

The Role of the Educational Manager in High Schools in Cluj-Napoca as Centres of Excellence in the Local Community

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ABSTRACT. The Role of the Educational Manager in High Schools in Cluj-Napoca as Centers of Excellence in the Local Community. Educational management oversees the education system to ensure an effective learning environment by planning, organizing, coordinating, and controlling activities such as leading staff, managing resources, implementing policies, and engaging with the community. Educational leaders develop strategies to enhance programs and services, aiming to produce competent graduates ready for the workforce and significant societal roles, thereby improving the overall education system. **Objective:** This study explores high schools' vision and mission, the educational manager's role in shaping future competencies, and the strengths each institution promotes. It also examines the importance of parental involvement in education. The findings provide insights into strategic educational leadership and its impact on student development and institutional excellence. **Materials and Methods:** This study involved 10 directors (educational managers) selected from a total of 26 high schools in Cluj-Napoca. The data collection method chosen was structured interviews conducted based on a personal data processing agreement. The study was conducted from February to April 2023. **Results:** Highlighting the role of high schools as centers of excellence in the local community, this investigation can contribute to strengthening the connection between educational institutions and the surrounding community. It can promote collaboration, parental involvement,

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and community engagement in supporting and developing high schools. The results and conclusions of the investigation can provide valuable information for the development of educational policies at the local or regional level. They can serve as a foundation for the development of strategies and measures to support the development of high schools as centers of excellence and improve the quality of education. **Conclusion:** This investigation contributes to the field of education research by providing new knowledge and understanding of the role of the educational manager in high schools in Cluj-Napoca. It can inspire and stimulate further research and studies in the field of educational management and excellence in education.

Keywords: *management, leadership, community, key competences, future of education.*

REZUMAT. Rolul managerului educațional în liceele din Cluj-Napoca ca centre de excelență în comunitatea locală. Managementul educațional supraveghează sistemul educațional pentru a asigura un mediu de învățare eficient prin planificarea, organizarea, coordonarea și controlul activităților precum conducerea personalului, gestionarea resurselor, implementarea politicilor și implicarea comunității. Liderii educaționali dezvoltă strategii pentru a îmbunătăți programele și serviciile, având ca scop formarea de absolvenți competenți, pregătiți pentru forța de muncă și roluri semnificative în societate, îmbunătățind astfel sistemul educațional în ansamblu. **Objective:** Acest studiu investighează rolul managerului educațional în liceele din Cluj-Napoca pentru a le integra ca centre de excelență în comunitatea locală. **Materiale și metode:** Acest studiu a implicat 10 manageri educaționali selectați dintr-un total de 26 de licee din Cluj-Napoca. Metoda de colectare a datelor aleasă a fost interviurile structurate, desfășurate pe baza unui acord de prelucrare a datelor personale. Studiul a fost realizat în perioada februarie-aprilie 2023. **Rezultate:** Prin evidențierea rolului liceelor ca centre de excelență în comunitatea locală, această investigație poate contribui la întărirea legăturii dintre instituțiile educaționale și comunitatea înconjurătoare. Poate promova colaborarea, implicarea părinților și angajamentul comunității în sprijinirea și dezvoltarea liceelor. Rezultatele și concluziile investigației pot oferi informații valoroase pentru dezvoltarea politicilor educaționale la nivel local sau regional. Ele pot servi drept bază pentru dezvoltarea strategiilor și măsurilor de sprijinire a dezvoltării liceelor ca centre de excelență și pentru îmbunătățirea calității educației. **Concluzie:** Această investigație contribuie la domeniul cercetării în educație, oferind noi cunoștințe și înțelegere a rolului managerului educațional în liceele din Cluj-Napoca. Poate inspira și stimula cercetări și studii ulterioare în domeniul managementului educațional și al excelenței în educație.

Cuvinte-cheie: *management, leadership, comunitate, competențe cheie, viitorul educației.*

INTRODUCTION

Education is a comprehensive and structured process aimed at fostering the intellectual, moral, and physical development of individuals and communities (Țoca, 2002). Within this framework, educational management plays a fundamental role in ensuring an effective and efficient learning environment. It encompasses essential functions such as planning, organizing, coordinating, and overseeing the activities within the educational system, including teacher supervision, financial and material resource management, and the development and implementation of educational policies (Kerr, 2003). According to Fayol (2016) and Popa et al. (2013), the four core functions of management—planning, organizing, directing, and controlling—are integral to optimizing the educational process.

Closely linked to educational management is educational leadership, which emphasizes the ability to inspire and influence the education system in achieving its objectives (Sallis, 2002). Effective educational leaders play a key role in establishing a compelling vision, fostering a climate of trust, providing meaning, and facilitating success among both educators and students (Amanchukwu et al., 2015). Through their leadership, they motivate and guide stakeholders, ensuring that institutional goals align with students' needs and societal expectations.

The primary beneficiaries of public education are students and young people. As stated by the Ministry of National Education (2019), schools have the mission of ensuring that future adults acquire functional literacy across various disciplines, ethical values, character formation, and a commitment to a healthy lifestyle. Additionally, educational institutions support families and communities in the learning process, contributing to social well-being and preparing students for professional and societal integration.

A key factor in delivering high-quality education is the framework of key competencies for lifelong learning, as outlined in the EU Council Recommendation (2018). These eight fundamental competencies include literacy, multilingual skills, scientific and mathematical reasoning, digital proficiency, personal and social abilities, civic engagement, entrepreneurship, and cultural awareness. The goal of the education system is to develop these competencies at a functional level by the end of high school and at an advanced level in post-secondary education (Monitorul Oficial, 2021).

By equipping students with these essential skills, educational institutions enhance their capacity to navigate complex and dynamic societal challenges. Education will increasingly focus on personalized learning, tailoring the educational experience to meet the unique needs and learning styles of each student (ACT Government Education, 2019). The advancement of digital technologies, artificial

intelligence, and online platforms will be pivotal in implementing this approach, enabling the creation of customized learning materials, performance analysis, and personalized recommendations (Valamis, 2023). However, the successful implementation of personalized learning will largely depend on the adequate training of educators in using advanced educational technologies (Sridhar, 2021).

The Ministry of Education of the Australian Capital Territory (ACT Government Education, 2019) has outlined a ten-year strategy for the future of education, emphasizing a student-centered approach. This strategy includes increased investment in teacher professional development, the strengthening of learning communities, and the optimization of organizational structures within educational institutions. By focusing on these aspects, the strategy aims to enhance student engagement and learning outcomes, ensuring that education remains adaptive to emerging trends and societal needs.

In conclusion, educational management and leadership are critical to ensuring the quality and effectiveness of the teaching and learning process. By integrating strategic planning, institutional oversight, and inspirational leadership, these elements shape the educational experience and institutional success. Future education will center on personalized learning models and the adoption of advanced digital technologies, with a primary focus on individual student needs and the development of key competencies required for successful socio-professional integration. These advancements will require continuous investment in teacher training, adaptive learning strategies, and institutional innovation to ensure that education remains relevant and effective in a rapidly evolving global landscape.

STUDY OBJECTIVES

- First objective was to identify and analyze the vision and mission of high schools.
- Secondly, the study aimed to examine the educational manager's approach regarding the competencies required for future generations.
- Third objective of this research was to find out the strengths promoted by each high school.
- Fourth objective sought to determine the significance attributed by the educational manager to the role of parents in the future of education.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The study involved 10 directors (educational managers) from 26 high schools in Cluj-Napoca, representing a diverse range of educational institutions. These directors hold authoritative positions and extensive responsibilities in decision-making, policy implementation, ensuring educational quality, and developing staff and students. The experience of the subjects is a minimum teaching time of five years in at least pre-university institutions. The research aimed to understand the challenges, strategies, and experiences of these school directors. Specific objectives included identifying school visions and missions, examining approaches to developing competencies for future generations, analyzing promoted strengths, and determining perceived importance of parental roles in education.

Regarding methods, the theoretical component involved a literature review, while the empirical component utilized qualitative interviews conducted from February to April 2023 with consent for data processing. Researchers employed observation of daily activities, in-depth interviews, and document analysis for data collection. Additionally, statistical-mathematical methods were used to process and analyze the collected data, including techniques like sampling, measurement, data centralization and processing, and graphical representation.

Table 1. High schools involved in the study

Liceul cu Program Sportiv Cluj-Napoca
Liceul de Informatică „Tiberiu Popoviciu” Cluj-Napoca
Liceul Tehnologic UCECOM „Spiru Haret” Cluj-Napoca
Liceul Teologic Adventist Maranatha Cluj-Napoca
Liceul Teologic Baptist „Emanuel” Cluj-Napoca
Liceul Teoretic „Brassai Samuel” Cluj-Napoca
Liceul Teoretic „Apáczai Csere János” Din Cluj-Napoca
Liceul Teoretic Creștin Pro Deo Cluj-Napoca
Liceul Teoretic Eugen Pora Cluj-Napoca
Liceul Waldorf Cluj-Napoca

Table 2. Questions used to interview the educational managers from high schools

Question 1	What is the vision and mission of the high school you lead?
Question 2	How has your school aimed to compensate for what the pre-university education system is currently unable to provide?
Question 3	In your opinion, what competencies do future generations need? What can your high school do to develop these skills?
Question 4	What are the development priorities for the next academic year regarding academic, curricular, and extracurricular activities?
Question 5	What makes your high school unique, and why should parents choose it for their children?
Question 6	What should be the role of parents in the future of education?
Question 7	How do you anticipate pre-university education in 2043?

RESULTS

Question 1: More than half of the respondents emphasize the promotion of Christian values, integrating students within family, church, and society while fostering ethical and moral development. Another key aspect is the formation of responsible citizens with strong character, adaptability, and leadership skills. Additionally, respondents highlight the importance of a learning community and diversity, ensuring a safe and inclusive environment for student growth. There is also a strong focus on academic excellence and personal development, encouraging individuality, creativity, and high achievement. One respondent specifically mentions the promotion of sports values, shaping students into responsible citizens, athletes, and professionals.

Question 2: Schools have implemented various strategies to address gaps in the pre-university education system. A key focus is continuous teacher training, ensuring educators are well-prepared for evolving student needs. Additionally, extracurricular and volunteer activities provide valuable learning experiences beyond the classroom, fostering both academic and personal growth. The digitalization of education enhances resource accessibility and personalized learning, while career guidance and counseling support students in setting goals and preparing for professional pathways. Initiatives like the Future Authoring program, developed by Dr. Jordan B. Peterson (University of Psychology in Toronto), highlight the benefits of self-reflection and goal setting in reducing uncertainty about the future. Schools also emphasize collaboration with external stakeholders such as federations, associations, and NGOs to expand educational opportunities. Some institutions adopt Waldorf-inspired scheduling, integrating rhythmic activities, cognitive learning, and storytelling to create a holistic and engaging learning environment that balances theoretical, artistic, and practical development.

Question 3: Responses indicate that social competence is considered the most essential skill for future generations, with 40% of respondents emphasizing the need for strong interaction, collaboration, empathy, and conflict resolution abilities, which schools foster through extracurricular activities and non-formal education. Digital competence, highlighted by 30% of responses, underscores the importance of integrating digital literacy programs to ensure students develop responsible and effective technology use. Literacy competence, noted by 20% of respondents, remains fundamental, with schools promoting reading, writing, and communication skills through creative writing, debates, and public speaking. Another 20% of respondents stress the importance of organizational competence, focusing on time management, task prioritization, and resource allocation to enhance academic and professional efficiency. The remaining 10% recognize the significance of critical thinking, artistic creativity, and information analysis, which schools support through projects, artistic initiatives, and learning programs.

Question 4: Schools have outlined several key development priorities for the next academic year. Human resource development remains a primary focus, with emphasis on teacher training and professional development to enhance the quality of education. Infrastructure improvement is also a priority, aiming to modernize facilities and expand school capacity to accommodate growing student populations. Expanding extracurricular programs is another major goal, ensuring students have diverse opportunities for personal and academic growth. Additionally, national and international mobility programs are encouraged to broaden students' perspectives through exchange programs and study trips. Schools are also working towards educational accreditation expansion, securing certifications that provide students with recognized qualifications. Health education initiatives are being introduced or strengthened to promote student well-being. To bridge the gap between education and industry, collaboration with universities and the private sector is being pursued, creating real-world learning experiences. Lastly, decentralized decision-making is being prioritized, allowing schools greater autonomy in implementing clear, measurable educational strategies tailored to their needs.

Question 5: Responses highlight key aspects that make high schools in Cluj-Napoca unique and attractive to parents. Many emphasize Christian-based education, fostering ethical values, and ensuring a safe learning environment. Several schools stand out through national and European partnerships, offering cultural exchanges and diverse learning experiences. Other defining elements include effective communication with stakeholders, international collaborations, and academic excellence. Some schools specialize in IT education, partnering with industry leaders, while others emphasize community building, personalized teaching, and sports opportunities.

Question 6: Responses highlight the crucial role of parents in the future of education, with 50% of respondents emphasizing the need for active collaboration between parents and schools to support students' learning and development. An additional 20% stress the importance of emotional and motivational support, helping students build confidence, resilience, and motivation in their academic journey. Another 20% focus on the need for parents to understand and respect the school's role, fostering effective communication and cooperation with educators. The remaining 10% underline the role of parents in career guidance, assisting children in making informed decisions about their professional paths and preparing for future opportunities.

Question 7: Responses highlight key expectations for pre-university education in 2043, emphasizing the growing role of technology, personalization, and institutional autonomy. Technology integration (30%) is a primary focus, with predictions of AI-driven learning, digital platforms, and adaptive teaching tools enhancing student engagement and accessibility. Personalized learning models (25%) are expected to replace standardized education, adapting to individual interests and needs through data-driven instruction. Greater school autonomy (20%) is seen as essential, allowing institutions to implement flexible curricula and localized decision-making. Teachers' roles (15%) are projected to shift towards mentorship and facilitation, guiding students through self-directed learning rather than traditional instruction. The remaining 10% of responses highlight concerns about societal changes affecting education, emphasizing the need for schools to prioritize critical thinking, real-world competencies, and ethical values to prepare students for an uncertain future.

Presenting the vision and mission of their institutions, the ten educational managers provided 28 responses. Of these, 11 responses focused on preparation for community and society, including perspectives such as „building a community of students who can serve as role models in society” or „educating students to appreciate the environment and the people around them”. These were followed in frequency by five responses emphasizing individual student development. Other responses, mentioned less frequently, referred to promoting Christian values, creating a safe learning environment, and preparing students for change and future demands.

Regarding the competencies required for future generations, social competence had the highest frequency, appearing in 8 out of the 24 responses provided by educational managers. Digital competence was highlighted by four managers, while other competencies such as literacy, artistic competence, and organizational skills were mentioned more often.

The key strengths promoted by each high school vary widely. However, three educational managers emphasized the importance of national and international partnerships, while two managers highlighted the safety and security of school environment. The following table presents the advantages of each manager mentioned particularly.

Table 3. Advantages of high schools from the educational managers perception

Educational managers answers	
Extracurricular activities for easier social integration	United school community
Christian education	Partnerships with industry firms
IT-related activities	Correction of undesirable behaviors
Safe and secure environment	Teaching adapted to the specific needs and developmental stages of children
Qualifications offered	Regional and national trips
Learning environment	Academic achievements
Sports championships and training camps	Practical applicability
International/National and European partnerships	Comprehensive child development across all necessary areas
Effective communication	Development of teamwork skills

DISCUSSIONS

The research has provided valuable insights into the vision and mission of high schools in Cluj-Napoca, demonstrating their commitment to delivering quality education, holistic student development, and preparation for the challenges of the future. Schools emphasize values such as academic excellence, responsible citizenship, diversity, and personal growth, with some also integrating Christian principles as a foundation for character formation. This finding is consistent with Sridhar (2021), who argues that personalized learning is becoming a core element in modern educational systems. Additionally, the responses suggest a strong desire for these institutions to act as centers of excellence within the local community, not only by fostering intellectual development but also by providing students' social and emotional well-being.

One of the primary objectives of this study was to analyze the approach of educational managers regarding the competencies required for future generations. The findings highlight the increasing importance of transferable skills, critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and adaptability in an era of rapid technological

and societal change. Educational managers recognize that these competencies are essential for students' successful integration into the workforce, encouraging a learning environment that goes beyond traditional academic knowledge to include practical problem-solving and learning skills, similar to findings outlined in Monitorul Oficial (2021).

Furthermore, the research examined how high schools compensate for gaps in the current pre-university education system. Several key strategies emerged, including continuous teacher training, extracurricular and volunteer activities, digitalization, career guidance, and partnerships with external organizations such as municipal authorities, and higher education institutions. Schools aim to offer a more dynamic and interactive learning experience that aligns with students' real-world needs and aspirations. Additionally, innovative pedagogical approaches, such as those inspired by Waldorf education, reflect an effort to create a well-rounded curriculum that balances intellectual, artistic, and practical development.

The unique strengths of each high school also play a significant role in shaping their identity. These strengths often include modern infrastructure, diverse learning opportunities, and a strong extracurricular framework that provides students with essential experiences beyond the classroom, in line with Fayol (2016) on the management of educational organizations. The ability of schools to effectively promote and develop these strengths has a direct impact on their ability to attract and retain students, contributing to their overall reputation as institutions of excellence.

A crucial aspect highlighted in the research is the role of parents in the future of education. The findings emphasize that educational success is a shared responsibility, requiring close collaboration between schools and families. Educational managers strongly encourage open communication and a transparent relationship between parents and the school, ensuring a coordinated approach to student development, similar to ACT Government (2019).

Looking toward the future, pre-university education in 2043 is expected to undergo significant transformations, with a shift toward technology-driven, personalized, and competency-based learning models. Educational managers perceive an increase in school autonomy, enabling institutions to tailor their curricula to better meet the needs of their students and communities. Additionally, the role of teachers is anticipated to evolve into that of mentors and facilitators, guiding students in a more interactive and flexible learning environment. Alongside these developments, the status and remuneration of teachers are also expected to improve, ensuring that the education system continues to attract highly qualified professionals who can prepare students for the demands of the future job market.

The study's findings provide valuable insights into shaping educational policies at the local and regional levels. By identifying both the strengths and challenges within the current system, this research serves as a foundation for developing strategies that support high schools as centers of excellence. Furthermore, the study contributes to the broader field of educational management, offering an in-depth understanding of the role of school leadership in driving institutional success. The results can inspire further research on best practices in educational leadership, innovative learning methodologies, and the integration of technology into teaching and learning.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, this research highlights the crucial role of educational managers in shaping the future of high schools in Cluj-Napoca. Through strategic planning and a strong commitment to excellence, these leaders play a pivotal role in defining a clear vision and mission, fostering essential competencies for future generations, leveraging each school's unique strengths, and promoting active parental involvement. Their holistic and forward-thinking approach ensures that students receive a high-quality education that prepares them for both professional success and personal fulfillment. By continuously adapting to emerging educational trends and societal needs, these institutions can maintain their status as leading educational centers within the community.

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