

## Identification of cultural dimensions specific to pre-university education

Nectara Elena Mircioagă

"Pia Brătianu" Middle School/UPB-DPPD  
Bucharest/Romania, nectara.mircioaga@ccdbucuresti.org

### Abstract

*This paper aims to present the importance of the existence of training management in pre-university education. The paper presents a case study based on the application and interpretation of a questionnaire that aims to establish the cultural dimensions of pre-university education. The paper aims to develop a material that can serve better information on the cultural dimensions of teachers, developing the possibility of developing training programs specific to Romanian education.*

### 1. Motivation of research

Due to the evolution of technology in this knowledge-based society, the educational system has undergone several changes, implying the adaptation of teaching methods that train the higher-level thinking competencies in pupils to better prepare them for life and work in a global world. Teachers are motivated to actively participate in a training program if they are provided with the opportunity to define the problems they face in their schools, and thus express their professional development needs and participate in a program of training that is not imposed by others, and primarily responds to their needs. Therefore, the situations in their schools should be known in detail.

### 2. Organization of Research

#### Purposes:

-Characterization of school culture;  
-Facilitating direct contact, relationships and communication beyond prejudices and stereotypes;

#### Research hypothesis

Provided that there are background elements (Communist or Western) incorporated into the school culture, some of them can be consciously assumed and explicitly formulated in the form of assertions about behavior and school events. School employees can easily identify the traits specific to their field of activity. They not only describe a state of fact, but they can also **build** up further events and school situations as well as explanations that serve as a base for actions and behaviors. [1.3]

### 3. Research Methodology

#### 3.1 Methods used

In view of both the aspects studied in the theoretical part of the work and the desire to capture the objectives pursued, we decided on the following investigative methods:

1. **A questionnaire for teachers;**
2. **A case study;**

#### 3.2 Specific objectives pursued:

- a) Identifying the problems faced by teachers from the perspective of the people involved in the professional development process;
- b) Establishing proper instructions for achieving effective activities carried out in the educational field;

- c) Adapting trends from the globalizing school culture (Western models) **and/or** maintain elements of traditional school culture;

**Target groups:** teaching staff, management staff, guidance and control positions, non-didactic staff.

**Time Period:** January – May 2018

**Elaboration of working instruments:** When drafting the questionnaire, it was granted that the questions were clearly formulated to avoid confusion. We mention that the questions and requests in the questionnaire mainly pursued the identification of the cultural dimensions specific to pre-university education. The **questionnaire** is a document containing a set consisting of 30 questions and is anonymous, confidential, and requires about 10-15 minutes to complete. The respondents could only check one box out of the five options given. The technique used is the self-administration of the questionnaire. This choice took into account the benefits of:

- Low costs;
- Removing disruptive influences of the operator;
- Correct recording of replies;
- The condition of anonymity;
- Providing sufficient time for thinking;
- Ensuring a large number of respondents

The answers were collected and transmitted after teachers had been informed about the purpose of the study and how the conclusions would be used. The transmission and the collection of the completed questionnaires were carried out primarily by electronic means. The respondents completed and sent the questionnaires to the e-mail address: and were inputted into the database. The questionnaire was formulated to support the achievement of some of the major research objectives:

- Identifying the cultural dimensions specific to the Romanian pre-university educational system.
- Collection of the teachers' valuable suggestions from the educational system.

#### **4. Relevance and representativity**

One of the main problems of investigation in the area of socio-human sciences is ensuring the representativity of respondents for the phenomena category. In the case of this study, it has been noted that the results and conclusions correctly outline the needs of most teachers who teach technical disciplines in pre-university education.

The following considerations are expected to be solid arguments in support of the relevance of the study conclusions. According to the current data collection methodology, a strict breakdown of the teaching staff in high-school, vocational and post-secondary education is difficult. This situation generates a number of obstacles in calculating indicators relating to human resources. However, the number of completed and transmitted questionnaires is large enough to be considered sufficient in the description of the investigated situations. The arguments are presented below.

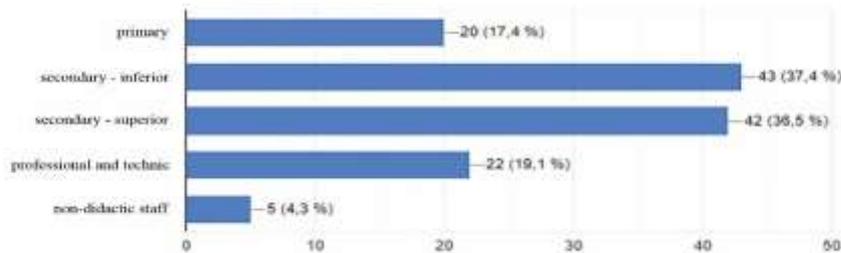
**1.** Respondents form a representative sample at a national level in relation to the distribution of development regions. Teachers from all development regions answered the questions in the questionnaire.

**2.** Numerically, the sample is representative. The indefinite area of statistical records on teachers is the numerical non-differentiation of teachers who teach in high school education in the technological field, as well as teachers who work in vocational and post-secondary education. Furthermore, based on the number of didactic frames contained in the official statistics of the INS, those who teach specialized disciplines cannot be numerically highlighted, and there is no way of knowing how many of them have their specialization acquired through Bachelor studies in the fields within the project. To estimate representativity, it was opted for the Taro Jamane expression. The 115 administered and processed questionnaires enclose the error limit to 3% in terms of an estimation based on the data set out above. We believe that the above arguments are sufficient to support the relevance of the study results and can ensure the representativity of the target group.

## 5. Results of the study

### 5.1. Description of the respondents' group

The study was conducted by collecting responses from the target group consisting of teachers working in pre-university education. The fields of specialization acquired through the Bachelor's degree are further displayed, but one should keep in mind that non-didactic staff also responded to the questionnaire. The questionnaire was a survey for identifying cultural dimensions in pre-university education (annex 2). It was applied to a sample of 115 respondents coming from pre-university education in Romania. As shown in the figure below, the distribution based on the level of studies was the following:



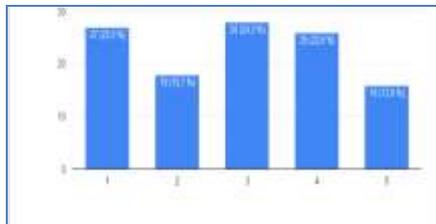
Graph 1 the distribution based on the level of studies

Then, they were detailed on the four cultural dimensions and their interpretation was performed. The results are presented in the form of graphs in which on the vertical axis we find the number of respondents, and on the horizontal axis 1 represents total disagreement, 2 partial disagreements, 3 do not know for sure, 4 partial agreement, 5 strong agreement.

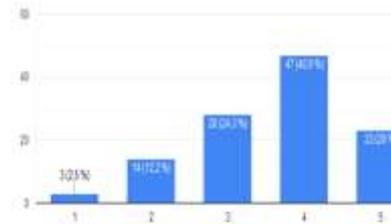
Figures that express the maximum number of answers to questions are relevant for research.

#### 5.1.1 "Distance from power"

It measures the degree of inequality in society and exemplifies the differences in power. A large "distance from power" indicates the preponderance and preference for authoritarian styles. The opinions of the bosses should be listened to in a non-critical manner, only by virtue of the formal authority with which they are invested. It indicates the extent of which the staff with lower influence accepts that the power is unevenly distributed.



Graph No. 2. The answers to question: "Generally, bosses take decisions based on the overall info they have and then communicate it to their employees. The way my bosses take their decisions seems to be adequate for the general educational system."



Graph No. 3. The answers to question: "Generally, bosses take decisions based on the overall info they have and then communicate it to their employees. The way my bosses take their decisions seems to be adequate for the general educational system."



Graph No. 4. The answers to question: "For me, financial gains are more important than a good relationship with my boss."



Graph No. 5. The answers to question: "For me, it is more important to advance in my career than to have a quiet, peaceful life."



Graph No. 6. The answers to question: "For me, having a stimulating job is more important than having a stable one."



Graph No. 7. The answers to question: "The competence of a teacher must be appreciated more than their friendly attitude towards students."



Graph No. 8. The answers to question: "Performance and equity are more important than solidarity and equality."



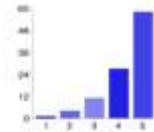
Graph No. 9. The answers to question: "Scholar failure represents a negative for students."

This proven uncertainty about the distribution of power can also happen because of the various changes through which the Romanian education has gone in recent years. Teachers try to avoid conflicts with their bosses or are reluctant in this regard; the increased financial gains or position advancements are not a goal and are uncharacteristic for this profession, and most teachers prefer to keep their secure job. The competence of a teacher is the main focus, while the friendly attitude towards the pupils is not regarded as essential, and the achievements and performances are worth more than solidarity and equality. School failure is obviously seen as a disastrous result for pupils.

**5.1.2 Communitarianism-Individualism**

Regarding the second defining dimension, it refers to the consideration of the group's interests as opposed to the individual's. "People are educated to take care of themselves, or to

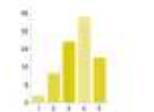
be integrated with the group.”<sup>4</sup> The size poles do not have a political cargo and do not necessarily characterize state regimes. The parameters for Communitarianism are those referring to: perfectionism, physical working conditions, use of qualifications for employment. The parameters for individualism are those that refer to: personal time, freedom, expression of options.



Graph No. 10. The answers to question: “For me, peace is more important than conflicts.”



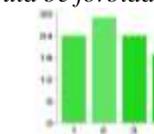
Graph No. 11. The answers to question: “Teachers are similar to philosophers who transmit their knowledge to pupils.”



Graph No. 12. The answers to question: “Students must always be respectful towards the teachers and any informal language should be forbidden.”



Graph No. 13. The answers to question : “Employees are used to do as they are told.”



Graph No. 14. The answers to question: “My job allows me to have enough free time for my family and myself.”

Graph No. 15. The answers to question: “During class, the majority of the educational initiatives must come from the teacher.”

The maximum score is obtained for maintaining harmony and avoiding conflicts in school. The answers from graph no. 13 confirm the general consensus, that teachers are seen as "philosophers" who transmit their own knowledge to students, but students must also show their respect to them. These results from graph no. 15 underline a commonly known issue – because of the constant changes made in the recent years, the teachers from the Romanian educational system no longer have as much free time. Regarding how well the students can execute what they are told to do, and how much of the teachers' authority is present, uncertainty is observed. It can be concluded that, when talking about these two cultural dimensions, there is no clear inclination towards Communitarianism or Individualism. Communitarianism is perceived as a social harmony, a source of personal fulfillment, with Individualism being praised for its freedom of choice and promotion of expressivity.

### 5.1.3 Masculinity - Femininity

“Femininity” and “Masculinity” are two opposites maintained in balance, where masculinity represents “pragmatism and efficiency” and doesn't cultivate individualism. Therefore, we can conclude that this dimension relates to the social value given to arrogance, the valorization of the

<sup>4</sup> Hosfede, 1996,p.69

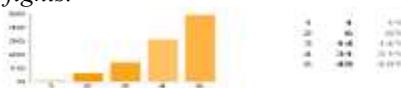
individual and the freedom of expression, which are considered to be specific to the male culture, or, otherwise, to the sensitivity, modesty, rooting of good relations, acceptance and obedience to the interests and values of the group, which are considered specific to female culture. Masculine culture means greater gains, personal recognition, advancement and competitiveness, while feminine culture means good relations with the bosses, cooperation, a personal sphere of work and workplace safety.



Graph No. 16. The answers to question: “Boys are not allowed to cry but are expected to fight, while girls are allowed to cry but can't ever have fights.”



Graph No. 17. The answers to question: “If you are a qualified person to perform at their best, provide them with clear and concise instructions.”



Graph No. 18. The answers to question: “Many schools would function better if conflicts were reduced.”



Graph No. 19. The answers to question: “My students prefer exact study methods and are interested in the accuracy of the results.”



Graph No. 20. The answers to question: “The teacher is expected to be able to answer to any question.”



Graph No. 21. The answers to question: “For me, having people recognize my worth and my competence is more important than working in a team that is based on cooperation.”



Graph No. 22. The answers to question 26: “I prefer not to change the school in which I teach very often.”

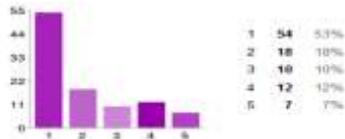


Graph No. 23. The answers to question: “As a teacher or a principal, you must always be prepared to answer to both students and employees.”

As seen in Graph No. 17, the most common answer is “strong agreement” when asked if the instructions should be clearly given when somebody wants to achieve something of quality. The data from Graph No. 18 suggests that people strongly agreed on the elimination of conflicts in school, as they recognize the existence of this phenomenon and its negative implications. The answers from graph no. 22 show that, for most respondents, stability is very important. They prefer steadiness and staying in the same school. They would also like the school programs not to change unless it is really necessary.

### 5.1.4 Avoidance of uncertainty

The fourth dimension indicates how alterity and differences are culturally accepted, and the extent to which the members of a culture feel threatened by uncertain situations. In the cultures with a high degree of uncertainty avoidance, the dominant idea is that "what is different is dangerous", while in the cultures with a small degree of uncertainty avoidance, then slogan becomes "what is different, is curious", representing how these two polarizing cultures conceive truth and accept risk. Avoidance of uncertainty refers to the extent of which the members of a culture feel threatened by uncertain or unsecure situations. Among other symptoms, this feeling is expressed through high stress, anxiety and the need to know a set of predictable rules-written or unwritten. People that come from communities with a high degree of uncertainty avoidance are agitated, nervous and even aggressive. In cultures with lower degrees of uncertainty avoidance, people are looking for a solid structure in the organizations where they work in order to help them determine foreseeable events.



Graph No. 26. The answers to question: "I feel harassed at my workplace."



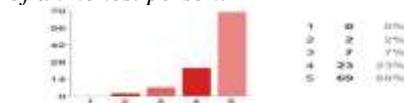
Graph No. 27. The answers to question: "The main purpose of education is to teach people how to behave."



Graph No. 28. The answers to question: "Telling the truth directly is a trait of an honest person."



Graph No. 29. The answers to question: "What is different is dangerous."



Graph No. 30. The answers to question: "The main purpose of education is to teach people how to learn."



Graph No. 31. The answers to question: "Generally, during class, I take most of the decisions and share them with my students."

After these results, we can conclude that, in the opinions of teachers from pre-university education, the main purpose of education is not to teach you how to behave (this should be done by family and society), but to teach you how to learn. Truth is associated with honest people, and a high degree of avoidance of uncertainty leads to a need for governance and leadership with pre-established rules. Most people do not feel harassed at their workplace and the non-recognition of stress (which can be a negative result of over-working) expresses an attitude that assumes this state as being normal and natural.

## 6. Conclusions and proposals:

Teachers do not want to interfere with their bosses or are reluctant, they agree with the decisions their superiors take and show their care for the superiors. Teachers are seen as "wise

mentors", students must respect them, and the competence of a teacher is valued more than their friendly attitude towards pupils. They tend to value performance and equity over solidarity and equality, and school failure is seen as a catastrophe for pupils. These opinions are, in my view, the result of the changes that have been made in the school system in the last few years. On the other hand, in terms of study practices about analytical programs or educational initiatives, there is a need for a fixed analytical program with accurate answers that can help the teachers in the process of training. The financial gains or advancements are not a real goal and are uncharacteristic for this profession, with people opting for a secure job instead. The parameters for individualism refer to personal time, freedom of choice and expression of options, and those for Communitarianism are referring to perfectionism, physical conditions of work and use of qualifications for employment. A teacher's inclination towards Communitarianism is expected. Essentially, it can be said that teachers have a tendency for stability and security. A specific preservationism is observed, with the freedom of expression being limited by what the bosses and the higher institutions consider to be the norm. There is also the sight of free-time getting lesser, which has been reported more and more by teachers in the recent years. Knowing the cultural dimensions of teachers from pre-university education, a more thorough analysis of teaching needs to be done, and training programs can be proposed, as they will have a positive impact on the educational system.

### References

- Stoica, A. (2012), Research methodology, Course support, UTCB
- Miroiu, A. coord.(1998) Romanian education today. Diagnostic study, Editura Polirom, Iasi,
- Cerchez, N.; E. Mateescu. (1995), Elements of school management, Editura Spiru Haret, Iași
- Văcărețu, A-S. (2007). From the needs analysis to the training programme. Editura Didactică și Pedagogică, București
- Chelcea, S. (2007) Methodology of sociological research, Ed. Economică,
- Cristea, S. (1998) Dictionary of Pedagogical terms, Editura didactică și Pedagogică, București
- Butucea M (2012) Pragmatic explanation in Education sciences Editura, Conspress București pag. 231-235

# **S e c t i o n**

## **SOFTWARE SOLUTIONS**

### **Software Solutions (SOFT):**

- **New software environments for education & training**
- **Software and management for education**
- **Virtual Reality Applications in Web-based Education**
- **Computer Graphics, Web, VR/AR and mixed-based applications for education & training, business, medicine, industry and other sciences**
- **Multi-agent Technology Applications in WBE and WBT**
- **Streaming Multimedia Applications in Learning**
- **Scientific Web-based Laboratories and Virtual Labs**
- **Software Computing in Virtual Reality and Artificial Intelligence**
- **Avatars and Intelligent Agents**

