or as a stability of a set of parameters, is the customer satisfaction, seen as a compliance of the expectations of the client of an organization or institution with the characteristics of the object, or with the conduct and effects of the service [see for example: Brauer, Kühme 1999; Reu, Przybyła 1999; Hornowska 2004]. But while in the case of production, service (in the traditional, narrow sense) or administrative organizations, customer satisfaction is the criterion which is clear and relatively easy to operationalize in the form of indisputable indicators, then in the case of educational institutions or facilities the issue is more complicated because there is a substantial difficulty in precise and unambiguous determination who is the client of these institutions and whether or not the concept of a client is aptly applied here at all, and if so, whether it can be used as the sole one in determining the actors to which the categories of effectiveness and usefulness of education refer. These difficulties relate to both the facilities and institutions which directly carry out the state educational policy objectives as well as institutions providing educational services for a profit⁴. The theoretical reflection on issues of education quality predicted such difficulty for some time, treating it simply as the academic digression, and basically dismissing it entirely [see eg. Van Vaught 1994]. It was only the need and even – in the bureaucratic and administrative sense – the necessity for the submission of projects related to providing and assessment of the quality of training to the requirements of accreditation and certification bodies, operating under the standards established by the ISO (International Organization for Standardization), that attracted the attention to important practical questions. Who is the client of an educational or training institution? Whose satisfaction would be the criterion of the quality of education?

From the economic or commercial standpoint, the customer in the field of education is the one who pays for the educational cycle. This point of view is

⁴ The latter ones are, at least formally, controlled by the state and, at least in theory, also contribute to the implementation of educational policy.

adopted, be it exclusively or among others, in most dictionary definitions of the client. In the English language dictionaries and in English language marketing analyses, in addition to the term ‘client’ another, also semantically related, but hardly synonymous expression ‘customer’ is used (the purchaser, also the recipient of services). The differences here are rather subtle but nevertheless quite significant. In one of the dictionaries, a ‘client’ is “someone who pays for the service or advice from a person or organization” and the customer is “someone who buys goods or services from a shop, company, etc.” [*Longman Dictionary...* 1995]. According to another dictionary, a client is “a customer or someone who receives services [my emphasis, AB]”, while the ‘customer’ is “a person who buys goods or a service” [*Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* 2003]. Only some of the dictionary entries are a bit clearer in suggesting that paying for the service is not a necessary element of the definition of the client. In one of the American encyclopedia dictionaries, it can be read that the client (in the first sense), is “one for whom professional services are rendered” [*The American Heritage Dictionary ... 1980*]. Dictionaries also use sometimes a reference to the Latin origin of the word client: it is someone who is under the protection of someone else. Such a meaning is used in the marketing considerations, particularly in relation to small and medium business. In one of his popular Internet expert opinions, an American construction entrepreneur Josh Macmichael wrote: “Understanding the difference between a client and customer can affect the way in which you do business. Because clients tend to be people who seek advice, people tend to pay more attention to clients than they do customers. This is evident in the fact that some businesses actually have changed the name of their customer service department to client service. If you still aren’t sure on the difference between the two, consider the example of a lawyer and client. Although they are paying a lawyer for services, an individual is not considered a customer. This is because they are seeking advice and are under the lawyer’s protection. This is a good way to remember the difference between the two.” [Macmichael 2009]

One might ask, who is the client of an educational facility (or buyer of educational services) on the compulsory levels of education: whether it is the student, their family or rather the state (as the formal and administrative representation of the public)? This applies, of course, to the primary and secondary schooling. And who is the client of the non-compulsory forms and levels of education, funded by the state, including those which are part of the otherwise necessary implementation of the State functions relating to the defense and maintenance of public order? General considerations on the quality of higher and postgraduate

level of education⁵ suggest explicitly that the client is a student/learner because they are the direct recipient of educational services. Thus limiting the issues under consideration to this particular level of education, one can ask further – about the essence of educational services. What is the service which students / learners are provided and are they still clients, if they do not receive it in a certain, pre-established manner, or only receive a part of it? What is the content of the service, the product, of which they are recipients? The answer seems obvious: the knowledge, skills, attitudes – or a specific competence. And if someone expects also or exclusively something else? Are the competences transferred to such persons actually acquired, and if so, to what an extent are they adopted as a useful service in autotelic sense, and to what an extent in instrumental terms? Perhaps equally important, or even more important are other elements of educational services understood in an extended sense, as participation in the educational process (training cycle) – such, for example, as the prestige associated with the very fact of participation, the social composition of the participants, obtaining a diploma / certificate, the postponement of the responsibility for an individual adult life and, until recently, in the case of men – a shield against compulsory military service. Knowledge and skills do not count then, and / or are treated instrumentally in terms of processing and completing the next batch of material due to the goal of staying on the list of students with a perspective of at first distant and then ever-closer diploma / certificate, which is also considered generally as a means of securing employment, support and, possibly, prosperity. Instrumental use of this part of the educational services, which is recognized in the educational discourse as the most important, leads to apparent actions in relation with the service provider: learning, instead of being the acquisition of knowledge and skills bringing a relatively lasting effect becomes periodic at best, a short-term response to the requirements of formal and administrative requirements, a response often leaving no significant trace in the consciousness of the recipient of educational services. Which of course does not mean that participation in the educational cycle is useless for a participant. The problem is that the predicted and then experienced benefits may apply only to certain of the functions of education, often distorted in the popular reception by ideological stereotypes and myths appearing in the educational discourse.

⁵ The reflection on the quality of education at all levels of the educational system is mostly reduced to the demands of the development of infrastructure and equipment for educational institutions (and in fact to increasing the expenditure on education) as well as stereotypical, mythologized „improvement of effectiveness of education”, usually in a form of a series of demands resembling ritual incantations or clichés.

This is also the case of another social actor or stakeholder in educational transaction: educating institutions on higher and postgraduate level. If one of the foreground assumptions of such an institution is increasing the number of non-obligatory learners and students, usually accompanied by the lack of teaching staff – and this happens as a result of the universal commercialization of education at this level, the essence of educational services inevitably moves in the direction of activity only feigning the provision of substantially significant educational service⁶ and the care of its actual acquisition by the “clients.” The situation is not helped by the fact that the largely commercialized educational system and its educational facilities conduct their business “on demand”, which consists of different, sometimes conflicting expectations of various actors / stakeholders involved in the educational process.

From sociological point of view, an educational service can be recognized, firstly, as an activity aimed at achieving the objectives of training defined in a given training facility, or assigned to a given cycle or level of education. Secondly, as the activity of the educational system (and its various sub-systems) aiming at achieving social functions attributed to it⁷. Such approaches, as well as other viable alternatives, are not mutually exclusive; they may differ in scope, range or extent of the complexity of the cognitive or analytical perspective, but they still will be different aspects of education service as a conceptual construct. Another, very important issue is the content of educational services. Firstly, that is what pupils, students, learners (clients of a ‘business’ of education? buyers of an educational product?) are expecting from the educational system. Secondly, equally important, and also ambiguous is the content of the educational offer, or how (if at all) the objectives of education are formulated – in different contexts, at different levels or grades of the educational system as well as whether and to what an extent these objectives are achieved, or are likely to be achieved. It is also evidently important how expectations of „clients” of the educational system and the „service” obtained by them are related. Such relation brings the cumulative effect in the form of the so-called customer satisfaction syndrome.

⁶ Substantially significant educational service is defined here as the impact of an educational facility designed to make targeted, relatively permanent changes in the consciousness of people affected by such an impact.

⁷ Implementation of the various social functions of education is, to varying degrees, useful for different entities (and their types). The criteria of usefulness can be (and often actually are) different, even contradictory, and the domination and forced execution of one function sometimes brings negative consequences for the performance of other functions.

In the marketing and evaluation literature, customer satisfaction is defined simply as the evaluation of the act of acquisition and the consumer experience related to product, service, brand or company. Recent studies of this problem use the concept of cumulative customer satisfaction, defined as any previous experience with the product or service provider. This definition is closer to the expressions used in economic psychology and economy of prosperity, where customer satisfaction is synonymous with the concept of usefulness of consumption [see Johnson, Fornell, 1991; Johnson, Gustafsson 2000]. The usefulness of consumption is nothing but the benefits of owning some good or being the recipient of a service – for example, the recipient of educational services.

Narrow, economic and commercial definition of clients limits the perspective of the analysis in an educational context, in fact isolating it from the problems of social functions of education, in particular from the question of the functionality of the educational system and its components. Firstly, in such a sense, the pupil, learner or student is not a client (or is not the only client), if the cycle of education is paid by the state or its agency, structural fund, foundation or an NGO, or, as sometimes happens, an employer. Secondly, it is worth recalling the distinction and the mutual relationship between the concept of a client and the concept of a beneficiary. This is especially crucial in the situation where the benefits of a better education – more knowledge, new skills, well-formed attitudes, etc. – are made available not only to the person being educated but also other individuals or social groups. This occurs in a number of social subsystems, including the health care system⁸. A customer is someone who comes into the possession of a product (in particular one which is the essence of the service). A beneficiary is someone who benefited from the fact that such product came into the possession of a customer. Because of a specific benefit (or a specific set of benefits), a customer may be – but not always is – the beneficiary – the latter may be another social entity; there may also be no beneficiaries at all (lack of benefits of a particular type), their configuration may be different than originally expected, there may also be a situation of apparent benefits or different than assumed; there may be beneficiaries aware or unaware of certain benefits. The concept of a customer, even extended beyond its purely economic meaning, is far from enough in the context of education, especially taking into account the whole set of its differ-

⁸ The problem of this distinction deserves a separate, more extensive and in-depth discussion, particularly in the context of the educational market dominance of formalized standards and rules for the provision and evaluation of education recommended by official certification and accreditation bodies.

ent functions. The concept of a beneficiary is an important complement here, however, a broader, generalizing category is lacking, one which could be used in relation to the qualitative aspect of education, in particular its effectiveness and usefulness. The concept of the social actor interested in education may be such a category.

A social actor interested in education is a person, community or institution having specific expectations from the educational facility⁹, which uses its services and as a result has those expectations met, as well as the needs behind them, and/or receiving certain goods (benefits). If one could speak of the *satisfaction* of an actor interested in education (in the sense mentioned above), it would be usefulness understood as the perceived and / or experienced benefits resulted from the functioning of a particular cycle of education or a particular educational system. Such an approach goes far beyond the marketing perspective still dominant in the analysis of the quality of education (especially higher and postgraduate), limited to the relationship between the client (direct recipient of educational services) and service provider (educational facility) and adopting a simplified understanding of the satisfaction of the student as the current balance of positive and negative feelings associated with educational cycle.

In reference to each educational project a number of social actors can be identified, corresponding to the definition of the actor interested in education.

They are, therefore, firstly, those who directly participate in the educational enterprise as pupils, students or learners. Their satisfaction may not be the sole criterion for the quality of education, because of the variety of reasons for undertaking education and subjective goals involved. There is no doubt, for example, that some pupils, students or learners of graduate and postgraduate courses would be most happy if no specific requirements were directed at them, no exams expected to be passed nor different subjects to be completed, etc. and at the end of the training cycle they were handed diploma or certificate of graduation (completing an educational cycle) without any additional "obstacles".

Secondly, as an actor interested in activities of an educational institution can be considered a potential employer, more broadly – an institution which in the future will employ a graduate, or is currently employing such a student of postgraduate studies. Regardless of the operational difficulties in determining

⁹ Most expectations are not specified, explicit or at least semantically homogeneous; in fact, vagueness, amorphousness and a far-reaching stereotypical character is a soil nutritious for effective marketing actions. Some of the psychological aspects of the formation and dynamics of expectations and the associated ambiguity of the very concept are discussed by E. Hornowska (*op. cit.*, p. 125–126).

what the satisfaction of such an actor is and how it is manifested, it also cannot be regarded as the sole or main client a training facility. Employer's objectives are not always identical or consistent with the objectives of the graduate. Sometimes employer is guided by a particular understanding of self-interest, and is not always interested in someone educated in ways that are beyond his influence. In the case of postgraduate education quite often the employer is not interested in further training of his employees, or even is against it, despite existing regulations, recommending a favorable attitude in this respect [see Pogorzelska 2002].

Thirdly, a social actor interested in some educational activity (educational cycle) could be a specific professional circle whose prospective or current members participate in this activity. It is so on the assumption that such a circle actually exists and is capable in certain circumstances to articulate their expectations relating to the raise of qualifications of persons belonging to it and to feel any satisfaction if those expectations are met. However, this assumption is not always fulfilled, and what is defined as the professional circle is often a field of competition, in which a diploma or a certificate of graduation (including a postgraduate course) can be one of the tools.

Fourthly, as a social actor interested in a specific sphere of education can be considered entire sector, for which, at least in principle, a given education facility works. However, the size as well as structural and functional complexity of such an actor make empirical indicators of "system satisfaction" (a summative criterion for the quality of education in a given field) difficult to define and measure. In fact, their role is assumed by ratings and reviews mostly formulated by the *ad hoc* administrative and political demands. However, one can imagine an attempt to operationalize 'system satisfaction' in the form of a set of indicators relating to the raise of its efficiency¹⁰ (in particular efficiency of the part of the system known as human resources) as a result of the presence of people with certain educational parameters within the system. At this point attention should be paid to the fact that maximizing the number of people with the highest possible education of a particular type hardly ever is a prerequisite for increasing efficiency of performance, quite the opposite – it may cause disruption in efficiency mechanisms.

¹⁰ Efficiency is defined here in the praxeological sense which Tadeusz Kotarbiński gave to this concept: an action is efficient when it is (1) purposeful (purpose-directed), (2) using all actor's resources indispensable to attain the purpose, (3) using the resources in economic way (1970, p. 197–206).

Fifthly, a social actor interested in education is a society represented formally and administratively by the state, including various institutions, traditions, culture as a whole and its individual features or elements. Positive responses or impressions caused by the participation of specific individuals or groups in education, in this case are the hardest to grasp empirically due to the scope of any evaluation and the stretching in time of the nation-wide outcomes of educational macro-processes.

All this inspires to adopt a slightly different point of view – broadened and more complex, and thus more corresponding to reality – on what is the essence and the main criterion of education quality : the satisfaction of the actor interested in education.

The satisfaction of a particular, quite precisely defined client, while a sufficient criterion of quality in case of manufacturing products and providing services of consumable character, is not a sufficient criterion for educational services. They are clearly of investment character – independently on variations in types, causes and motives of investing in consciousness changes. Moreover, in the case of educational services, the criteria of quality (understood as the degree or level of satisfying the actor) may be different because of the need to meet the expectations of different actors interested in education. The “parameters” of these expectations would have to be determined only through arduous analyses taking into account many social circumstances – cultural, administrative, political, economic, etc. Indeed, any social actor interested in education formulates – directly or indirectly – a set of expectations, and therefore certain requirements to be met by educational system (or educational cycle). The expectations of various actors are common and sometimes coincide, but often differ greatly. Many of these expectations in a more or less conscious manner coincide, accumulate and undergo some modification in the minds of the people directly involved in the educational process, secondarily affect other interested actors and is reflected in the expectations formulated by them towards training institutions. In this way students (learners), through their actions, their satisfaction, which may be operationalized in evaluative studies in various ways, becomes a major medium through which one can try to evaluate the quality of education. Schematic illustration of these complex processes and phenomena is shown in Figure 1.

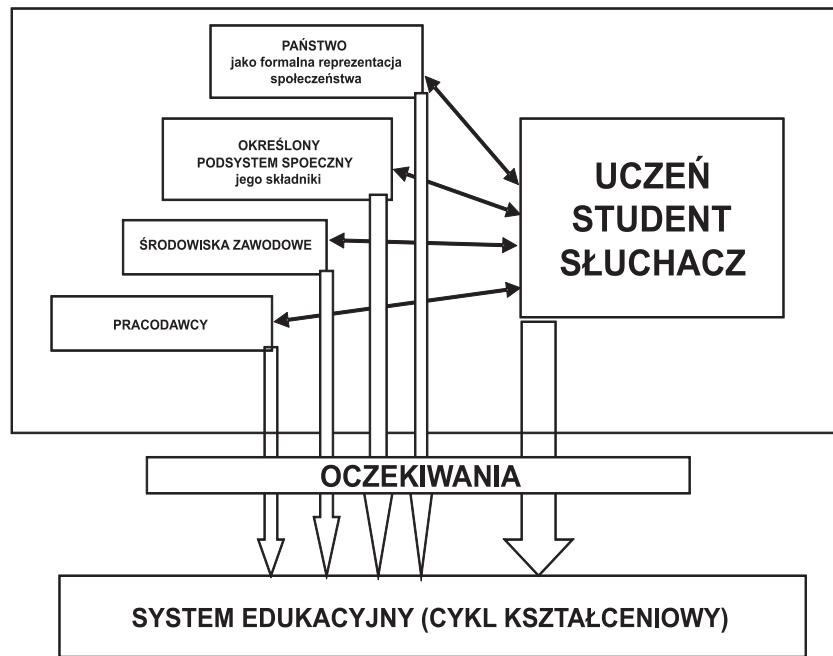


Fig. 1. Social actors interested in education on higher/postgraduate level

Quality, and therefore the quality of education can be understood differently and this is reflected in the literature of the subject [see e.g. Frazer 1992, Skrzypek 1999, Boczkowski 2001, Hornowska 2004, *Strategia rozwoju... 2009*]. In particular, the quality of education can be interpreted as its effectiveness, i.e. the extent to which educational objectives of a training facility, previously formulated on the basis of needs and expectations of actors interested in education, are achieved. Most frequently there is also the question of whether certain professional skills are transferred, developed, modified and refreshed in a way that maximizes the satisfaction of particular actors. As satisfaction is here a function of benefits perceived in relation to specific educational experiences, we are dealing here with another aspect of the quality of education – its usefulness. It is particularly important that mutual relations exist between these two aspects of education quality (Figure 2).

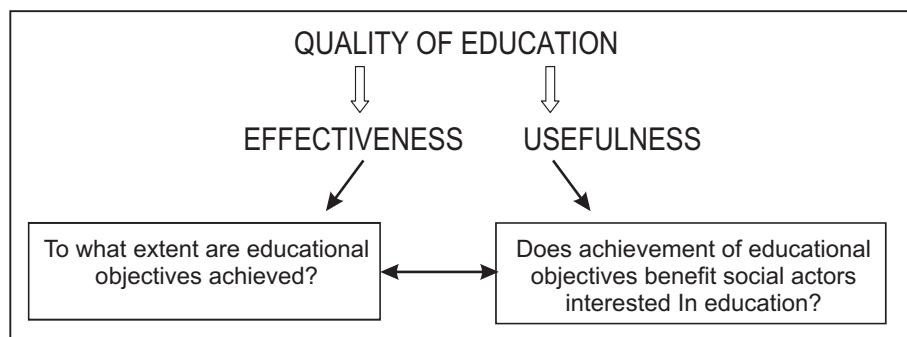


Fig. 2. General relationship between effectiveness and usefulness of education

The assessment of the education quality conceived in such a way can be carried out in three complementary dimensions or aspects – as is shown in Figure 3. Firstly, by checking how much consciousness of the participants of a learning process has been subjected to a desirable (consistent with the objectives of education and / or expectations of the actors interested) changes as a result of this process. Secondly, through the analysis of the positive (again – in line with educational objectives) aspects of professional careers of people educated, the point being, of course, to extract and identify those aspects which have their roots in an educational cycle completed by a given person or are at least indirectly related to that cycle. Thirdly, the assessment of the education effectiveness can be performed using evaluations, feelings and opinions of graduates after the completion of an educational cycle. The first of these evaluations concerns the effectiveness of education, the second – its usefulness, while the third – both effectiveness and usefulness of education.

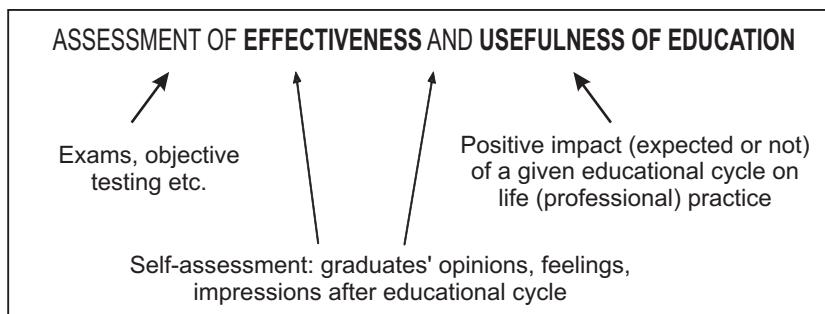


Fig. 3. Three ways to assess effectiveness and usefulness of education

Educational objectives are generally formulated by an institution offering education or by a wider educational system, taking into account cultural patterns, interests of the state, social expectations (expectations of social actors) – including direct participants in the educational process and their families, expectations of groups of people pursuing the interests of the educational system, the interests of academics, employers, etc. Which is not to say that there is a coincidence. Usually one of these options (one of the social actors) is dominant, while others are subordinate (or are subordinated) having a more or less unique background or reference systems. One can also imagine a dynamic, varying hierarchy of interests and related expectations.

Social actors interested in education always expect benefits – different in the case of different actors, often conflicting or mutually exclusive. The qualification of events or states as a benefit or no benefit may be different in the context of perceived education effectiveness. What is a benefit for one social actor – independently on the level of effectiveness – for another one may be an effective but useless realization of an educational objective.

The value may be, on the one hand, the achievement of specific education objective(s), and on the other hand – meeting certain individual or collective expectations. In this context a category of universal educational objectives can be suggested – the kind which should always be carried out regardless of the content and details of the educational process. These are changes (defined structurally, not generically) in consciousness of the educated actor. If these changes were implemented sufficiently, the training could be regarded as effective, regardless of acquired knowledge and practical skills characterized generically. An argument could be made that the achievement of the universal education objectives would make the educational process useful as well, in a similar universal dimension. Assessment of the education effectiveness should be performed in this context as well.

Both the goals and expectations may be formulated in terms of benefits. Moreover, regardless of its objectives (verbalized or not), education may bring some benefits, so the utility value of education should be taken into account – whether it brings or not the benefits of defined characteristics (expected or unexpected, unforeseen or foreseen, predicted or unpredicted). In order to determine the above, an assessment of education usefulness is made. Here, a category of the relative utility of education should be considered: some benefits (even those that are not seen as such in connection with specific perceptual conditions of the interested actor) arise or may arise from the participation in the educational process. Training may therefore be perceived as useless, despite the established

effectiveness and independently on usefulness perceived by another actor according to other criteria.

An assessment of the education effectiveness and usefulness is associated with „customer satisfaction”, i.e. the degree or the scope of positive assessment of learning outcomes by certain interested actors. This assessment also concerns coming up to the actors’ expectations connected with learning process, educational institution etc., generally formulated in terms of benefits. It is made by taking into account the degree to which expectations are included in the declared goals of an educational institution (before selecting its kind or specific type of training) as well as the extent of achieving these goals (meeting those expectations) during the educational cycle and as its result. The issue of assessing the usefulness comes into play as the main component of the satisfaction of an actor interested in education, if the question arises about meeting the expectations,. Education is (was) useful if it brings (brought) benefits, that is, if events or states of things occurred as its result, are (was) perceived/experienced as benefits. Of course, it also entails benefits unrelated to the formal (official) education program.

Directions, spheres and locations of the evaluation of the effectiveness and usefulness of education should relate in some, possibly precisely defined way to the purposes of education and expectations associated with it, which can be illustrated by the following example.

Postgraduate education (training) was effective because during its course an employee had to learn to do something he could not do before – and indeed this took place. However, such training is not useful to him¹¹, if he anticipated a salary raise in connection with it – because he did not receive it. If the purpose (or one of the purposes) of the educational process was to ensure higher wages for the persons educated, which in fact is a rare enough occurrence in the educational reality¹² one could speak of the ineffectiveness, or partial ineffectiveness. For

¹¹ Usefulness is always for someone, from some point of view, it is interpreted subjectively or inter-subjectively; effectiveness is associated with objective changes in a person who is (being) educated as well as in the effects of its action – although generally it is difficult to assess these changes.

¹² One can imagine a socio-technically oriented educational cycle – aimed at mastering the methods of negotiating raises or promotions in a workplace. In educational reality, it is realized in a quite specific manner in a form of psychological training course in assertiveness, negotiation etc., as well as trainings concerning specific behavior in the process of seeking work. In any way, effectiveness concerns the changes which have been caused by the education process in an educated person, while usefulness – whether the participation in the educational process and the possible (though neither necessary nor obvious) changes in an educated person brought, are bringing or can bring any benefits to either such person or another social actor.

the employer, such a training, if it was effective, is useful or not – depending on whether what the employee has learned the company (employer) needs or not, whether it benefits employer or not – of course in employer's own individual or collective assessment. It can be said that it is the society (professional environment, area of the economy) which benefits – because sum of skills has increased. But it is a controversial benefit in the sense that it sometimes boils down essentially to the optimistic interpretation of statistical data, because in fact those skills may not be needed by the society (including the economic sphere or a professional environment) – for example, there is no demand for specialists in the field. Thus, it may be an advantage / benefit of an apparent or virtual nature. But it is also the fact with a determined negative and positive meaning, with its own "useful" life as a social fact, present in the collective consciousness, in the public opinion, entailing a number of decisions, actions and consequences, especially important for the functioning of the educational system.

Basic mechanisms and circumstances of assessing the effectiveness and usefulness of education are presented in Figure 4.

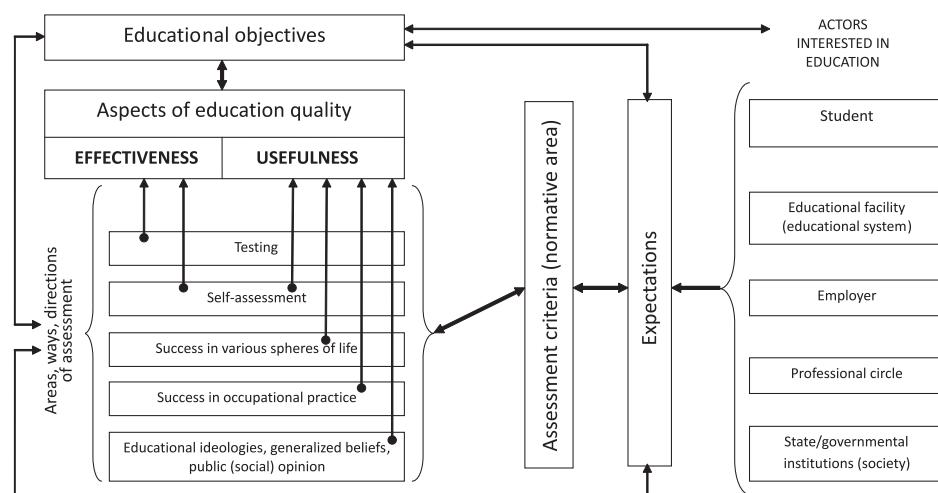


Fig. 4. Assessment (evaluation) of education effectiveness and usefulness

Arrows indicate the directions of interactions between:

- educational objectives (both declared and realized),
- effectiveness and usefulness (aspects of the quality of education),
- social actors interested in education,
- actors' expectations,

- assessment criteria,
- spheres, methods and directions of assessment.

1. Interactions between the objectives of education and its effects described in terms of efficiency and usefulness.

This type of interaction consists in the fact that, *inter alia*, the specific manner of formulating and implementation of the objectives of education affects the level of effectiveness (harder to achieve, more ambitious targets can cause lower effectiveness – with a fixed method of evaluation, uniform criteria, defined area in which evaluation is made and, of course, with a fixed inventory of resources and equipment of a training institution). Some ways of formulating objectives (e.g. a high degree of generality) and some methods of their implementation (e.g. emphasizing modernity or alterative character of didactics) favor such an interpretation of the level of effectiveness which is good (useful) for the interested actor. Certain formulations and the anticipated manner of realizing the educational objectives also influence the perceived usefulness – primarily as an incentive to engage in the education process in relation to the subjective assessment of the adequacy of that formulation to the expectations of the actor. All of it can also affect – in a secondary or complementary way – satisfaction of the actor resulting from his commitment in the education process.

The level or the degree of effectiveness and usefulness of education may strengthen or modify the objectives' formulation and implementation. Especially differences in the assessment of these two aspects of education quality (highly evaluated effectiveness with low evaluation of usefulness and *vice versa*) can lead to reflection on whether the objectives of education (of a definite system of education or educational cycle) are properly formulated – in line with the ideological and theoretical premises as well as the substantive needs.

2. Interaction of the objectives of education (the way they are formulated and implemented, their scope, level of generality, etc.) and actors interested in education with specific parameters.

Objectives can be formulated differently and / or modified because of the default preferences of a particular actor or they can be expected, and therefore suggested or inspired by one, several or all actors¹³. The social actors listed in the Figure 4 do not exhaust the list of possible actors interested in education – in analyzing the effectiveness and usefulness actors with other characteristics also can be taken into account.

¹³ Typically, not all actors are interested in education of a particular type, in a certain mode, a certain level, etc, thus, the term which should actually be used is: „potentially interested actors”.

Objectives formulated and realized in a certain way can affect what type of social actors are interested in educational process, cycle or project and to what an extent.

3. Each of the actors interested in education has expectations of the educational system, institution or facility – expectations of a more or less specific character. These expectations apply not only to the educational objectives explicitly formulated by an educational institution, but also to other elements of an educational offer.

The impact of mass media, the marketing of educational institutions, the functioning of public opinion are all conducive to unifying tendencies, however, the area of their specifics remains significant, perhaps becoming even more differentiated with the increasing number and diversity of educational offerings.

4. Educational objectives and expectations of interested actors remain in the constant relationship. Educational goals can be compatible (in varying degrees) or inconsistent with the predominant or common expectations of actors. In the case of low compliance, or lack thereof, the objectives of education are usually reformulated, there are also changes in realization. It must therefore be assumed that the expectations of interested actors may affect the educational objectives. The way in which these objectives are formulated and realized may affect the interested actors' expectations – clarifying, restructuring and modifying them. This might be when expectations are not very precise, vague, or if the educational offer in the part regarding the educational objectives is seen as more attractive than expectations.

5. Expectations and criteria of evaluation interact with each other. The general direction, type and degree of generality/detail of expectations affect the type of criteria used to evaluate the effectiveness and usefulness of education as well as the selection – conscious or not – of a particular system of norms as a reference system in these assessments.

Generalized evaluation criteria which are a relatively permanent element of consciousness (culture) of particular interested actors may regulate the expectations aimed at specific educational systems, institutions and projects.

6. Expectations of interested actors and adopted criteria of evaluation may affect the sphere¹⁴ and aspect of the quality of education in which the assessment is (or will be) made. In the case of a direct recipient of educational service – pupil, student or learner, applying both personalized, subjective criteria, as

¹⁴ Spheres of assessment can be distinguished in various ways, also differently than was done in Figure 4.

well as those more general, formed in public space – the assessment is made primarily in the sphere of life practice (including professional sphere of life) and sometimes in the field of educational self-assessment. These assessments relate primarily to the usefulness of education; effectiveness – recognized in connection to specific expectations – is only a prerequisite condition of usefulness. This does not mean that the direct recipient of educational service makes no evaluation of its usefulness in other areas, for instance in public discourse. Employers, due to the specifics of their expectations and criteria will locate their assessment in the area of professional practice. Institutions and educational facilities locate their assessments primarily in the field of tests and – in the case of universities and postgraduate education – procedures for assessing educational services by direct recipients. State institutions – primarily in the sphere of ideology, politics and propaganda (one might add – using mainly quantitative reporting).

But if for some reason it is known in advance in what area or what social or cultural context an assessment of the effectiveness and usefulness of education is (or should be) made, it may affect the conscious or unconscious choice of both broader normative references and more or less specific evaluation criteria.

7. Educational objectives (declared and implemented) and spheres or contexts in which the quality assessment is made mutually influence each other. Through assessments in particular areas (contexts) directions and types of changes, modifications and objectives of education may be indicated. Specific formulation of educational objectives and practice of their achievement may affect the sphere in which the results of education are to be primarily assessed as well as which aspects of education quality will dominate the assessments.

8. The assessment of the effectiveness and usefulness of education is affected by: declared and realized educational objectives, the characteristics of the evaluating actor (in particular, their expectations relating to the educational institution or project), adopted evaluation criteria, as well as spheres of reality which provide the context for evaluation. Especially the perception / feeling of the usefulness of education, defined through various benefits connected with a given educational system, institution or project, depends on the parameters which are included in Figure 4. Since the assessment of education results which contributes to the conditions of satisfaction of interested actor is not, or at least should not be carried out once or “once and for all”, the perception / feeling of the effectiveness and usefulness of education may vary with the change of a reference system, consisting in each case of various configurations of elements listed above, also changing themselves under the influence of social and cultural conditions.

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