

Features of managerial strategy specific to school bodies in high school and vocational education in Suceava County, Romania

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Abstract. *The end of 1989 brought to Romania a change of political system. The transfer from communism to modern capitalist society determined the country's orientation towards the European Union and globalization. The impact of changes also appeared in the field of education. This study aims to identify specific aspects of managerial strategies specific to a school body oriented towards improving the quality of educational services. The research was conducted on a sample of 418 teachers from 12 high schools and vocational schools belonging to secondary education of Suceava County, Romania. The data were collected based on a questionnaire and processed using the SPSS software. The study uses correlation analysis in order to assess the specific links among the variables specific to the educational system and also their intensity. The results underlined that **material resources** of educational units and the **ongoing training** of teachers are the two important features of a managerial strategy oriented towards increasing the quality of an educational service.*

Keywords: education system, teachers, training, material resources, managerial strategy.

JEL Codes: I20, I29, J24

Introduction

Starting with the end of the last century, the literature in the field of the economically developed countries looked into the structural changes in the educational systems of different countries. Educational reforms had been implemented that imposed changes both in the curricula, teaching methodology and resources needed to achieve the set goals. The main countries in which the reforms had been accelerated by theoretical studies included Great Britain and the United States.

In England and Wales, the reform had been enforced by the Law on Educational Reform (1988) that was further completed by other laws. This reform introduced *self-management* that is the basis of the decentralized system in which all functional areas (curriculum, human resources, financial resources, community relations, etc.) are managed by the school director and the board. The parents of students sit on this board (Bush, 2015).

In the USA, the reform of 1980 put at the centre the learning activities of the *student* and its personal needs, marking the transfer from the concentration on resources entering into the system to the results of educational services. The reform brought important changes not only to teaching methodology but also to the curriculum structure (standardised curricula and assessment) (Democrats for Education Reform, 2007). The educational reform transforms public education into a *market* where the effectiveness of input-output relation of the educational system is assessed. The organizations of parents actively get involved into the life of the school along with their children (Parent Revolution, 2009).

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In Romania, the educational reform started in 2000 when the first law on education was adopted after the change of the political system in 1989. It brought a novel element of school decentralisation and the increase of their self-management. Later though by many changes of ministers, the decentralization was blocked. Only in 2011 a new law was issued called the Law of National Education (Solomon, 2011). To increase the effectiveness of activity, the secondary educational system in Romania underwent reforms that aimed to change its specific features. In this context, there have been 24 ministers since 1989, 3 laws on education, over 1000 legislative amendments and law articles, most of them not implemented (ex. 6% of GDP for education, free textbooks for all students, or classes of up to 25 students).

Structurally, *school management* has been one of the main priorities of educational reforms in secondary education. The term *management* referring to the management of a school unit was introduced in Romania at the beginning of 2000. The director of a school unit was seen as a “*gate* through which the reforms pass easier or harder” (Iosifescu, 2001). Not only changes in school management were aimed by the reform, there also arose the idea of change at the individual level of all members of school organization. Implicitly, this fact should have left to organizational change. Such terms as educational management, project management, and strategic management were introduced into the daily use of educators, many times with no prior explanation of their meaning and importance for school activities. Now, in the daily life of schools, concepts specific to organizational culture are used, such as: mission, vision, values, organizational policy and strategy, strategic aims and objectives. The problem is that these terms frequently showed the *formalism* as the feature of the Romanian secondary educational system. How does the simple teacher relate to these concepts? How is objective the analysis of factors characterizing the educational organization? Which are the main elements included into the managerial strategy aimed to ensure the success of the educational unit and its competitive advantage?

This study investigates these issues being conducted within a more extended research aiming at identifying a strategic model ensuring the quality of secondary educational services in Romania.

The main purpose of the study is to identify specific teaching features that are significant for the structure of a managerial strategy oriented towards the improvement of the quality of educational services in schools.

To achieve this goal, the research aims:

- to analyse the relationship between the socio-demographic characteristics of teachers and their *expectations* and *perceptions* on the features of a managerial strategy oriented towards the improvement of the quality of educational strategies;
- to analyse the relationship among variables expressing the *expectations* of teachers on the features of managerial strategy in a school unit and their *expectations* on the strategy;
- to analyse the relationship among variables expressing *the perceptions* of teachers on the features of managerial strategy in a school unit and their *perceptions* on the strategy.

1. Data and methods

1.1. Data

According to data available on the web site of the Suceava County School Inspectorate, there are 40 high school and professional school type of units, out of which 37 are public and three are private. In these schools, students are enrolled into the theoretical/vocational, technological or professional areas of study (*Rețea școlară publică*, 2017. *Rețea școlară particulară*, 2017). Depending on the share of students in each study area, the school unit belongs to one of the categories: theoretical high school (32.5%), technological high school (27.5%) or mixed high school (40%). In technological high schools, there are also professional schools that train students in a specific profession within a shorter timeframe than in theoretical/vocational high schools.

The research was conducted on a sample of 418 teachers from 12 selected high schools (30%) out of a total of 40 high schools of Suceava County during July-September 2016. We applied 521 questionnaires, representing 67.83% of total teaching posts recorded in these schools. 418 questionnaires were completed

and returned, namely, 80.23% of total applied questionnaires and 54.42% of total teaching posts in the schools that make up the sample. The distribution by study area of schools included in the sample and the applied and completed questionnaires is in line with the structure of the studied population (Table 1).

Table 1. The distribution by study area of schools included in the sample. The distribution by study area of the applied and completed questionnaires

The study area of school	The share of schools in sample	Applied questionnaires		Completed questionnaires	
		Count	%	Count	%
theoretical/vocational	25%	169	32.43%	148	35.40%
technological	16.67%	20	3.83%	19	4.54%
mixed	58.33%	332	63.72%	251	60.04%
Total	100%	521	100%	418	100%

From the perspective of the *length of service in education*, expressed in groups of equal time frame (five year interval), the highest share belongs to respondents with length of service in education over 10-15 years (22.7%) and the lowest to respondents with the length of service in education of up to 5 years (10.8%).

In what concerns the professional training of respondents, certified by the acquired teaching grade, the distribution shows that the most significant weight (74.8%) is found in teachers holding at least grade II in education on an ascending scale with 5 grades: *junior, definitive, grade II, grade I, PhD*.

Table2. The structure of the sample of teachers by: (a) length of service in education; (b) grade; (c) position

(a)						
Length of service in education	0-5 years	5-10 years	10-15 years	15-20 years	20-25 years	
		10.8%	13.4%	22.7%	20.1%	11.7%
(b)						
Teaching grade	Junior	Definitive	Grade II	Grade I	PhD	
		8.9%	16.3%	23%	47.5%	4.3%
(c)						
Position	Professor	Vice-principle	Principle	Total		
		96.9%	1.9%	1.2%	100%	

1.2. Methods

Data collection was made on a paper-based questionnaire as the application of the questionnaire in the electronic format (google.docs) failed due to the low number of respondents. The questionnaire was based on the questionnaire model used by the ServQual method assessing the quality of services provided to a specific organization. ServQual is a representative method for measuring and assessing the quality of a service. It is used to establish the difference between the *perceptions* and *expectations* of the service beneficiaries and may be adapted to the assessed service (Parasuraman, Zeithaml&Berry, 1988). The perception of beneficiaries on the product quality is important as “the perceived quality is not equal to the objective quality” (Zeithaml,1987). The ServQual method is used in education, the difference between *perceptions* and *expectations* expressing in this case the quality of educational services provided by an educational institution (Good Practice Manual, 2013). A quantification of the difference between *perceptions* and *expectations* of the teachers on the quality of educational services is the first step in the identification of strategic aspects allowing to improve the quality of educational services.

The questionnaire is adapted to secondary schools taking into account the organizational specificity of Romanian schools. It is divided into two parts. The socio-demographic data of teachers were collected in the first part that included the their status (full time, part-time), length of service in education (0-5 years, 5-10

years, 10-15 years, 15-20 years and over 25 years), professional training reflected by the teaching grade (junior, definitive, grade II, grade I, PhD), held position at the time of questionnaire application (professor, vice-director or director). The second part of the questionnaire included two sets of questions, each comprising 22 statements. These expressed identical issues, formulated differently in terms of time reference (future and present). First, they were asked about what they would have liked to have at their disposal to ensure a qualitative educational process in terms of their expectations. The second perspective was related to their perception at the time of questionnaire application on the resources that the school directors together with the management team should provide to facilitate the unfolding of instructional activities specific to schools. Each item in the second part of the questionnaire was analysed using a Likert scale with five values, varying from (1), corresponding to the answer *to very low degree* to (5) matching the answer *to very high degree*.

Data was processed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS 13.0 programme). For this research, 8 variables from the questionnaire were selected: two socio-demographic characteristics (*length of service in education* and *teaching grade*); three items expressing *expectations* (I.1.1, I.1.3, I.1.6) and three items expressing the *perceptions* (I.2.1, I.2.3, I.2.6) of the respondents on the two features of the managerial strategy in the school unit (*material resources* of the school unit needed in the teaching process and the interest of organization directors for supporting *on-going training* of teachers) and a specific type of managerial strategy aimed at improving the quality of educational services (Table 3).

Table 3. Variables

Item number	Variable	Temporal perspective	Described feature
	Length of service in education		Socio-demographic characteristic
	Teaching grade		Socio-demographic characteristic
I.1.1.	The school unit should have rooms and equipment appropriate for providing theoretical and practical instruction.	future / <i>expectations</i>	Specific material resources
I.1.3.	School directors should support on-going professional training and personal development of teachers.	future / <i>expectations</i>	On-going training
I.1.6.	Managerial strategies should be oriented towards improving the quality of educational services	future / <i>expectations</i>	Quality of educational process
I.2.1.	The school unit has rooms and equipment appropriate for providing theoretical and practical instruction.	present / <i>perception</i>	Specific material resources
I.2.3.	School directors support on-going professional training and personal development of teachers	present / <i>perception</i>	On-going training
I.2.6.	Managerial strategies are oriented towards improving the quality of educational services	present / <i>perception</i>	Quality of educational process

Demographic characteristics of the respondents have been considered for the analysis as they influence the self-assessment capacity and objective reporting to school realities.

The six items selected from the second part of the questionnaire for the analysis have been grouped two by two to express the same idea from different temporal perspectives (future and present). The first pair (I.1.1-I.2.1) refers to *material resources* (furnished rooms and appropriate equipment) needed for teachers to provide good teaching activity. The second pair of items (I.1.3-I.2.3) describes the need of

school directors to support *on-going professional training* and personal development of teachers. The last analysed pair (I.1.6-I.2.6) considers the degree of orientation of managerial strategies towards improving educational services.

The relations among variables were analysed using association tables, Somers' d coefficient for ordinal variables (Labăr, 2008) and Pearson Chi-Square test.

2. Results

Sixteen possible associations among selected variables were analysed. Out of these, only seven were statistically significant (Asymp. Sig. < 0.05) (Table 4).

Table 4. Results of the association analysis

Variables		Values		Values	
		Pearson Chi-Square	Asymp.Sig.	Somers'd	Approx. Sig.
I.1.6.	Length of service	45.196	0.001	0.132	0.000
I.2.1.	Length of service	31.884	0.045	-0.144	0.000
I.2.1.	Teaching grade	37.431	0.002	-0.119	0.006
I.1.1.	I.1.6.	274.138	0.000	0.391	0.000
I.1.3.	I.1.6.	536.131	0.000	0.509	0.000
I.2.1.	I.2.6.	171.363	0.000	0.399	0.000
I.2.3.	I.2.6.	402.856	0.000	0.623	0.000

The results show that between the variable *length of service* and *expectations* of teachers on the orientation of managerial strategies towards the improvement of the quality of educational services there is a weak positive correlation ($d = 0.132$). Therefore, as their length of service grows, teachers want that *managerial strategies be oriented towards the improvement of the quality of educational services*.

Table 3 also shows the existence of a weak inverse relation between the variable *length of service* and *perception* of teachers on the existence of furnished rooms and appropriate equipment for providing the instruction of students in good conditions ($d = -0.144$). The distribution of respondents by the perception on *material resources* and *length of service in education* supports the same result. A share of 37.78% of teachers with the length of service 0-5 years and about 25% of teachers with length of service 5-10 or 10-15 years selected the answer *to a very high degree*. In opposition, only 12.36% of respondents with a length of service over 25 years perceive *to a high degree* that the school unity has the furnished rooms and appropriate equipment needed for providing the instruction of students in good conditions.

The value of Somers' d association coefficient shows that between the *teaching grade* and *the perception of teachers on the furnished rooms and appropriate equipment needed for providing the instruction of students in good conditions* there is a weak inverse relation ($d = -0.119$).

The *distribution* of respondents by the perception on *material resources* and *the teaching grade* confirms the inverse association between the two variables, the shares of those who perceive to a high degree that the school unit has appropriate material resources decreasing with the teaching grade (from 32.43% and 30.88% for *junior* and *definitive* grades, to 14.21% and 4.44% for *grade and PhD*).

In terms of perceptions, around 64% of respondents selected values 4 and 5 on the used Likert scale, corresponding to criteria *to high degree* (41.97%) and *to a very high degree* (21.82%), for the item describing the feature *material resources* in the school unit.

Regarding the feature *on-going training* of teachers, the share of teachers perceiving *to a high degree* or *to a very high degree* that directors support on-going professional training was around 85% (28.78% and 56.35%, respectively).

In what regards expectations, 89.11% of respondents see *material resources* in the school as being *to a very high degree* an element of a strategy oriented towards improving the quality of education. Also, 84.24% of respondents believe *to a very high degree* that school directors will have to consider *on-going professional training* of teachers to develop a managerial strategy aiming to increase the quality of educational services.

The association analysis of the variables expressing *the expectations* and that of those describing the *perceptions* of teachers on the selected features of managerial strategy in schools outlined (table 4):

- Weak to moderate relations were found in case of variable pairs I.1.1-I.1.6 ($d = 0.391$) and I.2.1-I.2.6 ($d = 0.399$) showing that managerial strategies aiming to improve the quality of educational services are related to the existence of material resources specific to the field both at the *perceptions* level and at the *expectations* level.
- A positive relation ($d = 0.509$) is recorded between *the expectations* that *school directors support the on-going professional training and professional development of teachers* and *the expectations* that *the managerial strategies be oriented towards improving the quality of educational services*. Therefore, in terms of *expectations*, managerial strategies oriented towards improving the quality are closely related to the support that school directors will provide to teachers as to stimulate their interest for on-going training.
- A strong positive relation was found ($d = 0.623$) between the *perceptions* of teachers of the fact that *school directors support ongoing professional training and professional development of teachers* and *the perceptions* of the fact that *managerial strategies are oriented towards the improvement of the quality of educational services*. Therefore, the respondents associate the interest of directors for on-going training of teachers with the managerial strategies oriented towards the improvement of the quality of educational services.

3. Conclusions

This study belongs to a more extended research aiming at identifying the main elements of a managerial strategy oriented towards improving the quality in the secondary educational system in Romania. Out of the high number of variables included in the study (48), just some of them were selected to be presented in this study (8). Two of the selected variables indicate the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents (*the length of service in education* and *the teaching grade*). The other variables describe two features of a managerial strategy, namely, *the material resources* in the school unit and *the ongoing training* of teachers, these elements being influenced by both the *length of service in education* and *the teaching grade* of teachers. The statistical processing of data allowed to analyse the associations among the variables and the intensity of the identified relations.

Regarding the items referring to *material resources* in schools and the *ongoing training of teachers*, most answers of respondents (over 64%) were concentrated on the two last values of the used Likert scale corresponding to answers *to high degree* and *to a very high degree*.

The correlation analysis identified the existence of weak inverse relations between *the length of service in education* and *the teaching grade* of teachers, respectively, and the existence of *material resources specific to teaching*. As the professional experience and the level of professional training grow, both the perception and expectations of teachers towards the equipment of schools with specific material resources decrease.

On the other hand, the attitude of school managers towards *on-going training* of those working in education is not associated in a statistically significant way with these characteristics.

The results also indicate that managerial strategies oriented towards the improvement of the quality of educational services are closely related to the available *material resources* and to the support given to teachers for *on-going training* as both in terms of perceptions and expectations of teachers, there have been observed statistically significant associations between these features and the managerial strategy aimed at quality.

In conclusion, the analysis of data confirmed the empirically observed aspects known by people working in the system of secondary education in high schools and professional schools of Suceava County. Thus, *material resources* needed in the teaching of students and *on-going training* of teachers have been identified as being two important features of a managerial strategy oriented towards the improvement of the quality of educational services.

Building an optimal model of managerial strategy aimed at improving the quality of educational services requires the identification of appropriate features for a managerial strategy in education and the establishment of their ranking and importance in the structure of such a strategy. For this purpose, the research will be continued with the analysis of other possible associations among variables from the set of 48 variables included into the survey questionnaire.

The results of this study could be completed by a qualitative analysis of documents on which the managerial strategies aimed at the educational system of Romania are based.

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