

THE DEVELOPMENT OF TEACHERS' LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT IN THE PRE-UNIVERSITY EDUCATION IN ORDER TO ADJUST TO THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE ONLINE SCHOOL*

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Abstract

The adaptation of pre-university education units to changes in their external environment and finding the best managerial solutions, effective organizational strategies in achieving this adaptation (the specific context is that of the Online School) represent important reasons for research related to the development of leadership and educational management in school institutions during the COVID-19 pandemic and the transition of the School to the online environment.

The research aimed to collect teachers' points of view regarding the motivation to participate in training courses with a theme related to the didactic activity in the online environment, knowledge of the theoretical and methodological benchmarks of educational management and school leadership, adapting the management and leadership of school units to the requirements of the Virtual School, familiarization with the development of tools for implementing management and school leadership according to the requirements of the Virtual School, the interest expressed in participating in a training program related to adapting the management and leadership of school units to the requirements of the virtual school.

Key words: Leadership; Management of school; Virtual School; Teachers.

1. Introduction

The evolution and transformations of the Romanian pre-university education system have highlighted, lately, the need to implement educational services that meet the requirements of various categories of beneficiaries, but also the need to adapt school management to the requirements of new forms of educational organization,

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imposed by external contexts, but with strong implications on the organization and implementation of student learning and the management of pre-university education units, in the context of effective decision-making.

From the teachers' point of view, this requires involvement, responsibility, vision, strategic thinking and professional and managerial skills, all under the specific conditions imposed by social reality and appropriate to the new requirements.

Strategic and operational management, alongside with school leadership, are systematic processes and are characterized by a set of actions and decisions used to formulate and implement strategies and action plans, an interactive process aimed at creating the best conditions for the School.

The process of strategic management is, therefore, a dynamic process that involves changes for continuous school adaptation to the changes in the environment within which it evolves and develops institutionally.

This implies *involvement, responsibility, vision, strategic thinking and professional and managerial skills*, all under the specific conditions imposed by the social reality and appropriate to the new requirements.

Strategic and operational management, together with school leadership, are systematic processes and are characterized by a set of actions and decisions used to formulate and implement strategies and action plans, an interactive process aimed at creating the best activity conditions for school.

2. The issue of institutional performance of the management of educational organizations

School external environment influences the adoption of the development strategy of the educational units, the drawing of the directions of evolution, the definition and selection of the variables subject to planning, followed by the implementation of the proposed educational decisions and the evaluation of the achieved performances.

School units need to develop their institutional capacity (through the development of management tools) to provide relevant learning experiences to students, harnessing the potential of online tools (platforms, applications, digital educational resources), to ensure access and stimulate the participation of each student in distance learning activities, by promoting the most suitable distance learning environments, which will give teachers the opportunity to organize online activities with students, both in synchronous format (audio/video) and asynchronous.

3. Research in the field of educational management

Research in the field of educational management (and especially, strategic management) has shown that *management* implies “formulating strategic and operational objectives, seeking conditions for achieving measurable performance, adopting decisions of different types and degrees of complexity, practicing delegation of authority” (Iucu, 2006, p. 40).

The issue of institutional performance of the management of educational organizations can be understood as the key to achieving an effective strategic management, whose elements and implementation tools are useful and important precisely from the dual perspective of analysis of a school – administrative and instructive-educational – specific to this type of organization.

There must be carefully observed the strategic levers of a school, at least from the management perspective, because school is an organization that delivers learning, which is both its added value and its created value.

Moreover, the context of online School implies new mechanisms and tools for implementing and developing strategic management at the level of pre-university education units.

Therefore, the research has a prospective and descriptive character, aiming at identifying a strategic managerial way of thinking and action, consistent with the constitutive elements of the reality of the educational management/ educational organizations in the Romanian pre-university education system, adapted to the particularities and requirements of the Virtual School.

Research reasoning is an inductive one, moving from specific to general, an approach that aims to identify structural elements that ensure the efficiency of strategic management and leadership in order to improve and optimize some educational realities: achieving an effective, efficient and relevant educational management, ensuring a qualitative teaching process, under the specific conditions imposed by the particularities of the online School.

3.1. The purpose of the research is given by the analysis from different perspectives of the possibility of developing tools for the implementation of strategic management in school units in pre-university education starting from the identification of mechanisms and elements specific to educational management, presenting their efficiency, the opportunity of using them to optimize the institutional management of educational organizations, within the specific context offered by online School.

In this regard, **objectives** have been formulated, as stages/ procedural steps to achieve the research goal:

- Collecting, processing and analyzing information on how management tools, mechanisms and models used in pre-university education establishments in the context of the Online School influence (and how?) management of educational organizations, institutional development, achievement of educational objectives;

- Investigating the respondents' opinions on the value and importance of the mission, vision and decisions taken in order to develop appropriate strategies in the context of strategic management for pre-university education units, customized to the conditions of the managerial activity in the online School;

- Identifying managerial strategies according to their usefulness and efficiency in the strategic management of educational organizations, by reference to the specifics and requirements of the Virtual School.

3.2. Results

The general hypothesis of research is:

The specific context of the online school strongly influences the management and leadership of school units (institutional development, achievement educational objectives, management optimization, decision making, leadership, designing and ensuring the transition to the new form of School systematization).

There have been sampled 165 public school units of different levels of pre-university education whose educational managers (directors, members of the Boards of Directors, CEAC Commissions) responded to the items of the questionnaire applied. We believe that the sample meets characteristics similar to the populations from which it was extracted, both in terms of educational establishments and their managers, so it can be said that we have *representativeness* through the chosen sample and that it is statistically significant.

In the investigative approach were used as a **quantitative method**, the survey based on a research questionnaire, and as a **qualitative research method**, the case study method and the literature review. **The questionnaire-based investigation** complied with the specific methodology and the applicability criteria. The questionnaire was developed in omnibus type, regarding the research of several themes. The questionnaire applied to the 165 pre-university education units included 10 items with predefined answers and 3 items with open answers. The sample to which the opinion questionnaire was applied had the following characteristics:

According to the type of pre-university education unit, the respondents represent the directors of secondary education (33.9%), pre-school education (32.1%), high school education (18.8%), college (8.5%), post-secondary school (1.2%), special education (1.2%), additional art education (1.2%), (Figure 1):

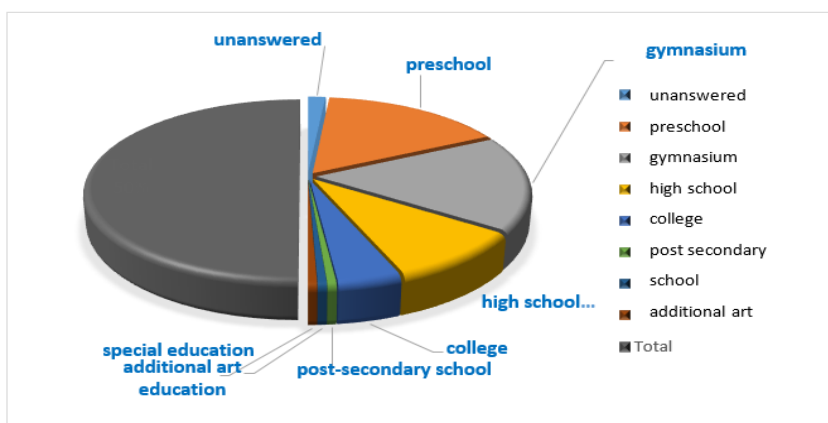


Figure 1. Type of educational unit represented by respondents

After the seniority in the management position, the respondents are mainly assigned to the tranche of 1-3 years, (32.7%), tranche 4-8 years, (29.7%), 16-20 years, (12.1%), 9-15 years (10.9%) (Figure 2).

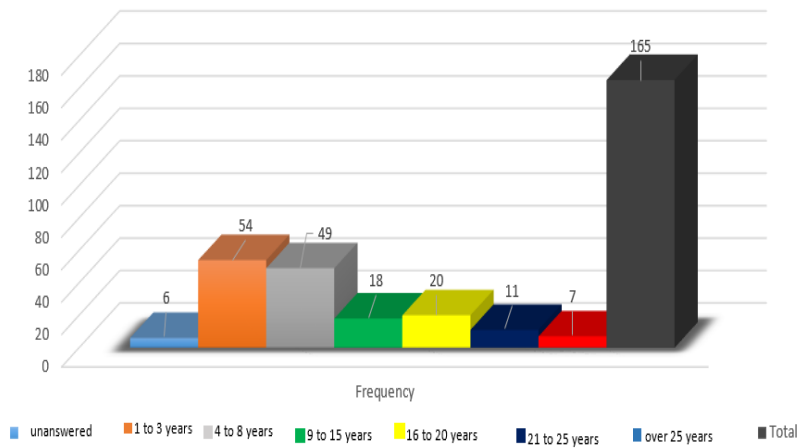


Figure 2. Seniority in leadership position

By the seniority tranche in education, the respondents are mainly in the range over 25 years (58.8%), 15-20 years, (17%), 20-25 years, (13.9%), 10-15 years, (5.5%), 5-10 years, (1.2%), (Figure 3).

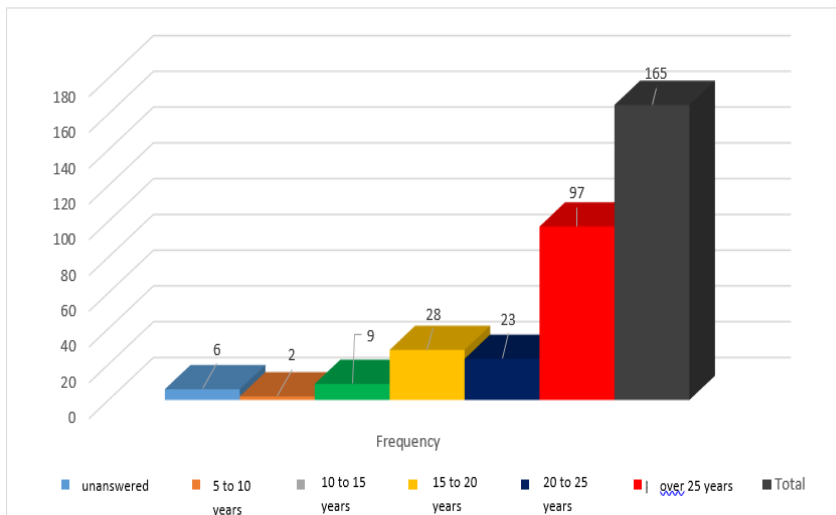


Figure 3. Age in education

The profile of the respondents can be built as follows: Head of state pre-university education unit, secondary level, with a seniority in the management position between 1-3 years, with an education experience of over 25 years. He is an

experienced respondent at the department, knowledgeable of the educational reality and with recent competencies in educational management.

The quantitative interpretation of the questionnaire allows the following conclusions to be drawn:

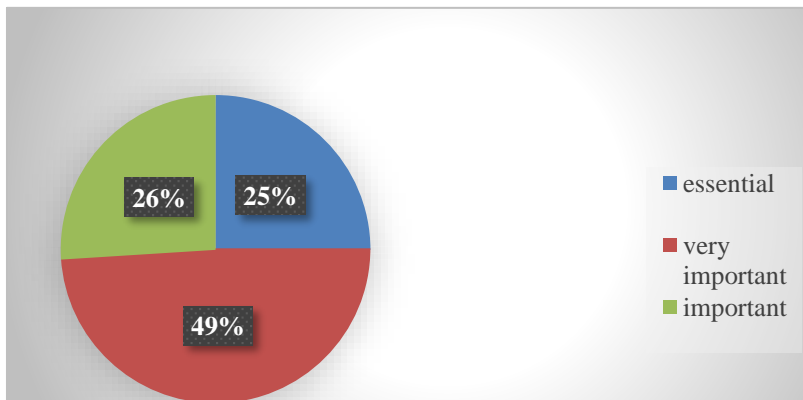


Figure 4. Motivation of participation in training courses on the topic of online teaching

Participation in continuous training/improvement courses regarding teaching activity in the online environment is considered **essential for teaching performance** (25% of respondents), respectively **very important** (49%) and **important** (26%).

Theoretical and methodological benchmarks of educational (strategic and operational) management and school leadership are known to a **very large extent** by 16% of teachers, **largely** 38%, to a **small extent** 33%, **not at all** 13% (Figure 5).

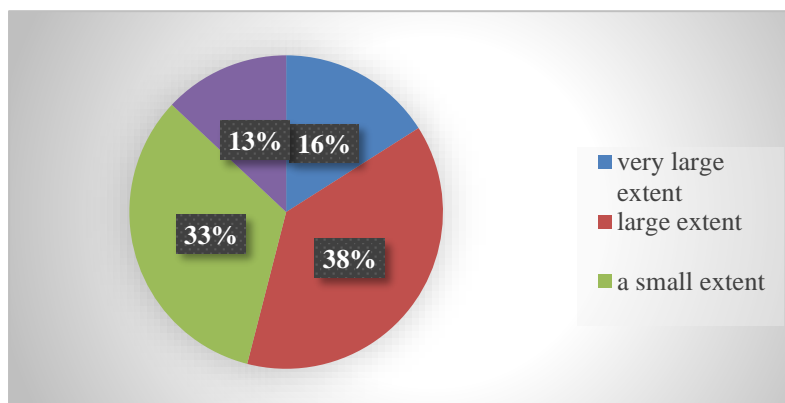


Figure 5. Knowledge of theoretical and methodological landmarks of educational management and school leadership

The peculiarities of the online school are known to a **very large extent** by 15% of respondents, **largely** 49%, to a **small extent** 36% (Figure 6).

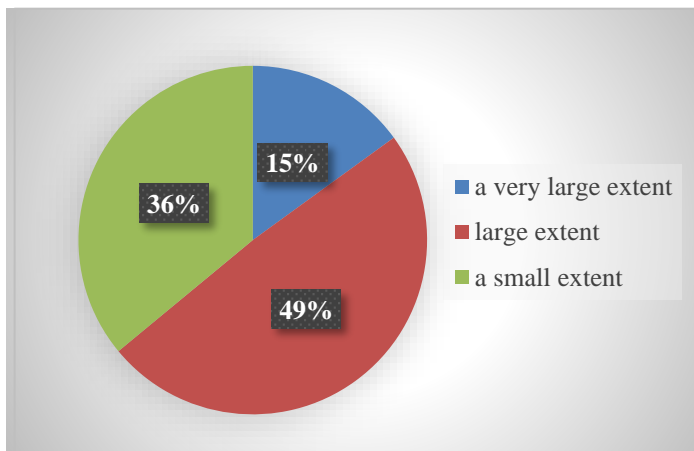


Figure 6. Knowledge of the peculiarities of the online school

They are familiar with adapting the management and leadership of schools to the requirements of the Virtual School to a very large extent 10% of those surveyed, to a large extent 27%, to a small extent 46%, not at all 17% (Figure 7).

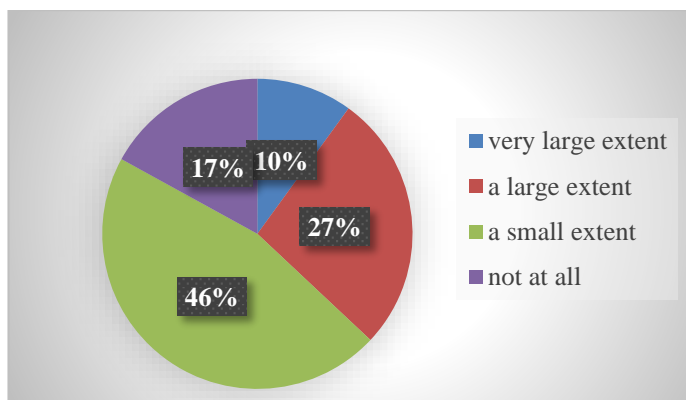


Figure 7. Degree of familiarity with adapting the management and leadership of school units to the requirements of the online school

There are familiar with the development of the tools for implementing school management and leadership (PDI, PAS, PO, Management Plan, Management Control System Development Plan) according to the requirements of Virtual School to a **very large extent** 8% of teachers, **largely** 36%, to a **small extent** 32%, **not at all** 24% (Figure 8).

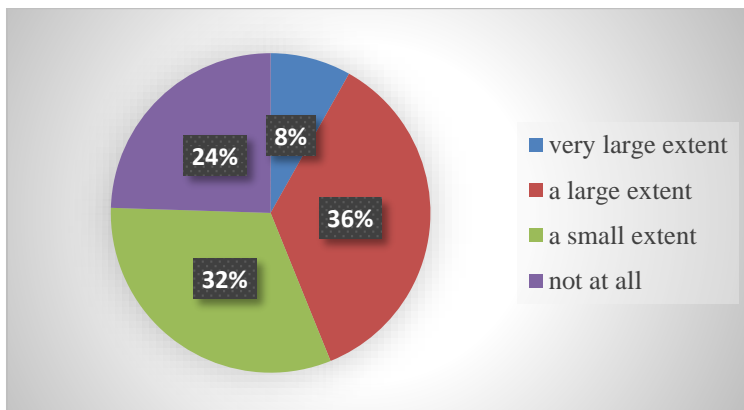


Figure 8. Degree of familiarity with developing tools for implementing management and school leadership according to the requirements of the Virtual School

91% of respondents are **very interested** in participating in a training program related to adapting the management and leadership of schools to the requirements of virtual school, respectively 9% to **a large extent** (Figure 9).

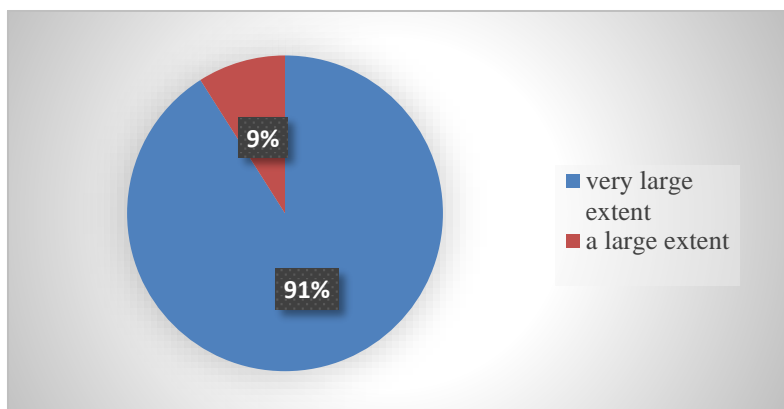


Figure 9. Interest in participating in a training program related to adapting the management and leadership of school units to the requirements of virtual school

In terms of organizational aspects, the majority of teachers prefer online courses (79%), a medium-term program (85%) and courses organized on days off: weekends and holidays (89%).

The case study method was taken in consideration from the perspective of the source of knowledge and used for the purpose of confirming and strengthening managerial realities. It involved detailed analysis of some contexts, to capture educational managerial models.

As a qualitative data collection technique, *the case study method* offered a *varied perspective on management issues and leadership* in educational organizations, due to *the specific approach of practitioners* (directors of pre-university education units, school inspectors, members of CA and CEAC).

There were registered the management forecasting documents in use for the school year 2020-2021, as well as diagnostic documents for the previous school years of 11 pre-university education units.

At the same time, specific, punctual situations were assessed, different interpretations of the structure of the tools for implementing the management and leadership of school units were collected from the perspective of the requirements of Virtual School, the conclusions providing a *further understanding of the results gathered by applying the questionnaires* but also the complex foundation of the necessity and usefulness of the training program.

4. The literature review method involved the consultation of some completed studies during the COVID-19 pandemic:

- Botnariuc, P. *et al.* (2020). *Home schooling: a new challenge for students and an opportunity for teachers*. Bucharest University. Available at <https://unibuc.ro/scoala-de-acasa-o-provocare-noua-pentru-elevi-si-o-oportunitate-pentru-profesori.pdf>.

- Florian, B., Ţoc, S. (2020). *Policy note: Florian, B., Zoc, S. (2020). Policy Note: Education during the pandemic. Answers to the ongoing crisis in education*. Available at https://media_server1/document-2020-04-29-23945977-0-2020-florian-policy-note.pdf.

- Hatos, A. (2020). *Distance learning during the state of emergency*. National survey. Sociological Research Center. Available at <http://socioumane.ro/blog/cs/2020/04/09educatia-la-distanta-in-perioada-starii-de-urgenta/?fbclid=IwAR2GPTwn6Gps5-3>

- Research Unit in Education (2020). *Additional skills and areas of support for CRED program learners in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic*. CRED PROJECT – Relevant Curriculum for Open Education.

5. The conclusions of the research

The answers provided to the items of the questionnaire, as well as the elements highlighted in the managerial documents (diagnostic and forecasting), as tools of the implementation of management and leadership in school units (following the application of the case study method) have allowed *the identification of the following directions of study*:

- It is necessary to present *the concepts and methodology of developing and implementing management and leadership* in school units for school managers and teachers, in order to achieve effective management, but also participatory leadership;

- Teachers know the theoretical aspects, but they need practical-applicative approaches depending on the specifics of the educational units in which they work, but also *adapted to the online school's qualifications*;

▪ There are different approaches in developing, due to different understandings on the structure of management documents (diagnosis, forecasting, evidence); this is why, it is necessary *to develop an integrative model of good practices for developing the tools for implementing management and leadership specific to the online school*;

▪ Moreover, during the period of suspension of the courses of the face-to-face School, according to the studies carried out during the pandemic, the teachers encountered important difficulties from a didactic perspective: using online platform facilities to reconfigure learning units in a virtual environment, organizing intersections with students, ensuring a good balance between synchronous and asynchronous online activities.

That is why it is necessary to:

- The develop the design, organization, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and decision-making skills of organizational strategies using the key concepts, principles, approaches and tools that are the basis of these concepts in order to understand and implement school management and leadership appropriate to the particularities and the requirements imposed by the Online School;

- Increasing the capacity of teaching staff to develop and apply institutional development strategies in the strategic and decision-making contexts specific to the Online School context;

- The development of a proactive attitude of teaching staff in contextualizing school management and leadership in relation to the demands of the Online School;

- The development of the flexibility and autonomy of the teaching staff's thinking in ensuring an effective educational management and school leadership, which determines the increase of their professional performances and the improvement of the students' learning results through the optimal implementation of the principles of institutional development adapted to the specific conditions of the Online School.

In this sense, by participating in a training program on adapting school leadership and management to online school conditions, learners should to identify the concepts and methodological norms specific to educational management and its strategic and operational components, as well as school leadership adapted to the Online School; to form a proactive attitude towards the set of design, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and decision-making operations specific to school management and leadership in the context of the Online School; to identify the main management, guidance and control skills that can be developed by applying the principles of educational management and school leadership in the specific conditions of the Online School; to promote in the managerial approach an objective, flexible, transparent attitude, in accordance with the new trends in the theory and practice of management and leadership in the educational field, in accordance with the specifics of the School organized online.

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