

MODERN DIMENSIONS OF THE MONITORING IN SECONDARY EDUCATION IN TERMS OF DECENTRALIZATION

Rumyana Gyoreva
South-West University "Neofit Rilski"

Abstract. The article discusses the challenges facing the need for external evaluation - monitoring the transformation of Bulgarian school in modern, affordable and high quality in terms of decentralization. The emphasis is on achieving greater efficiency in the management of school organizations and improvement of the quality of education through the implementation of monitoring, evaluation and analysis and realization of assertive environment to support and encourage schools to improve the quality of education.

Keywords: monitoring, decentralization, effectiveness

Issues concerning the effectiveness of educational institutions and their modernization, and the reformation of the Bulgarian educational system have become more and more relevant in the last years. Moreover, it is expected that the Bulgarian school fulfills the European scholastic requirements. It's been spoken of humanization and democratization of education, autonomy of the institutions of the educational system, and of education which is oriented to the development of students' learning skills. Also, the main subjects of interest are the communication and teamwork, the evolution of talents and forming values and principles, such as respect for human rights and democracy, tolerance, solidarity, creativity, social awareness, responsibility, and the environmentally responsible behavior.

In reference to improving educational system's efficiency and to provide equal access to quality education, a number of strategic and program documents have been developed, both at national and at European level. "Europe 2020 strategy" sets as main priorities "Smart growth - developing an economy based on knowledge and innovation, sustainable growth - promoting a greener and more competitive, resource efficient economy, inclusive growth - promoting economy delivering high levels of employment, which creates conditions for social and territorial cohesion" (European Commission, 2010). The call for greater efforts through cooperation of all stakeholders draws up national reform programs, that helps the achievement of the main goals. In this context, in the National Reform The program's leading

directions are “increasing access to education for retention in the education system and to improve the level of education, improving the quality of education, increase knowledge and skills through lifelong learning” (National Reform Program -http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/nd/nrp2012_bulgaria_bg.pdf). Educational policies as part of the public policy are embodied in other national strategic documents: the National Strategy for Youth 2010 - 2020, the National Program for Youth (2011-2015), the National Strategy for Lifelong Learning 2014 - 2020 National Program for the development of school and pre-school education (2006 - 2015), Strategy for educational Integration of Children and Students from Ethnic minorities (2004-2015). The key messages in them are quality, efficiency, and cooperation. These concepts are directly related to the democratization of education, and the constant interaction between stakeholders and monitoring for development.

Over the past two decades after the fall of the totalitarianism in Bulgaria, the Bulgarian society had to radically reshape its structure and its cultural values. The policy of the Bulgarian government, priorities and direction for the development have a common platform - a transition to democracy and to a market economy. And this is so, as one of the relevant problems in school education is over centralized system and the lack of real decentralization, as the last one is thought to be introduced in the recent years. The centralized approach does not enable citizen participation and control over the most management decisions, neither it allows the system to be developed by conducting municipal and participatory educational policy.

Democratization of Bulgarian education is manifested in several ways:

- Decentralization of education.
- Increase spending on education.
- Improving the quality of education and its outcomes.
- Increasing openness of the system and the involvement of all stakeholders through the development of partnerships.

Decentralization of education is related to the democratization of governance through transfer of management functions and responsibilities from central to lower management levels of the education system. It is closely linked to the creation of autonomous institutions in the public education system, which govern themselves. During the period 2007 - 2013 a number of actions are undertaken leading in a certain way to the democratization of education through decentralization, but these actions have not yet made their maximum effect. Measures applied have their positive impact, but there are many problems that need to be addressed: outdated normative basis, filled with a lot of controversy and lack of new education law; poor quality of education and lack of standards to measure and manage accordingly; reducing the learning outcomes during the transition; outdated content, curricula, textbooks, which can lead to the formation of key competencies in students; limited autonomy of schools; outdated facilities and equipment that does not meet the current requirements for physical learning environment; insufficient motivation of human

resources in education; insufficient involvement of parents and communities in school life, etc.

The practice of the European Union shows that achieving efficiency in educational institutions is impossible without delegation of responsibilities and ensuring self – govern of the basic family unit - the school. This authority must be subject to certain performance standards which are controlled by the state.

Standardisation is a tool that can lead to solving existing problems in education. It allows you to set measurable goals that can lead to development in accordance with the specific internal features of institutions. Standardization and planning ensure that school organization is developing in line with the socio-economic realities and meets public expectations. Standards may relate to different elements of the education system.

To achieve higher efficiency of educational services, one of the standards that should be introduced is related to the monitoring, analysis and evaluation of the quality of operations and management of school organizations, and encourage and support the improvement of the activity through their planning based on identified deficiencies or further development of the established good practices, ie monitoring.

In Bulgarian dictionary monitoring is defined as observation, analysis and evaluation of a phenomenon, event and so on. (Bulgarian dictionary, 2001). Largely the term evaluation is part of monitoring, but may be considered separately in view of the fact that it focuses on results achieved - collection, processing and analysis of data on a phenomenon, activity, process.

Monitoring is an integral part of the management. It provides the base information needed to detect problems and identify corrective measures. It shows how the planned goals and objectives lead to development and where change is needed to ensure progress. It establishes present state, but also shows the projections of the future state. The analysis made in the monitoring activities in the educational systems allows following the progress of the planned activities and thus tracking the strengths and weaknesses, successful and unacceptable practices. As a result, by identifying measures can be ensured the achievement of the desired goals of the organization, its efficiency and care for the student.

On one hand, it could be used monitoring of the overall activity in an educational institution, as well as individual activities, indicators of desired and achieved results, the effects that have planned activities on stakeholders and so on.. On the other hand, monitoring can be done at the national (macro) level, regional or municipal (meso) level, and institutional (school, micro) level.

After carrying out comprehensive monitoring, differentiated approach can be used , ie focused or thematic external checks on certain processes or specific areas of management and/ or training. Effective management of any school organization is impossible without timely, objective and sufficiently complete information about

its condition - internal and external monitoring. Good schools can ensure the quality of education they offer, and if they take responsibility for its management through systems of internal control and self-esteem (Fig. 1).

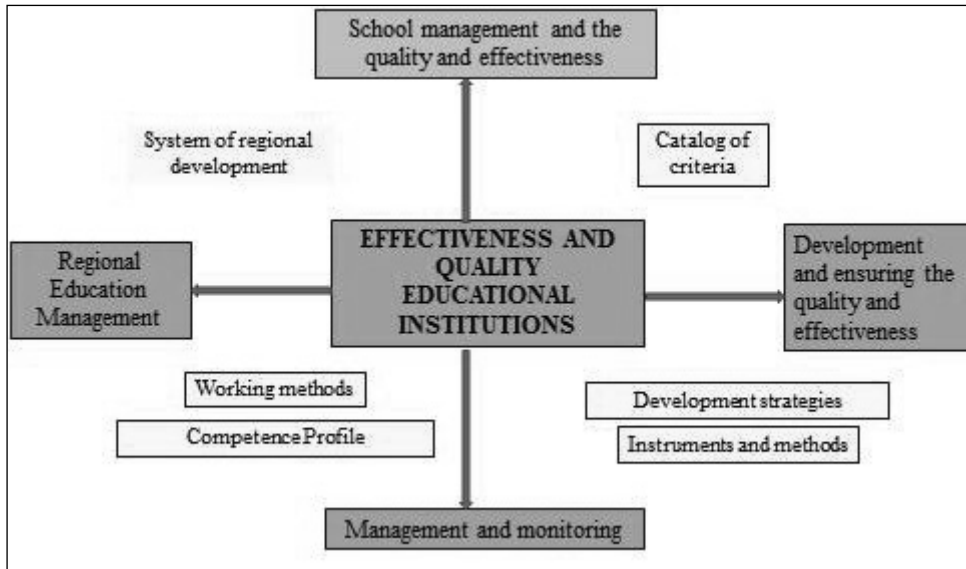


Figure 1. Concept of efficiency management and quality of education

Realization of periodic external monitoring of school organizations outlines problem areas as well as those that have proven their effectiveness. Maintaining and improving efficiency and quality in them may be done by developing a plan for development and continuous internal monitoring of its implementation. The emphasis is on quality development with a clear program and provide a guarantee with measurement (Fig. 2).

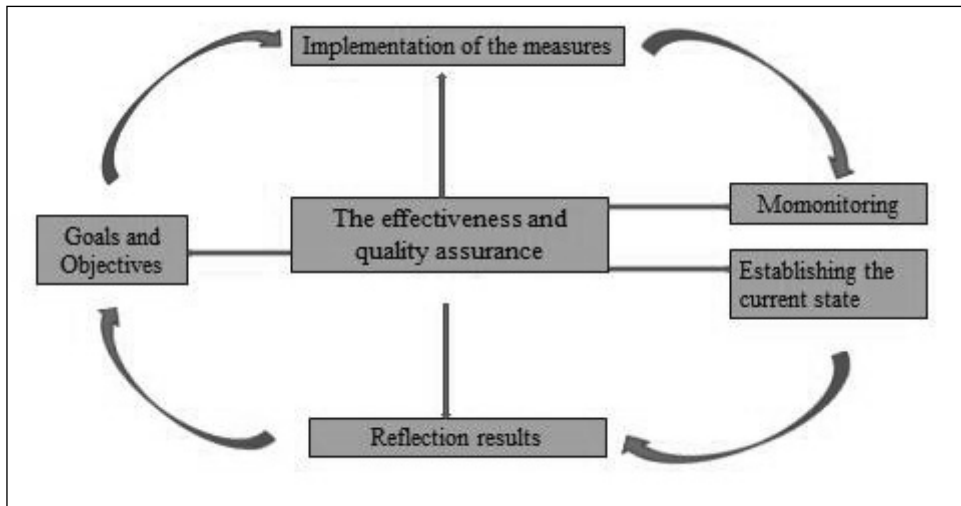


Figure 2. Cycle development of quality and efficiency

After all the functions of monitoring, reduced to effective school policies and management and quality assurance of education is limited to a few basic:

- Provide independent external evaluation of the effectiveness of school policies - appropriate use of available resources and the need for new or upgrading existing, as far as providing educational service meets the expectations of consumers, whether human resources development is measured with the objectives of the organization and its organizational culture.

- Create opportunities for long-term planning and perspectives for development of the organization with the establishment of appropriate mission and vision.

- Provide a transparent system of governance - the results are public and the stakeholders can get objective information about the educational institution, and to participate in decision making.

- Increase the responsibility of government - public results raise the responsibility of the management and staff of the school and support their internal and external motivation.

- Create mechanisms for participation, consent and cooperation of the teaching staff in the management of institutions and the parent community and the other stakeholders.

SWOT-analysis of the current state of Bulgarian education shows that it has a sufficient number of strengths, but there are negatives too. One of the main weaknesses concerning the management of the quality of education is the lack of a standard for external evaluation of educational institutions. At present, our country has not introduced an effective system for monitoring school organizations.

The control is based on the Law on Public Education, Instruction № 1 of 1995 to conduct control activities in the public education system and regulations relating to the control of the Ministry of Education and Science and the Regional Education Inspectorates. Instruction № 1 of 1995 has not been updated with the changes made in the PDO from 1998 until now, it has become obsolete, often leads to formality of control work and irregularity in the controls. Inspections performed are limited to monitor of the compliance of school documentation with state educational requirements. The findings lead to mandatory instructions, if violation of the regulations is present and do not provide an environment in which kindergartens, schools and servicing units to be encouraged and supported to improve its activities through planning based on identified deficiencies or build upon the established practices. In this context, construction and commissioning of a system of external monitoring is more than necessary.

The European experience shows that in most EU countries - Austria, Belgium, UK, Estonia, Slovenia, France, Sweden, is introduced external control of school organizations as a measure to ensure the quality of education. This external evaluation is used to track the effectiveness of the institutions in the education system and is not directed to individual teachers or leaders. It is believed that the external monitor, promote and support school management to achieve better overall activity results.

In relation to the challenges outlined in the 2013 a study of the effectiveness of management in school organizations is conducted, to explore possibilities for introducing an external evaluation. It was accomplished by analysis of school documentation and policies in seven schools in Pernik Province, analysis of external and internal environment of educational institutions, opinion surveys of teachers, parents and students, study of the the opinion of the directors of the schools surveyed by conferencing with the director and teachers from surveyed schools, expertise evaluation. The study was conducted in three areas of monitoring:

- Management of the organization;
- Human resources management;
- Management of financial and material resources.

In each area, by the project “Improvement of the system for the inspection of education”, funded by the Operational Programme “Human Resources Development” and implemented by the Ministry of Education and Science are made criteria and possible indicators (Fig. 3).



Figure 3. Areas and monitoring criteria

The study relied on both quantitative and qualitative data and covers the overall management activities in school organization (in terms of management of the organization, teaching and learning, the school environment, partnership and external relations, professionalism and staff development). Analysis of the results demonstrates the need for internal and external monitoring and correlation between the external evaluation of school organizations and their effective development.

Opinions of the respondents on one hand define and prove the necessity of an external evaluation - monitoring, and on the other highlight the problem areas that need to take measures to improve the management and hence the effectiveness of school organizations.

Surveyed schools are of different types, according to Art. 26 of the Education Act - two major, one secondary, two profiled high schools, two vocational high schools, two state and five municipal. They were selected in order to cover the types of levels of education and method of financing.

Based on the instructions given by interviewees assessments for each indicator fits summary evaluation (by districts and criteria), which is formed by the prevailing level of assessment. By the generalized estimates of the areas of monitoring score is formed. The final grade is determined by the analysis of opinion survey of stakeholders, taking into account the influence of the external and internal environment within which the respective educational institution operates. The final

grade is based on a five-point scale: Grade 1 - unsatisfactory; Grade 2 - satisfactory; Grade 3 - good; Grade 4 - very good; grade 5 - excellent.

Regarding the management of the organization, summarized the results of the respondents' views highlight both positive and negative trends (Diagram 1 - level of implementation of the indicators in the "Management Organization"). In total the level of performance is about 79%, the highest is the evaluation by the students - 86 percent, according to parents and teachers is nearly identical - 80% and 82%, and according to the directors and experts, it is about 74%.

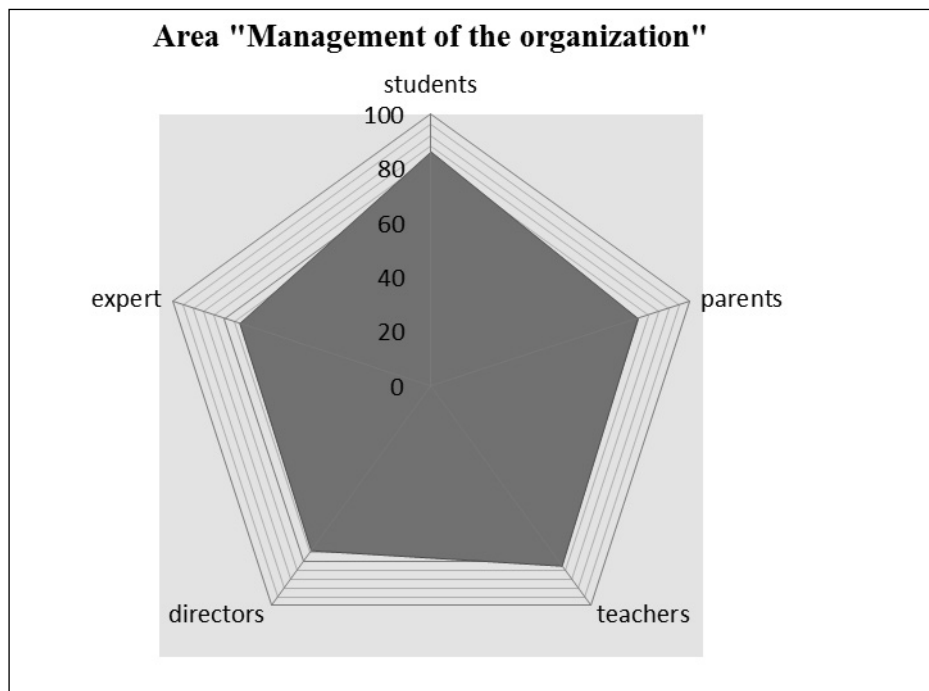


Diagram 1. Degree of implementation of the indicators in the "Management of the organization"

Each of the educational institutions has a strategy which is updated at the beginning of the school year, job descriptions were approved, committees to perform specific tasks and activities are formed, school sites are made. The problematic areas are no defined rules of delegation, authority and competence, not constructed systems of internal assessment, of organizational performance. Student performance is evaluated mainly quantitative, without a comprehensive

assessment in order to ensure quality teaching and learning for the management and development, psychological comfort at school, partner relationships between direct and indirect participants in the teaching process, ability and willingness to innovate and develop more efficient future strategic and operational planning. There is insufficient motivation of students to participate in extracurricular activities, conversations with students on issues related to their studies at the moment, and their development in the future are not sufficiently reflected, teams in schools to motivate and assist students in their personal development are not created. Work with gifted and retarded students is not optimal too. In some schools the interaction with established School boards and School councils is effective, but in other formally. Communication with the parent community needs Improvement. Despite the availability of communication channels in the tested educational institutions do not exist laid out communication systems with both students and parents, reports on the effectiveness of advertising and those for presenting in the media of public events are not available.

In the next area of observation - "Human Resource Management", the opinion of interviewees overlap in terms of positive and negative trends - the level of performance is about 77% (Diagram 2 - degree of implementation of the indicators in the monitored area). It accounts only the opinion of an expert, directors and teachers, according to which the performance is 77% (as judged by experts and directors of schools surveyed) and 76% according to the teachers. Questions to the students and parents in this field of observation are not provided.

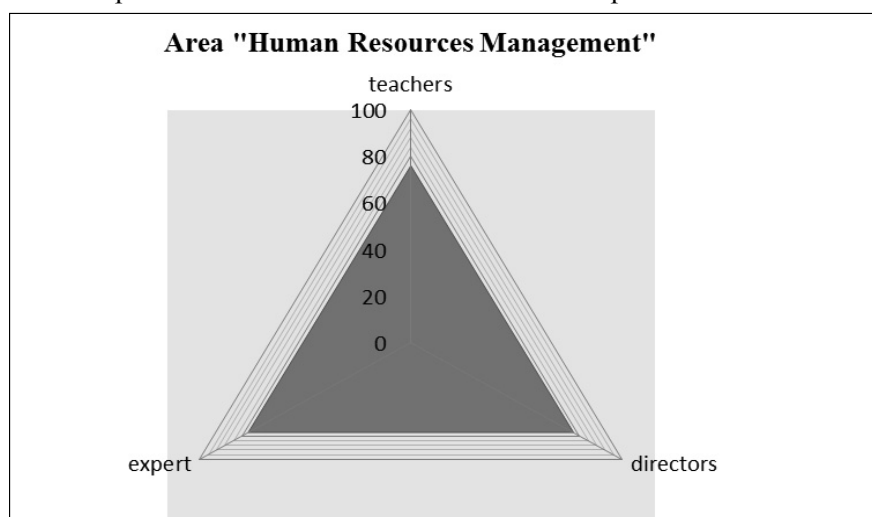


Diagram 2. Degree of implementation of the indicators in the "Human Resources Management"

Planning and staff selection is carried out according to pre-planned selection criteria, defined internal rules for the wage, educational specialists receive additional labor remuneration for achieved results of work on the basis of indicators, defined at national level and criteria to each, adopted by resolution of the pedagogical council, depending on the type and characteristics of the school. Qualifications of the educational specialists is carried out in accordance with established school rules for the qualification activity. Teachers have built their portfolios, but in the surveyed schools are not monitored systems developed by the criteria and requirements for the portfolio of the teacher. Despite the use of modern methods of teaching and learning and the availability of good practices is not available documentation on the creation, description, enrollment and implementation of the methods and practices. Insufficient stimulation and support is given to teachers to promote their activities and experience in professional publications, web sites of schools and / or educational forums.

In the management of financial and material resources are also identified strengths and weaknesses (Diagram 3 - degree of implementation of the indicators in the “Management of financial and material resources”). Level of implementation, in the view of respondents is different (according to students - 58%, according to the parents - 63%, according to teachers - 64%, according to the directors - 79%, and according to experts - 72%), in total it was about 67%.

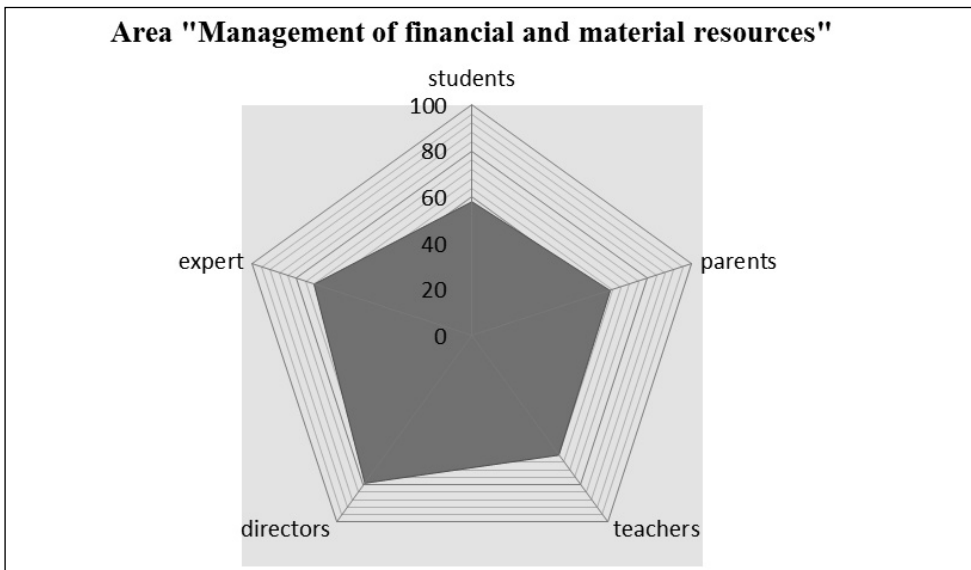


Diagram 3. Degree of implementation of the indicators in the “Management of financial and material resources”

Complying with the principles of legality, effectiveness and transparency in government, have been created and implemented systems for financial management and control, available are budget, financial plans and reports on the budget. General meetings are held at which such records shall be presented to the groups of schools - teaching and non-teaching. Negative trends are mostly related to insufficient modern and functional facilities and equipment, the lack of functional and modern classrooms and cabinets, a modern sports facilities and enough space for active leisure in day organization of the school day in general education and basic schools.

The survey and outlined challenges facing the implementation of external evaluation - monitoring suggest that it has its place in achieving greater efficiency in the management of school organizations and improving the quality of education.

The analysis of the strengths and weaknesses in the management of school organizations presents the opportunity to draw the following conclusions regarding the management aspects that need improvement in organizations:

- Optimizing existing activities for development of school organizations to ensure their progress, regardless of good organization in terms of planning, organization and control, management of human, financial and material resources.

- Increasing the transparency and openness of government and involving all stakeholders in the process.

- Intensification of communication channels in order to increase their efficiency.

- Create the conditions for more opportunities for personal expression of students and teachers and creative participation in the teaching process as well as promoting good educational experiences and achievements of teachers and students.

- Demand for financial mechanisms to improve the material and technical base in terms of school furniture and introduction of modern teaching aids in teaching.

The survey and discussions demonstrate the need, both external and internal monitoring of school institutions, which may be outlined in the following parameters:

- External monitoring is laterally independent monitoring and fair view of the state of school organization. It allows you to draw a picture of the strengths and weaknesses in the institutional functioning of the organization and they are compared with its purposes , to identify the resources available and how it uses them to reveal the causes of potential problems, identify possible ways to overcome them, to formulate development goals. As a disadvantage can be given the short time for which is performed and the inability to fully and clearly entering into school life. There is also the risk of resistance from staff.

- Internal monitoring is useful, but is in danger of distortion due to the direct involvement of school team with the activities at school. Often schools even have the achievements but not appreciate them enough or do not see them. There is risk

of exclusion from the monitoring of aspects that bear their negatives. Deficits are not seen due to established stereotypes, or do not want to appear.

– The correlation between the external and internal monitoring overcomes the weakness of external and internal assessment and contributes to improving the quality of education and the effectiveness of management of school institutions. It prevents institutions at the central level to decide on the specific problems in schools, increasing the autonomy of school organizations with the opportunity to develop and conduct their own school policies, conducts continuous feedback, the public receives information about the status and quality of education in their respective institutions. Self-assessments assist in making external monitoring for future visits, providing updated information on the state of school organization.

– Educational specialists accept the monitoring activities with a positive attitude, evaluate its advantages, recognize weaknesses and stand ready to assist in improving the activities in school organizations and participation in working groups identifying specific measures.

– The feedback from monitoring can serve as a basis for objective assessment of the institutions of the public education system at the municipal, regional and national level with a view to future strategic planning and their rating and establishing clearer criteria for monitoring and evaluation of educational practice, and make appropriate management decisions. It is bound by the more efficient method of financing school organizations based on proved quality of education in them.

– Creates an opportunity to inform the public about the quality of education and the effectiveness of management to rethink and optimize educational standards with broad public participation.

– Offers opportunities to encourage and support schools and kindergartens to plan and implement the necessary changes to improve its operations in order to provide quality care, upbringing, socialization and training of children and students.

Education of children is a fundamental value in the Bulgarian society. So any idea of the development of education must be rethought in light of this value to become Bulgarian education in modern, accessible and high quality. At the same time can not be assured quality education without viable mechanisms for its measurement. This would help the experts in controlling their methodological activity, but will also contribute to the equivalence of the effectiveness of school organizations and support their development, to enhance the competitive environment and ultimately - to enhance the quality of Bulgarian education and inclusion at its European educational standards.

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✉ **Rumyana Gyoreva, Phd student**
South-West University “Neofit Rilski”
66, Ivan Michailov Str.
2700 Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria
E-mail: r_todorova_g@abv.bg