

# Optimizing Institutional Performance: A Study of Romanian Educational Frameworks

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## Abstract

The core objective of this study is to explore the intricacies of leadership's impact on the performance of pre-university education institutions in Romania. This empirical study employs a qualitative research design, utilizing a mix of surveys, interviews, and case studies to gather data from a representative sample of pre-university education institutions across Romania. Participants include a diverse range of teaching and non-teaching staff who have direct experience with the effects of leadership within their educational settings. By analyzing their perceptions, insights, and experiences, the research aims to draw meaningful conclusions about the role of leadership in educational performance. Preliminary results indicate that both teaching and non-teaching staff place significant value on leadership qualities such as flexibility, innovation, and the ability to act as change agents. Leadership that balances rigor with adaptability, encourages open communication, and fosters a culture of continuous learning is seen as pivotal in enhancing educational outcomes. Moreover, the study reveals that certain leadership practices effective in other European contexts can be tailored and implemented within Romania, provided they are sensitive to the local educational landscape and cultural nuances. However, challenges such as resistance to change and resource constraints emerge as potential barriers to adopting new leadership approaches. This research contributes to the existing body of knowledge by providing a comprehensive analysis of how leadership impacts educational performance specifically within the Romanian pre-university education sector. Unlike previous studies that have focused predominantly on higher education institutions or have not considered the unique context of Romanian education, this study delves into the specifics of pre-university educational leadership.

## Keywords

Performance, education, institutions, education

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## Introduction

In the context of burgeoning global and national discourses, the function of education in driving societal development and facilitating the social incorporation of the younger demographic has emerged as a subject of paramount significance. The quintessential aim of the pre-university educational framework is to provide enhanced quality responses to both societal and individual exigencies. These include the cultivation and honing of foundational competencies crucial for societal progression, as well as the instillation and fostering of values and attitudes essential for nurturing active and engaged citizenry. Moreover, the system endeavors to facilitate pre-professional and professional training aimed at ensuring the successful socio-professional integration of the youth into the workforce (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

The landscape of Romanian pre-university education has undergone substantial metamorphoses post-1989, with a pronounced acceleration following Romania's entry into the European Union in 2007. These epochs have heralded significant socio-economic, cultural, and political shifts, precipitating a comprehensive

overhaul within the Romanian educational sector. The ramifications of these shifts have been multifaceted, effecting alterations not only in the legislative and administrative contours of educational governance but also catalyzing a paradigmatic shift in educational mindsets.

This period of transformation has been characterized by a concerted effort to align Romania's educational objectives and practices with broader European standards and aspirations, marking a critical juncture in the country's educational evolution. The reformation endeavors have sought to imbue the pre-university education system with the agility and adaptability required to navigate the complexities of contemporary societal demands, thereby ensuring that education remains a cornerstone of personal development and societal advancement.

The recalibration of Romania's educational policies and practices in this era underscores a strategic pivot towards a more holistic, inclusive, and forward-thinking educational paradigm. This approach is premised on the recognition of education as a dynamic and transformative force, capable of empowering the youth with the knowledge, skills, and values necessary for their active participation in the shaping of a progressive and sustainable future. Through these educational reforms, Romania aspires to cultivate a generation of young individuals who are not only academically proficient but also socially responsible, ethically grounded, and professionally competent, equipped to contribute meaningfully to the national and global tapestry. A pivotal factor in actualizing these systemic transformations involves a paradigm shift in management and operational practices—from merely adhering to basic performance benchmarks towards actively fostering and supporting behaviors and attitudes that strive for excellence, both within organizational structures and at the individual level. This shift is essential for cultivating a culture that not only meets but exceeds performance standards, thereby enhancing the overall effectiveness and efficiency of the educational system. To underpin and advance the quality of outcomes within the pre-university education system, it is imperative that academic research rigorously investigates the nuances of management strategies and performance enhancement within educational organizations (Zrno, 2012). Such scholarly inquiry should aim to dissect and understand the multifaceted dynamics that contribute to successful educational management, including leadership practices, motivational strategies, organizational culture, and the implementation of innovative pedagogies.

Furthermore, this research needs to explore how educational institutions can best adapt to and embody the shifts necessitated by contemporary challenges, ensuring that they remain responsive to the evolving needs of students and society (Powell et al., 2004). By doing so, academic research can provide evidence-based insights and frameworks that inform policy-making, guide organizational change, and foster environments where excellence in education is not just aspirational but achievable.

In essence, integrating rigorous academic research into the strategic planning and operational execution of educational policies and practices is crucial. It enables a data-driven approach to educational reform, ensuring that changes are not only theoretically sound but also pragmatically effective (Rynes et al., 2004). Through this symbiotic relationship between research and practice, the pre-university education system can be continuously refined and optimized, laying a robust foundation for a future where educational institutions are powerhouses of learning, innovation, and societal development.

## **1. Review of the scientific literature**

The emergence of organizations as social constructs throughout human evolution primarily served as an adaptive response to the collective ambition for achieving enhanced performance in various endeavors. Within this broad spectrum of organizational structures, the school organization stands as a quintessential educational entity, underpinning the foundation of the educational system, especially within the context of pre-university education. Performance, within such educational organizations, is intrinsically linked to the attainment of predefined objectives, characterized by the fulfillment of societal demands, adherence to quality standards in education, and the realization of expectations and satisfaction among educational beneficiaries (Zrno, 2012).

In the realm of educational organizations, the quality of institutional performance is paramount. This entails cultivating an organizational culture that prioritizes quality and performance alongside fostering a youth education system imbued with these values. The integration of quality into the very fabric of the national culture, thereby, becomes a cornerstone for the operational success and excellence of any educational institution. Consequently, the concept of quality transcends being merely an operational goal to become an essential, ingrained component of institutional performance in educational settings (Yuvaraj and Arabi, 2021).

This holistic approach underscores the importance of embedding quality and performance orientation not only in the administrative and operational frameworks of educational organizations but also in the pedagogical ethos that guides the educational development of young individuals. By doing so, educational institutions can significantly contribute to the cultivation of a quality-centric culture within society, nurturing future generations who not only value but actively contribute to the elevation of quality standards in all spheres of life (Shin, 2015). Thus, the institutional pursuit of quality becomes a pivotal element in the broader objective of achieving and sustaining high performance in educational organizations, ultimately reflecting in the preparedness and competency of the youth as they transition into the wider social and professional realms (Tan, 2009).

Management encompasses the systematic orchestration and direction of both individual and collective activities within all forms of organizations, aiming to actualize organizational goals and fulfill its set objectives through the unified efforts of its members. This multifaceted process involves not just the guidance of human action but also the strategic mobilization, allocation, and oversight of the organization's resources to meet its objectives in alignment with its foundational purpose, mission, and specific responsibilities (Silles, 2010).

The essence of management transcends mere administrative tasks, embedding itself in the very fabric of organizational strategy and operational efficacy. It demands a nuanced understanding of the organization's vision, the environment in which it operates, and the dynamic interplay between its various stakeholders. Through effective management, organizations can harness their collective talents and resources towards the achievement of shared ambitions, ensuring that every action taken is a step closer to realizing their overarching goals (Ratten, 2020).

In the educational context, management takes on a pivotal role, shaping the pathways through which educational institutions achieve excellence, innovation, and responsiveness to societal needs. It entails the creation of an enabling environment where educational objectives are met with quality and efficiency, thereby ensuring that the educational services provided are reflective of the needs and aspirations of both the learners and the broader community (Sabir et al., 2012). Thus, management in educational settings is not just about administrative efficiency or resource optimization but is fundamentally about nurturing an ecosystem that supports learning, growth, and the continuous improvement of educational outcomes (Shiky, 2013). Performance factors serve as pivotal metrics, delineating the proficiency and efficacy with which an individual or organization must execute its functions to realize anticipated outcomes. Typically articulated in broad terms, these factors encapsulate the requisite quality level at which institutional activities ought to be conducted and are encapsulated within performance criteria (Samuel and Chipunza, 2009). A critical performance factor for any organization, including pre-university educational institutions, is the capacity for self-organization. This encompasses the ability to recalibrate and maintain organizational equilibrium in the face of various internal or external perturbations. Concurrently, the aptitude for instituting changes at the institutional level to enhance and elevate performance stands as a salient indicator of an organization's vitality (Molka-Danielsen et al., 2009).

The significance of such a performance factor extends beyond mere operational resilience; it reflects the organization's robustness and its capability to navigate, adapt, and thrive amidst evolving challenges and opportunities. This dual capacity for self-organization and adaptive change is indicative of an institution's overall health and its potential for sustained institutional development and progress. In the context of pre-university education, this entails the ability of educational institutions to continually refine and evolve their pedagogical strategies, administrative processes, and organizational cultures to not only meet the dynamic needs of their learners but also to contribute effectively to the broader educational landscape (Janzen et al., 2022).

This holistic approach to understanding performance factors underscores the importance of adaptability, continuous improvement, and strategic foresight in driving the success and longevity of educational organizations. It suggests that the true measure of an educational institution's performance extends beyond immediate academic outcomes to include its capacity for innovation, resilience, and sustainable development in an ever-changing educational ecosystem (Schriesheim et al., 1999).

## **2. Research methodology**

Within the scope of this empirical research, the decision-making dilemma revolves around comprehensively understanding the perceived impact of leadership within Romania's pre-university educational sector on educational performance, as observed by both the teaching and non-teaching personnel partaking in the study. Additionally, the research seeks to explore the feasibility of transplanting

successful educational leadership practices from other European contexts into the Romanian educational landscape. This decision-making issue led to the articulation of the study's objectives, which aim to scrutinize the extent to which the endeavors of pre-university education managers and their teams contribute towards achieving established performance benchmarks.

To facilitate this investigation, an online questionnaire was meticulously crafted and disseminated, designed to capture the perceptions of both teaching and non-teaching staff regarding the influence of managerial activities and peer contributions on bolstering institutional and school performance. Responses were gauged on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from Total Disagree to Total Agreement. The respondent profile was delineated based on a set of criteria comprising the institutional environment, professional category, tenure in the educational field, and educational attainment, serving as independent variables for the study.

Prior to the questionnaire's distribution, a focus group was convened, consisting of five educational managers and five teachers. This assembly provided consensus on the questionnaire's final iteration. The study spanned from November 2023 to March 2024, accruing 150 validated responses that laid the groundwork for subsequent statistical analysis utilizing SPSS software, version 23.

The research adopts a correlational design framework, delineated by three principal informational domains manifested as composite variables: the activities of educational managers, the endeavors of teaching staff, and the institutional performance metrics. To affirm the internal consistency of the research instrument, which is composed of 21 items distributed among the three clusters, the Cronbach Alpha coefficient was computed for each cluster individually using SPSS. This methodological rigor underscores the study's commitment to ensuring the reliability and validity of the insights derived, paving the way for a nuanced understanding of leadership's role in the educational landscape and its potential as a catalyst for enhancing educational outcomes within Romania's pre-university institutions.

### 3. Results and discussion

The *Educational Manager Activities* cluster within this study demonstrates a notably high level of internal consistency, as evidenced by a Cronbach Alpha coefficient value of 0.954. This significant figure, as detailed in Table no.1, underscores the robust reliability of the research instrument pertaining to this specific domain of inquiry. A Cronbach Alpha coefficient approaching 1 indicates a strong degree of internal consistency among the items within the cluster, suggesting that the questions designed to gauge the perceptions of educational manager activities are both coherent and aligned in their measurement objectives. This high level of internal consistency is critical, especially in the context of assessing complex constructs such as the activities and effectiveness of educational managers. It implies that the respondents' perceptions of managerial activities are consistently interpreted across the survey items, lending credibility and validity to the collected data. In turn, this facilitates a more accurate and nuanced analysis of how leadership practices within the realm of pre-university education contribute to or impact educational performance. Given the complexity of educational leadership and its multifaceted impact on institutional performance, the attainment of such a high Cronbach Alpha value is indicative of the meticulousness in questionnaire design and the relevance of the included items. It provides a strong foundation for the subsequent analysis and interpretation of the data, offering insightful perspectives on the pivotal role of educational managers in shaping the educational outcomes and overall performance of pre-university institutions.

**Table no. 1. Determining the value of the Cronbach coefficient**

Cronbach's Alpha value	Cronbach's Alpha based on standardized items	Number of items in the research instrument
.952	.954	6

*Source: Output SPSS*

The analysis of correlations between each questionnaire item and the cumulative score of the remaining items within the *Educational Manager Activities* cluster reveals significant insights. Specifically, the item *The manager evaluates the progress according to the institutional development plan and ensures the motivation / training of the staff* stands out with the highest correlation index, boasting a coefficient ( $r$ ) of 0.914. This strong correlation underscores the pivotal role that managerial assessment of progress and the provision of motivation and training have in the perception of educational leadership's effectiveness. Furthermore, examining the Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted column reveals that the deletion values for each item are proximate to the overall Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.952. This consistency suggests that the removal of any single item from the questionnaire would not significantly enhance the instrument's

reliability. In essence, each item contributes meaningfully to the overall coherence and internal consistency of the survey, thereby negating the necessity for item elimination in future correlational analyses, as delineated in Table no.2. This finding is indicative of the well-constructed nature of the questionnaire, where each item effectively captures essential aspects of educational managerial activities without redundancy or irrelevance. The high correlation of the specific item related to managerial evaluation and staff development aligns with the theoretical understanding that effective leadership practices are integral to institutional development and staff performance. The close alignment of individual item deletion impacts with the global Cronbach's Alpha value reinforces the robustness of the survey instrument, ensuring that the correlational analyses undertaken will be based on a reliable and comprehensive assessment of perceptions regarding educational management activities.

**Table no. 2. Statistical indicators associated with the analysis based on Cronbach Alpha associated with the cluster Educational managerial activities**

Item	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
The manager develops an organizational culture in which the creativity, collaboration and diversity of ideas of all members of the educational community are appreciated	.831	.738	.946
The manager evaluates the progress according to the institutional development plan and ensures the motivation / training of the staff	.914	.872	.889
The manager ensures the professional training of teaching, auxiliary and non-teaching teaching staff	.779	.666	.954
The manager ensures the fair distribution of funds allocated, according to the law, by expenditure chapters and budget items	.784	.797	.943
The manager develops internal work tools that facilitate the guidance, control and evaluation of all activities	.892	.793	.945
The manager ensures the proper promotion and remuneration of the staff	.8851	.792	.944

*Source: Output SPSS*

For the *Teacher Activities* cluster, the research instrument similarly exhibits a remarkably high level of internal consistency, as denoted by a Cronbach Alpha coefficient of 0.954, detailed in Table 3.

**Table no. 3. Determination of the value of the Cronbach Alpha coefficient for the Teacher activities cluster**

Cronbach's Alpha value	Cronbach's Alpha based on standardized items	Number of items in the research instrument
.972	.972	9

*Source: Output SPSS*

This parity in internal consistency with the *Educational Manager Activities* cluster underscores the meticulous design and calibration of the survey items across different domains of educational activities. A Cronbach Alpha value of 0.954 signifies that the questions aimed at capturing the nuances of teacher activities are both coherent and reliable in measuring the intended constructs. This elevated level of consistency is vital for the credibility of the research findings, particularly in evaluating the effectiveness of teacher-led initiatives and practices within the pre-university educational framework. It implies that the survey items related to teacher activities are uniformly interpreted and responded to by the participants, providing a solid foundation for analyzing the impact of these activities on educational outcomes. The attainment of such a high degree of internal consistency across different clusters of the survey highlights the overall reliability of the research instrument. It ensures that the insights drawn from the analysis of teacher activities, akin to those obtained from the examination of educational manager activities, are based on a robust and coherent data set. This level of reliability is crucial for understanding the multifaceted roles that teachers play in shaping the educational environment and facilitating student learning and development. In conclusion, the high internal consistency observed in the *Teacher Activities* cluster, akin to that of the *Educational Manager Activities* cluster, affirms the quality of the questionnaire design. It sets a strong foundation for subsequent analyses, ensuring that the evaluation of teacher and educational manager contributions to institutional performance is grounded in reliable and valid data.

## Conclusions

Romania's engagement with the educational frameworks, internal evaluation methodologies, and institutional performance management protocols of European pre-university systems represents a vital pathway towards enhancing the caliber of our nation's pre-university education institutions. This alignment is not merely about adopting foreign systems wholesale but involves a nuanced exchange of experiences and exemplary practices that have been honed within the collaborative milieu of European educational projects. Such exchanges are instrumental in providing Romanian institutions with a wealth of insights and strategies proven effective across diverse European contexts. This process of cross-pollination can decisively impact the evolution of Romania's pre-university education landscape, ushering in a modernized approach to student education. It encourages a reevaluation of teaching methodologies, curriculum design, student assessment, and institutional accountability, ensuring they are reflective of contemporary educational needs and expectations. By aligning with the broader European educational ethos, Romanian institutions can adopt a more holistic view of student development, one that emphasizes not only academic achievement but also the cultivation of critical thinking, creativity, and socio-emotional skills that are essential for navigating the complexities of the modern world.

Furthermore, the integration of European best practices and performance management strategies offers Romanian educational leaders and policymakers a template for reforming institutional structures and processes. This reform is critical for establishing a culture of continuous improvement, where educational quality and institutional performance are regularly assessed and enhanced based on empirical evidence and comparative benchmarks. In keeping with the dynamic nature of educational trends and the socio-cultural development perspectives at the European level, Romania's education system can thus become more agile and responsive. This includes adapting to technological advancements, shifting societal values, and the evolving needs of the labor market, ensuring that students are not only well-prepared academically but are also equipped with the skills and competencies required to thrive in an increasingly interconnected and rapidly changing world. Elevating institutional performance and, consequently, fostering the advancement of pre-university education institutions hinge on the deployment of contemporary and efficacious performance management strategies and systems. The alignment of educational objectives across the European pre-university landscape, alongside notable uniformities in structural, organizational, and pedagogical methodologies, paves the way for Romanian pre-university institutions to assimilate, transpose, and customize best practices, as well as performance management frameworks and tools operational in analogous settings across Europe. The adoption and contextual adaptation of advanced performance management mechanisms and internal evaluation methodologies, whether sourced from the commercial sphere or mirrored from the operational blueprints of European pre-university educational entities, stand to markedly enhance the operational efficacy of Romanian educational institutions. A significant number of these institutions remain anchored in conventional educational doctrines, thus lagging in their responsiveness to the rapid socio-economic evolutions characterizing contemporary society. Initiatives aimed at the transnational exchange of exemplary educational practices offer a substantial prospect for Romanian pre-university educational institutions. These endeavors facilitate the strategic realignment and refinement of developmental strategies and specific components of performance management in consonance with the proven models and methodologies adopted by European counterparts. Such cross-pollination not only catalyzes the modernization of the Romanian pre-university educational framework but also accentuates its adaptive capacity to navigate and flourish amidst the multifaceted challenges posed by global educational dynamics and societal expectations. Ultimately, this deeper engagement with European educational practices and philosophies is not just about enhancing institutional performance metrics. It's about reimagining the very essence of education in Romania—creating learning environments that inspire, challenge, and nurture students, preparing them for a future where they can contribute meaningfully to both their local communities and the global society at large. In doing so, Romania can ensure its educational system is not only competitive at a European level but also emblematic of a society that values the comprehensive development of its next generation. The ambition to integrate Romania more closely with European educational standards and practices goes beyond the mere importation of systems and methodologies. It signals a transformative journey towards creating a learning ecosystem that is robust, inclusive, and adaptable to the ever-evolving global landscape. This journey involves several key dimensions that collectively contribute to a redefined educational paradigm, one that harmonizes with the aspirations of socio-cultural advancement and economic prosperity within the European context.

Therefore, the conscious integration of international best practices into the local educational milieu represents a strategic imperative for the continuous improvement and globalization of the Romanian pre-university education system. This approach not only ensures the elevation of educational standards and

outcomes but also reinforces Romania's position within the international educational community, fostering a collaborative and progressive educational ecosystem.

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