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HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT IN EDUCATION: A POST-PANDEMIC PARADIGM APPROACH

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Abstract:

The COVID-19 pandemic has generated impressive effects on all organisations, especially educational ones, creating a provocative, complex, and totally new environment for practitioners in human resources management (HRM), but also for managers who had to find practical, viable, and ingenious solutions to ensure the continuity of the instructive-educational process, but also to help its employees adapt to this extraordinary crisis. Since studies addressing this topic are sparse, this study aims to explore the impact that the change in the educational paradigm generated by the COVID-19 pandemic has had on HRM, expanding the objective of management research and performance in preuniversity education in Romania. The methodology consist of a SWOT analysis that identifies the main strengths, challenges, and opportunities that have arisen from the new pandemic, offering updated perspectives to HRM practitioners and managers, and regarding the possible development directions at the national level that could arise from these opportunities. Also, a survey opinion was conducted among teachers from Romania, Cyprus, England, Greece, Spain, and Turkey in order to identify to what extent they have knowledge about the following concepts: Human Resource Management and performance in education. In the end, in order to determine the knowledge by country and intensity levels for the Education Performance indicator, a statistical analysis was performed.

Keywords: COVID-19 crisis; human resource management (HRM), performance in education.

JEL Classification: A2, I25, I28

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INTRODUCTION

During the COVID-19 pandemic period, the educational system was profoundly affected and forced to adapt to a whole new online teaching-learning environment, as well as to maintain an appropriate level of performance.

In the current crisis, the organisational culture that characterises the education system in Romania can be considered a vulnerable issue because, under the impact of the pandemic, the traditional elements of the organisational hierarchy have changed significantly, especially due to the fact that the human resource faced a challenge related to adaptation to digital resources as a support of the online school. School managers had to provide sufficient resources and full logistical support for communication, help employees develop their skills, and to put comprehensive human resource management strategies into practice.

Therefore, the purpose of the research is to identify the performance of the Romanian education system, considering the impact on the organisational culture due to the transition to online teaching, as well as the identification of solutions to minimise the vulnerabilities generated by the change in the educational paradigm.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

The authors took into consideration the approach of the most current trends in terms of both theoretical frameworks and empirical demonstrations of the studies published starting with the onset of the pandemic, as indicated by the summary of the presented works that address the field of human resource management (HRM) in education.

Management represents, at its origins, an economic concept, defining a model of efficient management of economic activity, achievable by maximising the entire set of existing resources (human, financial, productive, technological, community, etc.). According to Mackensie's opinion, management is considered the process in which the manager operates with three fundamental elements – ideas, things and people – achieving the proposed objectives through others. Although it appeared, developed, and perfected with direct reference to the economy, management has gradually imposed itself in all areas of human activity: education, politics, science, and culture, as the most significant factor that conditions the dimensions of performance achieved by an institution.

According to Mercer, J., Barker, B., R. B., R. (2010), leaders in education must look for competitive advantage through strategies likely to enhance employees' motivation, consolidate capacity for organisational improvement and generate better value-added performance. The policy-makers in the field of education must embrace a vision, develop a well-structured plan, and concrete steps, according to the social, economic, and cultural realities, distribute responsibilities to all levels, from the ministry, school inspectorates, school managers and teachers, and also include parents and students in the process. This will represent a continuous process, as the new legislation must constantly be adapted to the broad vision, in order to maximise human resource performance in the teaching-learning process.

In 2021, Azizi et al. examined the strategies of HRM which should be used by managers in order to increase motivation, satisfaction, productivity, and health of employees, also providing the description of these strategies.

The role of HR during the pandemic years has continuously expanded, as it became a key participant in figuring out how employees can function best in their new post-pandemic work environment, be it onsite, hybrid, or 100% remote (Harbert, T., 2021).

Furthermore, human resources have become more integral than ever, despite the challenges which HR professionals will have to overcome in order to make sure that their workforces remain competitive, driven, and content. (Tunc, M., 2022).

Alkfiri, S. (2020) underlines the idea that employees of the future need to reassess their abilities and make them fit for the new culture and ethos, because individuals, communities, and institutions have been impacted and, in many ways, altered by the pandemic. (Smith, M.C., Bohonos, J., Patterson, M., 2021).

2. METHODOLOGY

In order to achieve the research objectives, we designed a questionnaire addressed to teachers from 6 countries that aimed to identify the level of performance perceived by teachers of different nationalities in the context of the change in the educational paradigm based on the transition to digital education and the upgrading of traditional teaching-learning methods.

In carrying out this approach, first, we prepared the SWOT analysis of the educational system in Romania regarding the period of the pandemic, an aspect that resides in the identification of strengths, but also of opportunities, respectively, of the vulnerabilities that characterise them, especially with regard to the management of human resources in the pre-university and university education system, as well as the ways

to motivate the human resource that activates in this system in order to reach appropriate levels of performance.

Also, a survey opinion was conducted among teachers from Romania, Cyprus, England, Greece, Spain and Turkey in order to identify to what extent they have knowledge about the Human Resource Management and performance in education. The sample consists of 227 respondents. The scale of presentation for the options is: option 1. To a large extent; option 2. Medium; option 3. To a small extent; option 4. I don't know. In order to determine knowledge by country and intensity levels for the Education Performance indicator, a statistical analysis was performed.

3. SWOT ANALYSIS OF THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM IN ROMANIA

The analysis of the educational system reveals the main characteristics that have been identified, representing an important basis for the future strategies or public policies intended to increase the performance in this field.

Strengths:

- open access to the educational resources offered by prestigious cultural institutions, such as: libraries, museums, cultural centres, theatres, etc. who have reorganised and rethought their business, attracting the public through virtual tours, apps, and interactive events.
- promoting Erasmus+ projects and partnerships that bring together preuniversity and university education institutions in the digitalisation field.
- developing teaching materials and resources suitable for differentiated teaching-learning approaches.
- promoting teamwork, collaboration, communication skills, and creativity among teachers.
- continuous improvement of teachers by completing postgraduate studies,
- enrolment in didactic degrees, doctorates, continuous training courses, etc.
- a significant number of teachers are authors of scientific papers and specialised publications.

Weaknesses:

- constantly changing legislation and the lack of coherent policies regarding the mid- and long-term predictability of the education system.
- involvement of political parties at all levels of the management (schools, schools "inspectors" - deconcentrated branches of the Ministry of Education), influencing managerial activity and teaching processes.
- the decrease in the birth rate generated a decrease in the number of students.
- lack of vision and coherent policies regarding the educational system
- unadapted legislation to the Romanian context
- unadapted curricula to the requirements of different ages and the students' current interest
- large volume of notions, concepts, reduced capacity to adapt to concrete reality.
- lack of concern for children's educational needs.
- the lack of clear performance indicators and clear criteria for evaluating the activity of teaching staff that would lead to a real differentiation realised, including in different salary classes.

Threats:

- decreased motivation and interest in professional activities due to excessive bureaucracy of the education process.
- teachers' burnout and health issues.
- the gap between rural and urban schools, according to performance in education.

- migration to different European countries or to areas in Romania with a better socio-economic perspective.
- increasing number of students with special educational needs.
- insufficient budget allocations.

Opportunities:

- implementation of "Wi-Fi Campus" type projects by the Ministry of Education and Research in partnership with the Authority for Digitization of Romania, which aimed to upgrade the material endowment with network equipment (routers, switches, Wi-Fi extension) of school units by expanding Internet access in over 4,500 schools.
- the involvement of both traditional education providers (House of the Teaching Staff, Ministry of Education and Research, universities, Department for Teaching Staff Training, County Resource Centres and Educational Assistance), as well as private entities in the creation of relevant, interactive and educational content attractive for all participants in the educational act, of software, applications and didactic materials available both free of charge and with a subscription, adapted to the online educational process. Such an example of good practice is represented by the projects organised and implemented by Aspire Teachers Romania, such as Education at Height, Open Class.
- the new project of the ministry, implemented through the National Centre for Policies and Evaluation in Education, which aims to develop evaluation standards.

Concluding the elements resulting from the SWOT analysis, the human resource employed in the system is mostly motivated and well-professionally trained, showing a special availability and ability to adapt to change, regardless of whether it is supported or not with financial measures or corresponding legislation (one such example being the way in which the teaching staff designed and carried out online teaching during the months of March-June 2020).

4. RESULTS OF THE SURVEY

The first aspect was related to teachers and school managers' level of knowledge about human resources management. Regarding the question Q1 <<To what extent do you have knowledge about the following concepts: Human Resources Management (CUN-HRM)>>, all 227 respondents stated on average (1.98/4) that they have average knowledge about the concept. (Figure no.1). The scale of presentation for the options is: option 1. To a large extent; option 2. Medium; option 3. To a small extent; option 4. I don't know.

Figure 1 - Statistical analysis of frequency series of responses for Q1

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	1	64	28,2
	2	108	47,6
	3	51	22,5
	4	4	1,8
	Total	227	100,0

(Source: authors, own data processing, 2023)

The statistical analysis of the frequency series revealed that the median of the sample is at 0.02 points or corresponds to the value 2/4, which indicates a moderate homogeneity of the sample. The standard error of the mean of the options expressed by the respondents to this question is 0.051. The best represented option (with maximum distribution) is that of respondents who declared that they have average knowledge about the concept. The fewest answers highlighted the opinion of the respondents that they do not know this concept.

A subsample of 130 respondents from Romania declared on average (1.9/4) that they had average knowledge of the concept. Statistical analysis of the frequency series revealed that the median of the subsample is at 0.1 points or corresponds to the value 2/4, which indicates a moderate homogeneity of the

subsample. The standard error of the average of the options expressed by the Romanian respondents to the question is 0.064. The best represented option (with maximum distribution) is that of respondents who declared that they have average knowledge about the concept. The fewest answers highlighted the opinion of the respondents that they do not know this concept.

A number of 21 teachers from England reported on average (1.95/4) that they had average knowledge of the concept. The statistical analysis of the frequency series indicated that the median of the subsample is at 0.05 points, corresponding to the value 2/4, showing a moderate homogeneity of the subsample. The standard error of the mean of the options expressed by the English respondents to the question is 0.146. The best represented option (with maximum distribution) is that of the respondents who declared that they have average knowledge about the concept.

17 respondents from Cyprus stated on average (2.18/4) that they also had average knowledge of this concept. The statistical analysis of the frequency series revealed that the median of the subsample is at -0.18 points, corresponding to the value 2/4, which indicates a moderate homogeneity of the subsample. The standard error of the mean of the options expressed by Cypriot respondents to the question is 0.246. The best represented option (with maximum distribution) is that of respondents who declared that they have average knowledge about the concept. The fewest answers highlighted the opinion of the respondents that they do not know this concept.

A group of 25 school managers and teachers from Greece reported on average (2.08/4) that they had average knowledge of HRM. Statistical analysis revealed that the median of the subsample is at -0.08 points, corresponding to the value 2/4, which indicates a moderate homogeneity of the subsample. The standard error of the mean of the options expressed by the Greek respondents to the question is 0.172. The best represented option (with maximum distribution) is that of the respondents who declared that they have average knowledge about the concept.

17 Spanish respondents declared on average (2.18/4) that they had average knowledge of the concept, with the median of the subsample at -0.18 points, corresponding to the value 2/4, indicating a moderate homogeneity of the subsample. The standard error of the mean of the options expressed by the Spanish respondents to the question is 0.176.

A subsample of 17 respondents from Turkey declared on average (2.06/4) an average knowledge of human resource management. Statistical analysis of the frequency series indicated that the median of the subsample is at -0.06 points, corresponding to the value 2/4, a moderate homogeneity of the subsample. The standard error of the mean of the options expressed by the Turkish respondents to the question is 0.181.

Regarding the question Q2 <<To what extent do you have knowledge about the following concepts: Performance in education (CUN-EDPERF)>>, all 227 respondents declared on average (1.54/4) that they have average knowledge about the concept. The scale of presentation of the options is: option 1. To a large extent; option 2. Medium; option 3. To a small extent; option 4. I don't know.

Figure 2 - Statistical analysis of frequency series of responses for Q2

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	1	117	51,5
	2	99	43,6
	3	10	4,4
	4	1	,4
	Total	227	100,0

(Source: authors, own data processing, 2023)

The median of the sample revealed by the statistical analysis of the frequency series is at -0.54 corresponding to the value ¼ and indicating a moderate homogeneity of the sample. The standard error of the mean of the options expressed by the respondents to this question is 0.04.

A subsample of 130 respondents from Romania declared on average (1.52/4) that they had average knowledge about performance in education. Statistical analysis of the frequency series revealed that the median of the subsample is at -0.52 points, corresponding to the value 1/4, which indicates a moderate

homogeneity of the subsample. The standard error of the mean of the options expressed by the total respondents to the question is 0.05. The best represented option (with maximum distribution) is for the respondents who declared that they have knowledge about the concept to a large extent. The fewest responses highlighted the opinion of the respondents that they have little knowledge about the concept.

The respondents from England reported on average (1.38/4) that they had a high level of knowledge about the concept. Statistical analysis of the frequency series revealed that the median of the subsample is at -0.38 points, corresponding to the value 1/4, indicating a moderate homogeneity of the subsample. The standard error of the mean of the options expressed by Total respondents to the question is 0.109.

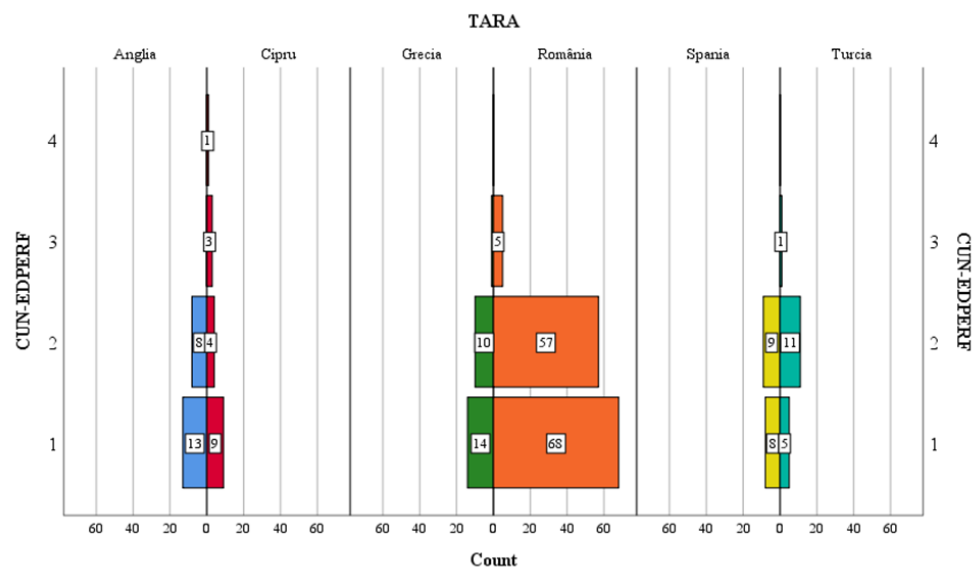
The teachers from Cyprus stated on average (1.76/4) that they had average knowledge of the concept. The statistical analysis of the frequency series revealed that the median of the subsample is at -0.76 points, corresponding to the value 1/4, which indicates a moderate homogeneity of the subsample. The standard error of the mean of the options expressed by the total respondents to the question is 0.235. The best represented option (with maximum distribution) is for the respondents who declared that they have knowledge about the concept to a large extent.

The school managers and teachers from Greece stated on average (1.48/4) that they had a high level of knowledge about the concept. Statistical analysis of the frequency series revealed that the median of the subsample is at -0.48 points, corresponding to the value 1/4, which indicates a moderate homogeneity of the subsample. The standard error of the mean of the options expressed by the total respondents to the question is 0.117.

A subsample of 17 respondents from Spain reported on average (1.53/4) that they had average knowledge of the concept. Statistical analysis of the frequency series revealed that the median of the subsample is at 0.47 points, corresponding to the value 2/4, which indicates a moderate homogeneity of the subsample. The standard error of the mean of the options expressed by the total of respondents to the question is 0.125. The best represented option (with maximal distribution) is that of respondents who declared that they have average knowledge about the concept.

The respondents from Turkey stated on average (1.76/4) that they had average knowledge of the concept. The statistical analysis of the frequency series revealed that the median of the subsample is at 0.24 points, corresponding to the value 2/4, which indicates a moderate homogeneity of the subsample. The standard error of the mean of the options expressed by Total respondents to the question is 0.136 (Figure no.3).

Figure 3 - Structured diagram of knowledge by country and intensity levels for the Education Performance indicator



(Source: authors, own data processing, 2023)

The respondents from England reported on average (1.62/4) that they had average knowledge of the concept. Statistical analysis of the frequency series revealed that the median of the subsample is at 0.38 points, corresponding to the value 2/4, indicating a subsample 'moderate homogeneity'. The standard error of the mean of the choices expressed by the mean subsample respondents to the question is 0.146.

A subsample of respondents from Cyprus, on average (1.82/4) and Greek teachers (1.68/4), stated that they had average knowledge of the concept. The statistical analysis of the frequency series revealed that the median of the subsample is at 0.18 points, corresponding to the value 2/4, which indicates a moderate homogeneity of the subsample, while the standard error is 0.214. The best represented option is of respondents who declared that they have knowledge about the concept to a large extent.

Romanian teachers declared on average (2.15/4) that they have average knowledge about the concept of performance in education. Statistical analysis of the frequency series revealed that the median of the subsample is at -0.15 points, corresponding to the value 2/4, which indicates a moderate homogeneity of the subsample. The standard error of the mean of the choices expressed by the mean subsample respondents to the question is 0.071. The best represented option (with maximum distribution) is that of respondents who declared that they have average knowledge about the concept. The fewest answers highlighted the opinion of the respondents that they do not know this concept.

17 respondents from Spain stated on average (1.59/4) that they had average knowledge of the concept. Statistical analysis of the frequency series revealed that the median of the subsample is at -0.59 points, corresponding to the value 1/4, indicating a moderate homogeneity of the subsample. The standard error of the mean of the choices expressed by the mean subsample respondents to the question is 0.173. The best represented option is of respondents who declared that they have knowledge about the concept to a large extent. The fewest responses highlighted the opinion of the respondents that they have little knowledge about the concept.

A subsample of 17 respondents from Turkey reported on average (2.18/4) that they had average knowledge of the concept. The statistical analysis of the frequency series revealed that the median of the subsample is at -0.18 points, corresponding to the value 2/4, which indicates a moderate homogeneity of the subsample.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The difficult situations that educational systems around the world had to face during the COVID-19 pandemic must be used both to change the paradigm in which they will operate in the future, as well as to adapt to the post-pandemic resilience stage in the event of new future crises.

The upper management must analyse, upgrade, and improve the existing human resources management strategies,

- promoting educational policies adapted to the new social and economic realities,
- providing the budgetary resources necessary for its implementation and support,
- ensuring a strong continuous training component for employees in the system,
- promoting a successful and collaborative organisational culture from the perspective of human resources management in education.
- providing clear evaluation instruments to measure the performance of students, teachers, and managers.

The contexts generated by the change in the educational paradigm registered with the advent of the pandemic require substantial changes in terms of educational policies, curriculum adaptation, the use of online educational resources, and the behaviour and work practices not only of the managers, of the organisation's workers, but also of all parties and stakeholders in the educational system (local community, pupils, students, parents, providers of educational services).

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

The author/authors listed have made a substantial, direct, and intellectual contribution to the work, and approved it for publication.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationship that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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