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# Identifying the Types of Diversity in the Romanian Pre-university Educational Institutions and the Appropriate Managerial Strategy

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**Abstract**: The current research aims identifying the level of knowledge the stakeholders in the pre-university education system have upon the concept of diversity as a social construct and as basis for both the cohesion degree of the employees' group (teachers, auxiliary personnel, non-didactical) and the students' group, as well as the satisfaction degree they have while participating in the didactical process.
The research method is the investigation. The instrument is the questionnaire (Annex 1), which was applied to a number of 25 respondents, school inspectors for institutional management and human resources management in Romania. After its application in Google forms format, the answers were introduces in the NVivo content data analysis program, using the codes diversity type, management strategy, ethnicity, gender, religion, language, gaining information according to the table in Annex 2.
As the main objective of our study was to identify the types of diversity the schools face, we therefore begin our analysis by simply asking the responders to enumerate the types of diversity they can identify in their counties. Altogether, once they are enlisted, the responders will further name the strategy they can find in the schools from their county where those types of diversity were found. Our data suggest that diversity is defined in a very unspecific, personal and subjective way, that the types of diversity are very distinct and quite difficult to manage and that an easily identifiable strategic approach is inexistent in most of the targeted counties.

**Keywords:** *educational diversity, diversity management.*

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## 1. Introduction

In the Romanian pre-university educational institutions, either at the beginning of the school year or during the semester, students coming from all over Europe or the world are enrolled and become a challenge for all those involved in the didactical process: they are native speakers of other languages than Romanian, have not pursued the same school curricula as the Romanian students have, do not have the same school behavioral norms. In their trial to meet these newly-acquainted needs, the school principals and inspectors have approached the differences the immersion of these students in the Romanian school supposes and have discovered that what would have been simple was in fact very vast and, that these differences represent a new, difficult to manage and ample concept – **diversity.**

The purpose of this article is to find a solution to the challenge the diversity raises in the educational environment, beginning from the premise that, if accordingly applied a diversity management strategy, a Romanian pre-university educational institution will achieve a high level of co-operation and social inclusion among their participants.

## 2. Literature review

The specific literature distinguishes five main dimensions of the diversity management:

### *2.1. Diversity – as resource and conflict*

Although there are many definitions of the concept of diversity, the most synthetic is where diversity is a bi-dimensional and social construct – the visibility of social aspects of diversity and the direct link to the job held. Diversity may be defined as the collective number of differences among the members of a social unit. Many theorists (Alcazar et al., 2013; Harrison & Klein 2007; Podsiadlowski et al., 2013; Shore et al., 2009) clearly dissociate between the visible dimentions of diversity, such as age, race, gender, ethnicity, and those more subtle, indirectly observable to others, such as the level of education, financial status, social class, religion, sexual orientation.

### *2.2. Diversity as institutional reality and its advantages and disadvantages*

Diversity at the work is generally presented as panacea, always associated with positive organizational results. This point of view, of Cox and Blake (1991) is mirrored by the hypothesis that diversity is the source of value, it brings added value to the organizational process. Albeit, a critical approach of the effects of diversity on workplace at the individual, team and

generic level, indicates the phenomenon as having both positive and negative outcomes. Along the time, different studies, such as the one run by Podsiadlowski et al. (2013), showed that the effect of diversity upon the workplace was neither consequent, nor conclusive.

### *2.3. Theorganizational policy imposed by law – equal employment opportunities (EEO) and affirmative action (AA) or proper institutional management*

As diversity at workplace foremost mirrors the social differences, it is not surprising that the USA is the first country to approach such problems, thus adopting anti discrimination legislation for the first time in 1964, in Title VII of the Civil Rights Law. Another perspective is the affirmative action (AA), also known as Positive Discrimination which is aimed at raising the number of employees from different ethnic groups and historically disadvantaged social areas – women, ethinc and religious minorities.

It is interesting to notice that the European Union has become active in the segment of anti-discrimination since 1997, through the Treaty of Amsterdam which contains a checklist of implementation og diversity management and the Diversity Chart.

### *2.4. The rhetoric of diversity management*

The first critical studies of diversity appeared at the middle of the 90s, representing a reaction to the multitude of programs to dominate the multinational corporations in their trying to apply and respect a series of inclusive principles, through a rhetoric vectoring a powerful perspective on valuing the different competences offered by a diverceworrkforce and continuously dynamic. Therefore, the organizational discourse tends to offer illegitimacy to different practices of structural inequality, both at the linguistic level and the practical one, although the discrepancy appears when the response remains rhetoric and the reality unchanged.

### *2.5. Diversity as a social construct*

As a practical, realistic example, the physical disability of an employee may be the result of a tragedy to have produced a biological modification, without an obvious social aspect. But the societal model regards disability as a form of social impact, through the socio-economical relations of dependence or autonomy, of adaptation to social group or rejection of it, or the degree of possible integration in the activity of an institution.

## 3. Methodology

The method used in the research is the survey and the instrument used is the questionnaire (Annex 1), which was applied to a number of 25 respondents, school inspectors for institutional management and human resources management in Romania. After its application in Google forms format, the answers were introduces in the Nvivo content data analysis program, using the codes diversity type, management strategy, ethnicity, gender, religion, language, gaining information according to the table in Annex 2.

As the main objective of our study was to identify the types of diversity the schools face, we therefore begin our analysis by simply asking the responders to enumerate the types of diversity they can identify in their counties.Altogether, once they are enlisted, the responders will further name the strategy they can find in the schools from their county where those types of diversity were found.

Once identified the specific types of diversity in the school, the manager can conceive a specific strategy to tackle the problems they infer, to initially test the level of psychological comfort within the groups in the schools (teachers, students, non-teaching personnel), apply the actions provided in the management matrix, achieve the proposed objectives and then finally test the level of social inclusion in order to see if the managerial strategic matrix has been both efficient and effective.

## 4. Results And Discussions

Following the centralization and interpretation of the answers, the term of diversitywas defined as ethnicity, religion, language, culture, different political opinion, without being directly related or associated with a majority or minority as reference (a totally subjective way of defining the term). Our data suggest that diversity is defined in a very unspecific, personal and subjective way, that the types of diversity are very distinct and quite difficult to manage and that an easily identifiable strategic approach is inexistent in most of the counties.

Altogether, there were also used the expressions "different people in one place", "a multitude of individual characteristics", which can be visible, such as gender, age, race, or less evident, such a attitudes, abilities, learning styles, types of intelligence, talents in certain domains, all of them cohabiting in a permanent and unique interaction.

The diversity management strategies existing in the schools in the five counties are only a few and difficult to identify. The question aiming at this has remained unanswered at nine of the respondents, has been given an

"I do not know" answer at five of the respondents and, among the eleven that have given a full answer, we can find the following: the integration of the students in the activities organized within schools, individual valorization of each student, without any mentioning a clear activity or action towards this.

In a school, either rural, urban, public or private, in the targeted counties, we can identify the following types of diversity:

- Ethnic (Rroma, Jewish, Arabs, German, Hugarian);
- Cultural (traditions, religion [orthodox, penticostal, adventist, evanhelist, catholic]);
- Linguistical (transnationality, plurilinguitic natives);
- Psycho - pedagogical (intellectual [IQ], special educational needs, physical disabilities, learning styles, types of intelligence, personality disorders);
- Behavioural and ethic (behavioural disordre);
- Political ideology (diffrent political party affiliation);
- Educational (level of study, personal development);
- Social (native environment, family - parental styles, marital status);
- Professional (different domains of study and interest, different didactical degrees);
- Geographical (rasial);
- Age (from 5 to 19 years for the students, from 23 to 68 years for the teachers and employees);
- Financial (income/types of spendings/possessions);
- Life expereince (military service, judical background)

These types of diversity have thus been graphically presented in a psycho-socio-pedagogical pyramid, based on how evident they are or, respectively, how reflexive and intrinsic-structural they may be:

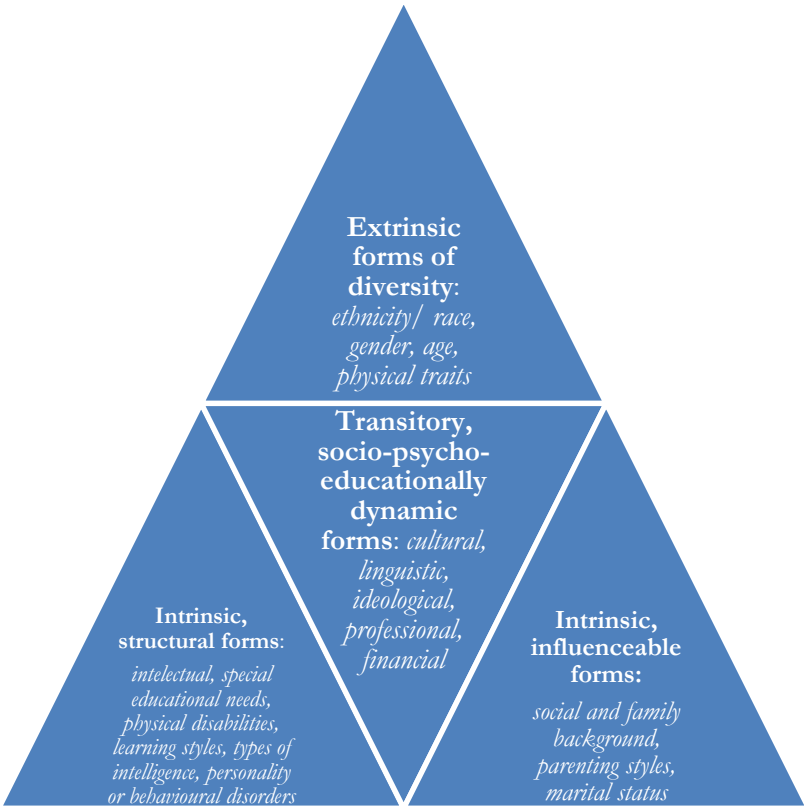



**Figure 1.** Psycho-socio-pedagogical pyramid
Source: author's work

This new reality an institution confronts with these days (irrespectively with the level, but based on it there will be approached a specific managerial strategy) imposes a further study of the problem to lead to practical conclusion, translated into a management strategy applicable in any given diversity-related context.

The problem is not set in simple terms, of acceptance that individuals are different, but in terms of creating a collaborative management, flexible and non-hierarchical, in an inclusive atmosphere and dedication to diversity valorization.

Along the time, there has been tried to scientifically establish that diversity management should be a basic component of human resources management, creating theoretical analyses with historical specificity which have underlined the possible discrepancies between the organisational rhetoric and the real practice.

Nevertheless, there are no conclusive studies regarding the efficiency of a diversity management strategy within an educational institution, the researchers have not yet investigated the direct and indirect impact of diversity on human resources in a school, where the interest and motivation are exclusively related to the learning process, with no patrimonial or financial benefit, and with no measured impact of such a strategy upon them.

## 5. Conclusion

**A first conclusion** of the study is the important attention given in the diversity management to the notion of equality, often named correctness or antagonistically defined thorough the concept of discrimination.

**A second conclusion** is that most of the schools do not have a clear set of diversity management practices. From a cultural or linguistic point of view, diversity is a growing challenge as more and more students are coming every year from all corners of the world and for whom the Romanian language, the traditions and the customs here are foreign. If the universities are well prepared to face these students, high schools and elementary schools are always surprised to discover the gaps in the adaptation process.

**Thirdly**, regarding the educational system, the human resources are multiple (teachers, students, auxiliary and non-didactical personnel, parents, educational partners), with the accent rarely falling on the diversity strategy upon the employees and beneficiaries, therefore an acute need to further research in this field.

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## Annex 1 – Questionaire

### Management of diversity in pre-universityeducational institutions

I am currently pursuing a doctoral research in the domain of management in order to identify a strategy for the management of diversity in the pre-university educational institutions and to achieve the following objectives:

**I.** Identifying the types of diversity in high schools,

**II.** Identifying the managerial strategies to tackle diversity in schools (whether/where they exist)

Thank you for your support and participation!

1. How do you define the concept of *diversity*?
2. Do you think it is important to identify this aspect in a school? Why?
3. In your opinion what are the positive aspects the diversity brings to your school?
4. Which are the types of diversity you can think of? Please, state them!
5. Which are the diversity management strategies you can identify in the schools you have verified so far?
6. Please, give examples of activities which may be part of astrategy of diversity management in schools.

## Annex 2 – Table of content qualitative analysis

**Table 1**. Table of content qualitative analysis

| Question | C1 Ethnic | C 2 Language | C3 Religion | C 4 Individual trait | C 5 Strategy | C 6 Positive/ Negative |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. How can you define the concept of *diversity*? | 7 | 9 | 5 | 23 | 6 | + |
| 2. Why do you think it is important to identify this aspect in a school? | 9 | 5 | 5 | 18 | 3 | + |
| 3.In youropinion which are the aspects that diversity brings in schools? | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 17 | 4 – 21 + |
| 4. Which are the types of diversity that come to your mind right now? Please, state them! | 1 | 6 | 19 | 22 | 0 | + |
| 5. Which are the diversity management strategies you could identify in time in the schools you have visited or verified so far? | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 6 | + |
| 6. Will you, please, give examples of activities that could be part of a diversity management strategy in a school. | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 6 | - |
| Total: | 7 | 0 | 29 | 63 | 8 | 25 + 5 - |