

## A Bibliographic Study on the Use of Communication in Relation to the School Relationship - Coordinating Institutions

Nicoleta SLABU<sup>1</sup>, Mihaela Luminita LUPU<sup>2</sup>

**Abstract** – Schools have a certain status at the community level. They must ensure their existence as an organization, and this depends on how well they adapt to the external environment. They must communicate effectively with these environments. The paper presents a bibliographic study on the external communication carried out at the level of educational institutions and aims to identify how this is reflected at the level of each stage of education in Romania. The realization of this study determined the conceptual analysis of the communication process within the school relationship - coordinating institutions and the formulation of the following conclusions that may constitute the theoretical foundation of the future research. In most institutions the communication process is not transparent. The deficiencies of communication are reflected in the image of the school, which is often at the disadvantage of the unit. This is not a substitute for a strategic plan. There is a lack of agreement in the communication between the levels of education: from the mayor to the secondary school, high school, and university. These observations support the choice of the research topic, as one of the impacts on the pre-university education institutions, on the community and the family of the beneficiaries.

**Keywords** communication, management, education institutions, pre-university, external communication, conceptual analysis

### I. INTRODUCTION

The bibliographic study on the use of communication in the relationship between schools and the coordinating institutions falls within the field of scientific research in Engineering and Management as a general field, and in the field of human resource management as a specific field of research.

Within any institution in general, and therefore the institutions that govern the educational field, communication is, along with professional motivation and competence, "the key to organizational excellence and effectiveness" (Grünig, 1992) [6].

The objective of the paper is to provide a scientific basis for analysing how communication is managed externally in pre-university education institutions. The motivation for choosing this topic starts from a real fact, which is that educational institutions are subject to a permanent process of change and rapid adaptation.

This implies the identification of mechanisms for adaptation to the new, of the barriers and factors that influence communication, of the strong points of external communication and their replication at the level of other institutions in pre-university education in Romania. The methodology approached in the paper consists in structuring the bibliographic study on the aspects presented in the research, within the direction of using communication in the school - coordinating institutions relationship.

### II. BIBLIOGRAPHIC STUDY ON COMMUNICATION IN GENERAL, AND IN THE EDUCATIONAL PROCESS IN PARTICULAR

The analysis aimed to highlight, on the one hand, the way in which external communication from the school level is reflected in the specialized literature, and on the other hand, to find out what is the preoccupation of pre-university education institutions towards the communication with higher level institutions, the inspectorates and the ministry. The review was diverse and included a variety of document types (books, academic articles and popular journals, institution websites, documents published on these sites).

Recent studies address the communication process between schools and coordinating institutions (school inspectorates and ministry) from the perspective of decentralization. According to Hunt (2007), educational systems tend to operate on three interconnected levels: a) the macro level - where

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<sup>1</sup> „Gheorghe Asachi” Technical University of Iasi, Faculty of Mechanical Engineering, Romania, [nicoletaslabu@gmail.com](mailto:nicoletaslabu@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup> „Gheorghe Asachi” Technical University of Iasi, Faculty of Mechanical Engineering, Romania, [luminitalupu2011@gmail.com](mailto:luminitalupu2011@gmail.com)

national policies are developed and negotiated; b) the middle level - which oversees the implementation of national policy; it is often located in the equivalent of provincial / local education departments; c) the micro level of schools and communities that implement the policies and where the change of practices in education takes place. Thus, the communication takes place from top to bottom, as the national and county authorities will implement and evaluate the adopted educational policies. However, the need for bottom-up communication has been increasingly recognized, starting with the fact that the responsibilities in the education management are apparently shifting to the school and community level. He notes the need to develop communication skills between the three levels of education, as well as the need for communication spaces and opportunities [7].

The communication with decision makers can take various forms, such as: consultation processes; public participation; global campaigns and links between research policies from the perspective of the educational sector.

Schleicher illustrates the involvement of communication in the process of implementing governmental educational policies. It shows how the communication policy has changed the nature of the conversation about the educational reform in the United States [15].

Keating analysed how the new evaluation system was developed and implemented at the level of four schools in different parts of the United States and highlighted the role of two factors in this process: trust and communication [9]. The collaboration between the determinants of this process was based on an open and honest communication. In addition to the communication accompanying the evaluation activity throughout its development, the report presented by Nusche et al. (2011) in Norway recommends further collaboration between national authorities and schools based on a clear communication of the significance of the evaluation results applied at national level [12].

In the consultation process, Finlay emphasizes the importance of two-way communication, but which is resumed in an iterative approach. This involves the following steps: listening, communication, feedback, communication and listening again [5].

### III. THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS REGARDING THE COMMUNICATION PROCESS BETWEEN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

#### 3.1. Types of external communication

A classification of external communication starts from the idea that communication is not strictly managerial. Annie Bartoli identified the following types of external communication:

- *Operational external communication* (between the members of the organization with interlocutors from outside the organization);

- *Strategic external communication* (building or expanding a communication network);
- *Promotional external communication* (advertising, public relations).

Thus, the promotional external communication at the level of educational institutions can be managed through various strategies. The first involved in this type of external communication are teachers who display an image of the institution voluntarily, through the type of relationships established with partners. The personal image they build on a social level is also reflected on the institution.

Strategic external communication involves building relationships with various actors in the social environment, but also anticipating the evolution of the relationships, the changes that may occur and that could impact the image of the institution. The promotional external communication presupposes that the school offers aspects of interest to the public (mission, vision, values and results obtained). This type of communication results in increased mutual trust between the beneficiary and the partners or between the beneficiaries of education and the offering institutions.

Thus, the management of internal and external communication by diversifying the ways of working with partners leads to an efficiency of the entire activity in a school institution.

#### 3.2. The legal basis of communication at the level of the institutions that govern the education process

In Romania, the documents that rule the communication process at the level of educational institutions are presented in the form of laws, orders, ordinances, norms, regulations, methodologies, such as:

- National Education Law no. 1/05.01.2011 with subsequent changes;
- ORDER no. 5079 of August 31, 2016 regarding the approval of the Framework Regulation for the organization and functioning of the pre-university education units, with the subsequent modifications and completions, brought by OMEN no. 3027 of 2018;
- Law no. 544/2001 regarding the free access to information of public interest;
- Methodological norms for applying Law no. 544/2001, regarding the free access to information of public interest, approved by the Government Decision no. 123 of February 7, 2002;
- Regulation of organization and functioning of the pre-university education units no. 5079/2016 - with the subsequent modifications and completions.

#### 3.3. The communication model at the level of the institutions that govern the educational process in Romania

The study presents the results of the bibliographic analysis performed on the documents that regulate the management activity. For each type of institution, we analysed the specific documents, highlighting the data on the external communication process. These were

extracted from the websites of pre-university educational institutions (high school, middle/secondary school, and primary school levels), of the school inspectorates and of the Ministry of National Education. These documents are the management plan, the institutional development project, the operational procedures.

The following figure shows the way in which the communication process between the analysed institutions is carried out. (Figure 1).

### 3.4. The Ministry of National Education in Romania

The Ministry of Education and Research developed in 2006 *the Communication Strategy for the pilot projects of decentralization in the field of education* in Dolj, Iași and Harghita counties, which is a tool that aims to improve the information and communication process during the pilot project of decentralization of a number of 50 schools from Dolj, Iași and Harghita counties [11]. This document shows that at the level of the Ministry there is a team of 20 people who make up the Communication and Public Relations Department (public relations), with five subunits (press office, public relations office, archive, telephone operators, customer service, copying documents). Through this Office of Communication and Public Relations, the entire external communication of the institution takes place.

Other current communication activities that take place at the level of the Ministry are daily press review, intranet, meetings, and encounters at the level of the director/manager, distribution of decisions in written format to the directors/managers.

According to the last point of the presented strategy, an information and communication body will be implemented. It will be composed of communication inspectors, who, based on a communication plan, will “define the objectives, target

groups, communication channels and activities addressed to the partners at the county level and the pilot schools / communities”.

Vertical communication with schools takes place through School Inspectorates. The information is taken over by the general school inspectors and the school subject inspectors, being then transmitted to the specialized inspectors and later to the schools.

The Ministry has a site through which it communicates with the public, <https://www.edu.ro/>, an interactive site that also contains a forum - [www.portal.edu.ro](http://www.portal.edu.ro). The means of communication used are email, telephone, fax, registered documents, other digital tools.

The analysis of the management plans of the universities shows that the communication process is based on the Active Dialogue with the society — which shows the importance given to it: “The connection between the society and the university becomes, in the modern world, a bivalent necessity, on the one hand, the university to its needs and aspirations, and on the other hand, the university must adapt its existence to serve the public interest” [5].

Universities aim to communicate with partners, but also with other institutions (Figure 2) by setting up a *Center of communication with the socio-economic environment*, with its own headquarters, technical support, and staff. Other directions are [5]:

- Concluding cooperation protocols with companies;
- Establishing partnerships with organizations;
- Creating databases;
- Organizing meetings with representatives of the socio-economic environment;
- Maintaining contact with the central and local public administration, agencies, authorities.

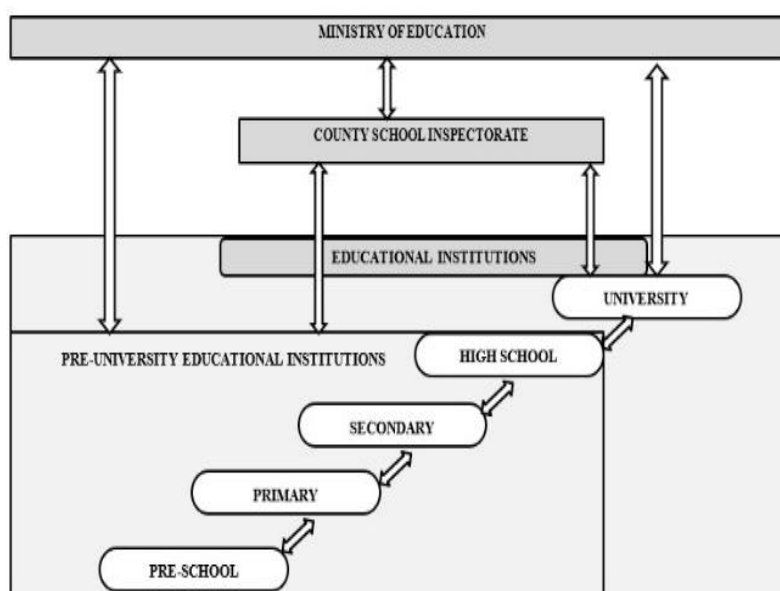


Fig. 1. Communication model of pre-university education institutions - coordinating institutions

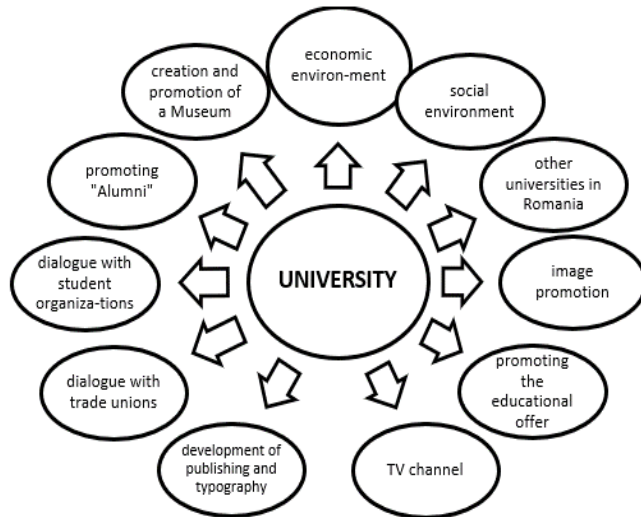


Fig. 2. Forms of communication between the University and the community (adapted after Costoiu, M., 2012: p. 24)

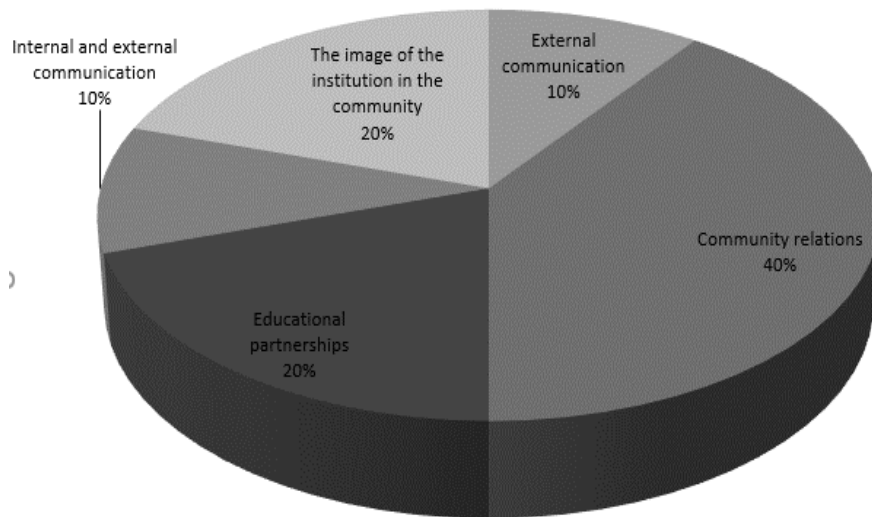


Fig. 3. Communication in the ISJ Development Plans

Table 1. Regulation of the communication process within the procedures developed at the level of pre-university education institutions

<i>Nr. crt.</i>	<i>Level of education</i>	<i>Regulation of the communication process</i>
1.	<b>High school level</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the communication is approached in a single procedure, but which includes references to several aspects of the communication at the level of that institution (an example would be the communication with the media)</li> <li>- does not capture all categories of dialogue partners with which that institution is linked</li> </ul>
2.	<b>Secondary level</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- both internal and external communication are described</li> <li>- the actions are formulated in a general way</li> <li>- there are no specifications for communication with parents or students</li> <li>- the preoccupation for establishing the relationship with the community and with the institutions predominates</li> </ul>
3.	<b>Primary school level</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- communication is focused on one direction: that of promoting the image and activities of the school</li> </ul>

### 3.5. Higher education institutions

From the documentary research at the university level, it results that the communication process remains

an important side of the management of higher-level institutions by the fact that it is found in all the analysed documents.

### 3.6. School Inspectorates

There are 47 school inspectorates in the country, corresponding to the territorial administrative organization. For each of them there should be an inspector on communication issues, according to the document prepared by the Ministry. Also, here it is specified that their training will be carried out within the Communication and Public Relations Department, but as mentioned in the same document, they are not active in all Inspectorates.

They operate based on Order No. 5530 of October 5, 2011 on the approval of the Framework Regulation for the organization and functioning of school inspectorates. This order defines external communication as being carried out with different types of public, among which the Ministry of Education and Research is mentioned. The media is a channel of communication.

The managerial plans displayed on the websites of 8 school inspectorates were analysed. It was found that only in some of them does the communication appear as a clearly formulated direction. It should be noted that there are school inspectorates in whose management plan there is no reference to communication.

The analysis highlighted the following aspects:

- The communication does not appear explicitly in the directions of action of the inspectorates;
- When the communication aspect is highlighted, it is inconsistent, with each institution considering a different target audience;
- Official documents are not found on some sites;
- Not all inspectorates present the media relations section;
- The spokesperson of the institution is not presented.

*The institutional development project* is designed for a period of 3-5 years and is a document that regulates and guides the activity of the institution.

The analysis of this document showed that 10% of the institutions clearly defined a communication objective, and another 10% formulated a common objective for internal and external communication (Figure 3).

Another document that presents the directions of interest of an institution is *the management plan*. The analysis showed that in this document there is no main objective to communicate, but in some it refers to partnerships and community relations. On the other hand, the secondary objectives include various aspects related to communication.

One observation is that documents do not regulate all aspects of communication. We have the example of the site: this is a means of communication used by all institutions subject to research, but it is mentioned in only two of them and defined as an objective in the management plan.

### 3.7. Pre-university educational institutions

At the level of pre-university educational institutions, the specific documents: the institutional development project, the operational plan, the

management plan, the operational procedures, constantly include aspects related to the regulation of the communication process, both internal and external.

*The institutional development project* regulates and guides the activity of the institution. Conceived for a period of 3-5 years, it has a prognostic character and appears mentioned in the *Regulation on the organization and functioning of pre-university education units no. 5079/2016, Art. 33*, together with *the operational plan* and *the management plan*. According to the Report published by the National Institute of Sciences, "it is based on the analysis of the current level of performance, assesses how current trends and factors that will act in the future may have an impact on the school and sets priorities and targets for improving future school activity" [8].

In its context, the communication aims at the relations with parents, community, local authorities, economic agents, other educational units, partnerships, projects. Of these, the largest share has the direction of community relations, followed by educational partnerships.

At the level of secondary education, we have a limitation to two objectives, while, at the preschool level, a diversity of directions is observed. We also encounter a situation at the level of primary education which does not include in the development plan any of the objectives listed or with reference to the field of communication.

*The management plan* is the document that should contain a communication plan in the form of a chapter, according to the document entitled *Communication strategy for pilot decentralization projects in the field of education in Dolj, Iași and Harghita counties* ". [11]

The websites of high school and secondary school institutions have published these documents. The central point of external communication is the elaboration of a budget plan, which has the effect of close communication with local partners.

*The analysis of the procedures at the level of pre-university educational institutions* was performed separately for the high school level, the secondary school level and primary school level. (Table 1) There are two types of procedures: system procedures and operational procedures. They reflect the two types of communication: internal and external. Target receptors are made up of parents, other institutions, local authorities, employers, local community.

## IV. EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION AND ITS INFLUENCE ON PRE-UNIVERSITY EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Following the analysis of the managerial documents, we made a diagram in which *the communication directions between the pre-university educational institutions and other institutions* can be observed. (Figure 4) Another aspect aimed at presenting the tools used in the external communication process at the level of educational institutions in Romania.



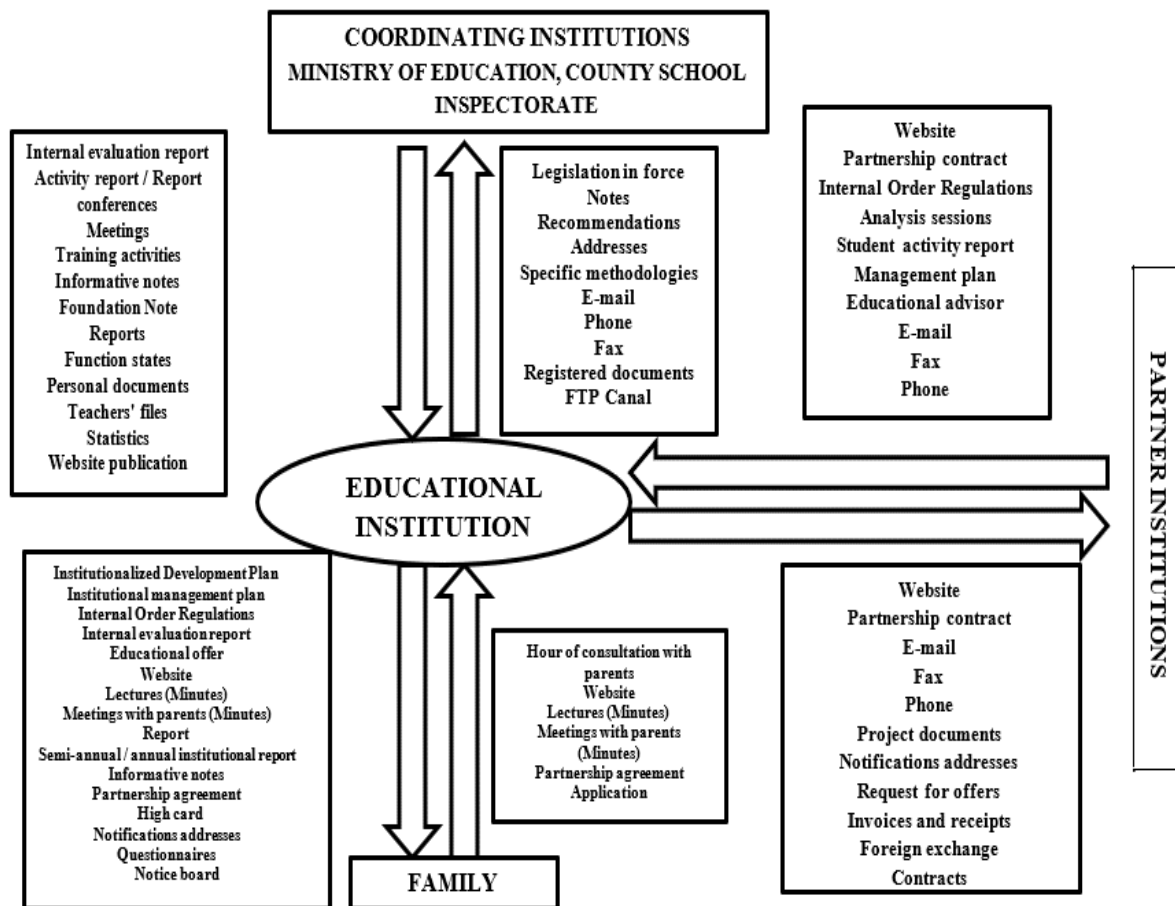


Fig. 4. Forms of external communication from the level of educational institutions

The special status that schools have within a community determines the personalized nature of external communication. The adaptation of institutions to the external environment represented by organizations, people, and other diverse environments, give efficiency and ensure its survival.

Oliver defines external communication as that which occurs between managers and people outside the organization [13]. It is the exchange of information and messages between an organization and other organizations, groups, or individuals outside its formal structure which, in turn, may be local, national, and international. Kiriago points out that, when used professionally, external communication projects a distinctive image of the school in the community, leading to an increase in prestige [10]. The concern of all school members, staff and students for proper external communication must be preceded by good internal communication. Thus, everyone contributes to the perception of the school as a strong and competitive institution in the field of education.

The researcher concludes that, in the process of managing the image of the school, the fundamental variables are identity, corporate communication, corporate image and feedback. Therefore, school managers should be aware of the effects of any form of communication that comes from their schools. He, consequently, recommends that the staff should be trained through training programmes, workshops,

seminars on how to manage public relations, and that there should be a public relations person at school level [10].

## V. CONCLUSIONS

The analysis carried out on the specialty literature revealed, on the one hand, *the importance of external communication at the level of educational institutions* whose beneficiaries are the students, the parents and the society, and on the other hand the fact that *the management documents of institutions contain insufficient data on the directions for this type of communication.*

The present research has shown that there are major differences in the communication approaches for each level of education. It was found that at the preschool and primary levels, there are no clear objectives regarding external communication. The partners referred to are the family and several community institutions.

The documentary research allowed a structuring of the regulations of the communication at secondary and high school levels, observing a more careful approach to external communication and a denser reflection of it in the management documents of pre-university educational institutions.

The bibliographic-documentary study showed that the promotion of external communication models, the

improvement of the existing ones, their inclusion in the management documents can lead to the improvement of the external communication at the level of pre-university educational institutions.

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