

Effective Leadership for Improved Pedagogy

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Abstract. *Educational leadership plays a significant role in the development of the school, teachers being seen as leaders of their own activity, leaders of the class of students, leaders of the process of personal and organizational development, without focusing on a hierarchy of positions. An authentic pedagogue should be effective in the professional community, contributing to the improvement of the educational process by assuming the status of leader of the class of students. However, there are few data from the Romanian pre-university environment about the direct impact of a certain leadership style on the educational act itself, both by favoring the acquisition of specific skills by students, and by improving training along with creating a favorable climate. The purpose of this study is to analyze teachers' perspectives on how leadership impacts pedagogical effectiveness. This study was conducted with 22 people, especially inspectors, principals and methodists from Romania, using a qualitative research design and a semi-structured interview. The results of this research prove that leadership is important for streamlining the pedagogical activity in the pre-university education system, but many teachers do not have sufficient knowledge about what authentic educational leadership entails and how it is implemented in the direct relationship with students. Therefore, teachers' performance tasks do not achieve their goals, and this affects students' receptivity, motivation, and implicit results. The results show that the profile of an authentic teacher-leader requires certain personality traits and professional skills, which can support the implementation of an effective leadership style*

Keywords: leadership, teacher, education, style, performance, pedagogy, school.

Introduction

Educational leadership plays a critical role in shaping pedagogical practices, improving student outcomes, and fostering a positive and cooperative learning environment. This qualitative research aims to explore the variables and impact of effective leadership on pedagogy in the Romanian pre-university environment. The study will focus on the motivation, personality traits, skills and leadership styles of various categories of teachers in direct relationship with students.

The main purpose of this research is to understand the way in which educational leadership manifests itself in the pre-university education system in Romania, but also to find contemporary challenges of teacher leaders. Exploring how leadership practices influence pedagogy in the Romanian educational environment is essential both for improving the quality of teaching activities and for increasing the quality of the educational act. Thus, it will be insisted on highlighting the way in which teachers prioritize personal skills and democratic attitudes, the roles they assume in the direct relationship with students, analyzing the main leadership styles and evaluating the impact on the efficiency of pedagogy, by increasing the receptivity, involvement and motivation of students.

Specialized studies emphasize the fact that the implementation of authentic leadership is of major importance in creating an ideal school in a cooperative and motivating environment. Most authors have focused only on theoretical aspects of specific leadership models (Bush, 2008; Hallinger, 2011; Leithwood and Jantzi, 2005) and not on assessing the pragmatic implications of leadership in education. It is not clear what authentic leadership in the educational process entails in the context of new challenges generated by scientific innovations (artificial intelligence,

machine learning, online and hybrid learning technologies). However, we note the absence in the Romanian space of reliable quantitative and qualitative studies on the approach to the teaching profession from the perspective of the specific competencies and skills of educational leaders. This fact must be correlated with the diminishing prestige of the teaching profession today, as well as with the shortage of teachers specialized in educational leadership, especially within the pre-university education system. Therefore, in this study we aimed to conduct an in-depth examination of the opinions of various teachers, principals and school inspectors in Romanian pre-university education on how leadership skills and personality traits should be used to make the educational act more efficient. Official reports from the Romanian Ministry of Education and the National Institute of Statistics do not include direct indicators on leadership styles or their impact on pedagogical practices, focusing on numbers, qualifications and educational outcomes, without analyses on institutional management or the influence of school leaders. Taking into account the opinions expressed by the interviewed teachers, their training and rich experience in pedagogical activities, the research conclusions can identify beneficial conditions for the development of an innovative culture based on the development of teachers' leadership skills and the implementation of a leadership style appropriate to contemporary challenges.

Literature review

Given the complexity of educational leadership, it is considered a crucial element in reforming education and adapting it to contemporary challenges. To generate authentic educational and school change, it is essential that all teachers are adequately trained, but also aware of their key role in this process. Teachers have a major potential in defining a concept of school suitable for contemporary challenges, to serve the learning and development process of students. Following this direction, Leithwood K. and Jantzi (2005) tried to outline a transformative leader who can accelerate change in educational institutions based on emotions, values, ethics, long-term standards and goals, and meeting the needs of community members. Thus, the main purpose of educational leadership should be related to the promotion of collective well-being.

The impact of a certain leadership style practiced by the teacher on the pedagogical act itself is the subject of many studies and concrete research such as questionnaires, interviews, statistics, etc. Analyzing the theories and empirical studies related to educational leadership, Mengmeng et al. (2024) concluded that the teacher-leader has a major influence on students' learning, contributing both to students' motivation and to their results. The pedagogue as a professional who is not only a specialist in his didactic field of activity, but also to promote culture, aware of its importance and of the particularities of expression in achieving the goals of education, has an essential importance on the direct beneficiaries of the educational act (Fullan & Quinn, 2020). The report "School Leadership for Learning: Insights from TALIS 2013" looks at leadership practices in schools and their impact on the learning process, providing a global perspective on how teachers can contribute to improving educational outcomes by creating an enabling environment for learning and developing management and leadership skills (OECD, 2019). Thus, the attention of many researchers has focused on the skills needed for an effective school leader (Bush, 2008; Amponsah & Asamani, 2016).

Some researchers have found several models of a teacher-leader and have shown that teacher leaders can change the environment by initiating engaging and relevant activities for students, individual initiatives, collective actions, understanding and innovative behavior (Robinson et.al., 2008). These hypotheses were later proven by qualitative research carried out in various countries. A study conducted by Day et al. (2016), using mixed methods (questionnaire

and case study on 20 schools) investigated the associations between the work of school principals in England and student outcomes, showing that the effectiveness of schools in the long term does not depend so much on the leadership style of principals, but on the ability of teachers to understand and diagnose children's educational needs. Another qualitative study conducted in Sweden, comprising 35 interviews with children and young people in both primary and secondary school, demonstrated that teachers with a high level of leadership can create a motivational environment in which students achieve high levels of performance, compared to other teachers with a low level of leadership who do not facilitate student motivation and performance (Öqvist & Malmström, 2016).

Another aspect in the literature is the analysis of existing leadership styles in education. Shahin et al. (2024) provide a comparative analysis of leadership styles and their impact on organizational effectiveness. A systematic review of 64 articles, by Kamal et al. (2024) highlighted that the impact of a certain leadership style can vary depending on the context, which can stimulate creativity in teams, but also teacher motivation. An authoritarian leadership characterized by a centralized approach and decision-making without consulting the team can be effective in crisis situations but can generate a lack of motivation and creativity among the team (Goleman, 2000). A Democratic Leadership (Participative Leadership) promotes collaboration, and the leader makes decisions by consulting team members, stimulating innovation, empowerment and a collaborative learning environment (Kamal et al. 2024).

The Transformational Leadership approach will emphasize vision, motivation, personal development of team members and the formation of a positive educational culture (Day et al., 2016). We mention the existence of perspectives on the implementation of a Leadership Servant in which servant leaders prioritize the needs of others and create an environment based on empathy, collaboration and involvement in the educational community (Goleman, 2000). Nguyen et al. (2019) analyze the Laissez-Faire (Delegative) Leadership style in the context of educational administration and its impact on the performance of teachers and students, finding that although it provides total freedom in teaching methods, it can lead to a lack of coherence in strategy and requires well-trained teachers to be effective. However, many researchers claim that laissez-faire leadership, characterized by minimal involvement in decision-making, has negative outcomes such as decreased satisfaction and effectiveness among teachers (Kamal et al. 2024). In addition to the classic identification of leadership styles, we mention the studies in this field consisted of the analysis of authentic leadership focused on the combination of several leadership styles. One such study by Mengmeng et al. (2024) systematically reviewed the literature on the concept, measurement, and mechanism of authentic leadership, as an emerging leadership style that combines the positive factors of different leadership styles. Therefore, there is a need for judicious application to leadership styles in education and their implementation according to the context. According to Leithwood and Jantzi (2005) a close connection can be seen between the organizational culture of the school and certain leadership characteristics of the teacher, such as: setting high personal standards, aiming to be the best, realistic assessment of the situation, a sense of responsibility and motivation to work in a team.

Therefore, it can be seen that Educational Leadership plays a crucial role in streamlining the pedagogical activity, influencing both the professional development of teachers and the quality of the entire educational process, through the active involvement of teachers in decision-making and strategic processes in order to streamline school institutions at all levels: class, institution and community (Nguyen et al., 2019). The studies presented above show that educational leadership has the strongest impact on student achievement across different contexts, with the direct goal of

improving student results. By adopting strategies proper to the particular context of each school or class, teachers and leaders can significantly improve pedagogical practices in their institutions.

In order to improve pedagogy, research is needed focused on a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities of educational leadership, which would provide a valuable perspective on how teachers live and interpret their role in the specific context of the Romanian educational system. For an in-depth approach to the previously formulated objectives, the following questions were formulated:

- Q.1. What personality traits are considered essential for an effective educational leader?
- Q.2. What are the most important skills of a school leader?
- Q.3. What are the main leadership styles found in the Romanian pre-university education system?
- Q.4. What is the impact of leadership style on pedagogical activity?

Method of data analysis

Research design

This study is based on qualitative research methods, as they aim to take a to explore and understand human behavior, attitudes, experiences, and complex social relationships. The chosen method will not focus on collecting numerical data, but rather on gathering information about educational leadership in the Romanian pre-university education system, starting from examining the participants' perspectives on this research topic. For this purpose, the qualitative interview method was selected, this being considered effective in determining individuals' knowledge of different topics, opinions, attitudes and behaviors that they express in their own words. The interview also allows a detailed analysis of human behavior, but also the identification of particular situations, difficulties existing within the researched subject.

The arguments presented above contribute to a broader understanding of the importance and role of leadership in education, trying to obtain as many perspectives as possible on this topic and to capitalize on the impressions, opinions and experience of various teachers. The internal validity of this study was ensured by naming and interviewing people who have experience in the educational field, but also in-depth studies specific to leadership, such as school inspectors, school principals, Principals of the Teaching Staff Houses in Romania, trainers in Educational Management courses. Also, the researcher looked to avoid any subjective interpretation by correlating the information obtained from the interview with specialized studies in both the educational and managerial fields.

Study data collection instruments

For the preparation and elaboration of an interview form, the scientific literature was analyzed, focusing on the characteristics of teacher leaders named by Amponsah & Asamani (2016), leadership styles in education and their impact (Bush, 2008). Then, the four main interview questions were developed and additional questions were considered, which could enhance the quality of the interview by addressing particular issues.

The data collection method use a semi-structured individual interview, as it allows a broader perspective on the investigated topic but also an increased reliability of the data (Belotto, 2018). The purpose of using this qualitative research tool (semi-structured interview) was to show the way in which teachers perceive and talk about the importance of leadership in streamlining pedagogical activities, but also to identify factors specific to the Romanian educational environment. To achieve this aim, questions of a semi-structured interview were developed, the justification of which is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Information on the questionnaire of questions

Interview questions	Additional questions	Purpose of the question of investigation instrument
<i>Present some details about your training and professional experience in education</i>		Identifying the main stages in the formation of a teacher-leader
	What led you to become a leader in education?	To understand motivational aspects of an educational leader
	What does it mean to train a teacher leader?	To identify certain stages in the formation of an educational leader.
1. What personality traits are considered essential for an effective educational leader? (Amponsah & Asamani, 2016)		To achieve a model of educational leader.
	How can certain personality traits of the teacher influence the effectiveness of the educational act?	Identify key traits that can contribute to the development of a positive relationship with students and colleagues, facilitating the learning process.
2. What are the most important skills of a school leader? (Bush, 2008)	What are the main skills through which teachers can stimulate creativity, students' critical thinking, motivation, initiative, spirit of observation, autonomy and responsibility?	To find out how a teacher's leadership skills manifest themselves in concrete situations and what impact they have on students.
3. What are the main leadership styles in the Romanian pre-university education system?		To determine the pragmatic implications of a leadership style in making the educational act more efficient.
	How do you describe your leadership style?	To assess the skills and personality of a leading teacher in a professional context
4. What is the impact of leadership style on pedagogical activity? (Robinson et al., 2008)		To identify the importance of a didactic vision centered on the needs of the student
	What strategies and methods do teachers use to improve their pedagogical work?	To find out which strategies are specific to a leadership style and how effective they are in pedagogical activity
	How does leadership style influence students' motivation and performance?	To analyze to what extent educational leadership can contribute to the creation of a motivating and effective environment.

Source: Authors' own research.

Through this form, data were collected from 22 teachers in Romanian pre-university education. In this regard, direct interviewing means (face-to-face or telephone interviews) and indirect interviewing (in writing, by email) were used. With the permission of the teachers, the interviews were recorded, to ensure the accuracy of the data, and the duration of the interview was approximately 30 minutes. Subsequently, the data was transcribed by converting the audio recordings into text, then the codes and categories were named based on the responses.

The names of the research participants were kept confidential according to ethical rules and a code name was assigned to each participant by adding a number to the letter "T", the first letter of the word teacher. To find recurring patterns and themes, a grouping of the codes into major themes (e.g., challenges, strategies, essential competences) was carried out, which were analyzed in the context of educational leadership in Romania. The codes and categories were generated directly from the information gathered, based on the literature on the concept of leadership, the skills and competencies of teacher leaders, their motivating and innovative behavior.

Working group

One of the main tasks of adjusting the study design was to select a sample from the study, which determines the characteristics and quality of the study. All study participants were contacted directly, either by phone or via social media, text messages and email. The participants in the study were decided by sampling by criteria, with the aim of working with all situations that meet certain pre-established criteria (Belotto, 2018). Thus, teachers who meet the following criteria were selected: participants must have at least 5 years of experience in Romanian pre-university education, must be graduates of a teacher training program in the field of educational management, must have held leadership positions in Romanian education.

Therefore, the intentional selection procedure generated 22 teachers. Another intentional sampling method used focused on ensuring maximum diversity, both in terms of the environment where they come from and on certain general information related to the gender, age or seniority or specialization in education of the participants. The main purpose of maximum diversity sampling is not to allow a generalization, but to reflect the diversity of individuals participating in the study at the maximum level and to determine whether there are common phenomena between the various situations, gathering a wide range of perspectives or experiences relevant to the concept of leadership in education.

In order to explore the complexity of the implications of educational leadership, we sought that the respondents represent both the large cities of Romania (Bucharest, Iasi, Cluj-Napoca, Brasov) and smaller cities or even rural areas (Bistrița-Năsăud, Vaslui), to be both people with a high and less experience in education, having various specializations and various positions within the pre-university education in Romania. Thus, teachers with experience in education between 5 years (T15 and T22) and 40 years (T12) were selected. It was also aimed at planning the observance of a diversity both in terms of specializations (primary teacher, mathematics, Romanian language, physics, chemistry, geography, economics, history, physical education, French, English) and positions held in the educational system (school inspector, Director of the Teaching Staff House (TSH), methodist, trainer, principal, assistant principal, full professor, substitute teacher, teacher, collaborating professor). Detailed information about the professors taking part in the research is presented in the table 4 of Appendix.

The research included representatives of all educational levels and an increased number of specializations (19), being addressed especially to teachers with management positions or with some experience as a trainer. Fulfilling the selection criteria and approaching a sampling as diversified as possible about the characteristics of the interviewees plays an essential role in providing rich data and information about the complexity of Romanian educational leadership.

Study ethics

All teachers were initially informed about the purpose, aims and methodology of the research. Subsequently, the respondents were informed that the conditions related to confidentiality and anonymity and data protection will be respected, thus obtaining the consent of each participant in the interview for the recording and use of information in the research. Therefore, all 22 interviewees taken part voluntarily, consented and informed in this research. It should be noted that the text of each interview was recorded, and the texts of the interview were transcribed and compiled into specific digital files. Maintaining confidentiality and respecting anonymity were the central lines of ethical issues.

Data analysis

As for the strategy chosen to analyze the data, the comparative, interpretative and contextual analysis of the information regarding the Romanian educational leadership was chosen. To reach the most exhaustive and elusive conclusions, we have resorted to both inductive and deductive analytical strategies, trying an integrative approach to all the information obtained about the concept of leadership in education and its implementation in the Romanian pre-university environment.

In the first stage, the recordings of the interviews were transcribed into a word file, and then sent to the participants, obtaining confirmation of the definitive version.

The second stage was based on the procedure of analyzing the interviews through a careful reading of each interview, while focusing on the perceptions of the study participant about the impact of leadership in pedagogical activity. During this reading, the main recurring phrases and ideas were identified.

In the third stage, an activity was carried out: comparison and labeling of the topics mentioned in the interviews. The thematic analysis was carried out based on the relevant literature and the research questions presented in Table 1. Subsequently, a process of merging and consolidating the common themes followed and various categories were created for the participants' interpretations. In this regard, we used the ATLAS.ti software.25.0 to streamline the simultaneous registration and categorization of the 22 documents (Belotto, 2018). As there were themes that appeared simultaneously within a paragraph, only the most important theme was considered. To this end, the most used concepts in the interviews were identified with the help of the same software, and these were essential in the ranking and selection of important topics. The presence within a theme of important concepts such as "teacher", "student", "pedagogy", "development", "performance", "education", "leader", "impact", was the main criterion in the codification of that text. The initial coding generated a number of 11 themes.

The fourth stage included linking common themes according to certain common ideas, examining the relationships between codes, participant approach and literature. Aiming to create an authentic model of the teacher leader, we have transformed the codes "Teacher Motivation" and "Teacher Vocation" into subcodes of the "Personality Traits of Teacher Leader". This action was based on both the identification of very frequent stereotypes ("the teacher must be...", "the educational leader must have...") and the existence of studies that unitarily address the personality traits, aspects related to vocation and motivation of teacher leaders (Amponsah & Asamani, 2016). Also, the themes "Strategies and Methods" and "Student Motivation" were transformed into subcodes of the category "Impact of Leadership Style on Pedagogical Activity", due to the causal relationship between the respective concepts, following the model of Robinson et al. (2008). Thus, 4 large categories with several subcategories resulted, each theme being correlated with one of the essential questions of the research: "Personality Traits of Teacher Leader", "Skills of an Effective Teacher", "Leadership styles in Romanian pre-university education" and "Impact of Leadership Style on Pedagogical Activity".

Data validation

Following the proposals of Belotto (2018) about the consistency and relevance of the results of a qualitative research, we focused on some practical approaches such as: detailed documentation, member checking and data saturation. To ensure the validity of the research, we initially checked the accuracy and authenticity of the data. Thus, we resorted to the member checking method, sending respondents preliminary results for confirmation or correction and asking them for feedback on the correct interpretation of the data. For example, the teacher with the T19 code had

said in his answer to Q4 that: "artificial intelligence cannot improve teachers' teaching style and cannot replace the role of the teacher in educating students". After requesting the feedback, he revised the answer as follows: "artificial intelligence cannot replace the role of the teacher in educating students, but the teacher must improve his skills regarding the use of modern technologies in the teaching-learning process".

About the transferability criterion on the applicability of the results in other contexts, the research approached a strategic selection of participants in order to highlight different perspectives, choosing a more diversified sample of teachers, from urban and rural areas, with various specializations and varied level of experience, between 5 years (T15 and T22) and 41 years (T9 and T 21). The fulfillment of the Thick Description criterion was also pursued, as ample information was provided about the participants regarding age, gender and positions held in various educational institutions, as can be seen in Table 4. To ensure the objectivity of the research, any personal or subjective perspectives of the researcher were avoided or eliminated, and the final findings were corroborated with hypotheses confirmed by other studies on the subject.

Data Saturation was achieved by carefully watching when recurring themes or subtopics were resumed. For example, for the Q3 question about the leadership style, the degree of saturation was reached very quickly, as recurring themes such as the democratic style, the mixed or combined style and the style adapted to the context were resumed. On the other hand, in questions Q4 and Q5, although recurring themes appeared quite often, there were still only 3 participants (T1, T6, T14) who generated most of the themes related to these questions, as these people provided a much more complex and overview of the impact of leadership in education, but also of contemporary challenges in terms of the position of school inspector. For questions Q1 and Q2, the saturation effect of the answers was more difficult to fulfill, as each participant brought new perspectives on these topics, finally finding several 8 sub-themes to the "Personality Traits of Teacher Leader" category and 14 sub-themes related to the "Skills of an Effective Teacher" category. Following the indications of Belotto (2018), the collected information was periodically analyzed, and after interviewing the T22 teacher, it was found that a maximum degree of saturation was reached for all the identified questions and themes, without generating relevant information. This shows that the research sufficiently explored the themes and subthemes related to educational leadership and the results could be analyzed both conceptually and phenomenologically.

Findings and discussion

By thematically analyzing the interviews with teachers working in various schools in Romania, we have developed detailed descriptions of the 2 major themes that will help us in achieving an overview of educational leadership in the Romanian pre-university education system: the profile of the authentic teacher leader and the results of effective leadership. The key themes and related findings were elaborated using extracts from the participants' interviews and were subsequently correlated with other research in the field, both to increase the validity of the study and to identify certain particularities of the Romanian educational environment. The interviewed teachers gave detailed answers for each topic, insisting on certain personal points of view, opinions and even exemplifying experiences of theoretical statements.

Table 2. Distribution of participants according to gender, experience and activity environment

Gender/Criteria	Distribution of respondents	Average experience in the education system	Activity environment	
Female	64 %	29..92 years	Urban	9 teachers
			Rural	4 teachers
Male	36 %	27.66 years	Urban	5 teachers
			Rural	4 teachers

Source: Authors' own research.

The research approached 14 female teachers (i.e. 64%) and 8 male teachers (i.e. 36%), with an average age of 51.81 years and an average professional experience of 28.79 years. Also, it was found that the interviewed teachers cover all pre-university educational levels (3 from primary education, 6 from secondary education and 14 from high school), the vast majority (20 teachers) being employees of public education and only 2 teachers being employed in private schools. About the distribution of the environment of origin of those interviewed, we find that an absolute majority of 14 teachers work in the urban areas, but a number of 8 teachers from rural areas were also selected.

Teacher leader profile

Our findings reveal that an effective teacher leader has an extraordinarily complex profile, summarizing various roles in the relationship with students, but also with colleagues (Shahin et.al., 2024). In an effort to outline a model of the teacher-leader, all those interviewed emphasized the need for specific personality traits and skills, which were summarized in figures 1 and 2.

Thus, we notice a remarkably high emphasis on traits such as empathy (48 occurrences), and openness (8 occurrences). Among the skills we note adaptability (36 occurrences), the efficient use of pedagogical methods (26 occurrences) but also the need for good communication between teachers and students (12 occurrences). Thus, T4's statements: "Empathetic teachers have a positive impact on the quality of learning, and their approaches can stimulate students' motivation and creativity", highlight the importance of emotional intelligence for any teacher (Goleman, 2000). T16 also offers an in-depth breakdown of this aspect: "a good teacher must have charisma, empathy and love for students, it is important to give respect to each student and help him become a responsible adult, if you don't care and you think that the one in front of you just needs to listen to you, to see how smart you are, for that you need seriousness". Bringing up charisma is interpreted both as a means of capturing attention and especially of inspiring positive change (Hallinger, 2011).

About pedagogical skills, the interviewees gave more space to this topic, this sub-theme being mentioned 62 times, special attention being paid to adaptability (36 citations), methodological skills (26 citations), flexibility (15 citations) and communication skills (12 citations). Regarding adaptability, we remember T8's pragmatic argument: "teachers must be flexible and adapt to the needs of students, but adapting to major changes, such as those imposed by the pandemic, can be difficult". Nguyen et al. (2019) highlighted the role of the ability to adapt teaching methods using innovative strategies, including educational technology. Approaching an inductive reasoning, we can emphasize the importance in educational leadership of skills that are little mentioned, such as leadership skills (1 citation), creativity (1 citation), innovation (1 citation), but which can inspire and motivate colleagues and students.

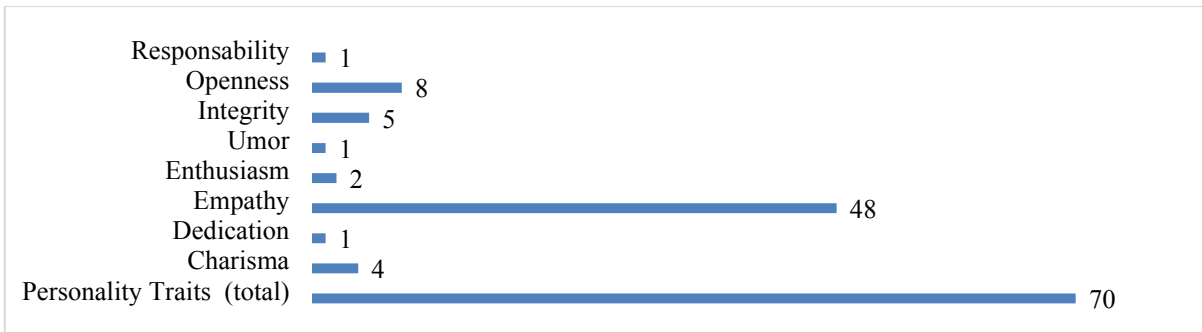


Figure 1. Subtopics in the "Personality Traits of Teacher Leader" category

Source: Authors' own research, based on data extracted from ATLAS.ti.25.0.

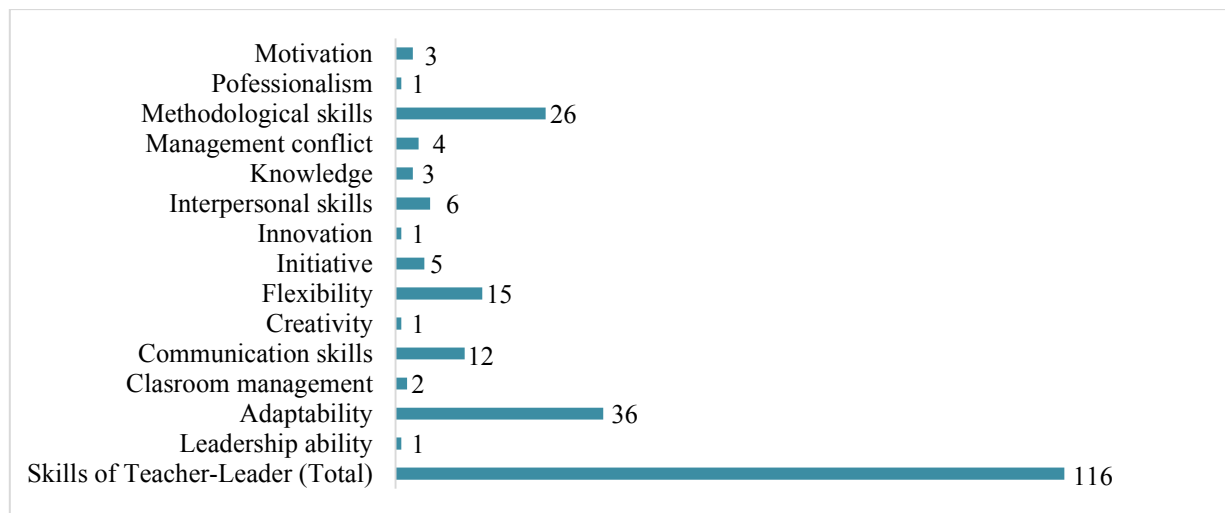


Figure 2. Subtopics in the "Skills of an Effective Teacher" category

Source: Authors' own research, based on data extracted from ATLAS.ti.25.0.

Regarding the motivation and training of a teacher leader, T14 notes a link that: "continuous teacher training is vital, but there are challenges related to the motivation of young teachers to get involved in this process, adaptability and the desire to learn are essential to meet the needs of students in an ever-changing educational environment, you need to have a certain skill, a certain personality that also comes from heredity, it also comes from the education of the first years, to be in a certain way, but also from the desire to train and improve all the time". Shahin et.al. (2024) also talks about this relational perspective between motivation, the desire for improvement and adaptability, arguing that it is important for teachers to participate in continuing education courses on a voluntary basis. Awareness of this continuous need to learn is a vital part of a teacher leader, with the aim of triggering changes in education, in the school organization, but also a means of adapting to the changing needs of students (Hallinger, 2011).

Teachers' leadership styles and their effects on pedagogy.

In the romanian pre-university education system, the interviewed teachers identified several leadership styles, highlighting strategies and methods specific to each mentioned style, as well as the main effects on the educational act. Thus, we will encounter different leadership styles, influenced by organizational culture, available resources and professional mindset. A synthesis of these aspects has been made in Table 5 of Appendix. The information shows a variety of leadership

styles existing in Romanian education, with a predominant emphasis on a democratic style (10 participants approached this topic), although the conceptual clarifications regarding characteristics, strategies, methods are quite vague.

Table 3. Teachers' preference for a leadership style

Leadership styles	Occurences	Participants	Percentage of preferences
Democratic	10	T1, T2, T3, T4, T7, T10, T14, T16, T19, T20	45.45 %
Autocratic	1	T22	4.54 %
Laissez-Faire (Delegativ)	1	T8	4.54 %
Transformational	2	T6, T9	9.10 %
Mixed style	5	T5, T11, T12, T15, T18,	22.73 %
Authentic style	3	T13, T17, T21	13.64 %

Source: Authors' own research.

For a clearer picture of the impact of leadership on the pedagogical act, the research approached a detailed analysis of this category, identifying 22 mentions of those interviewed on this topic, as can be seen in the figure 3.

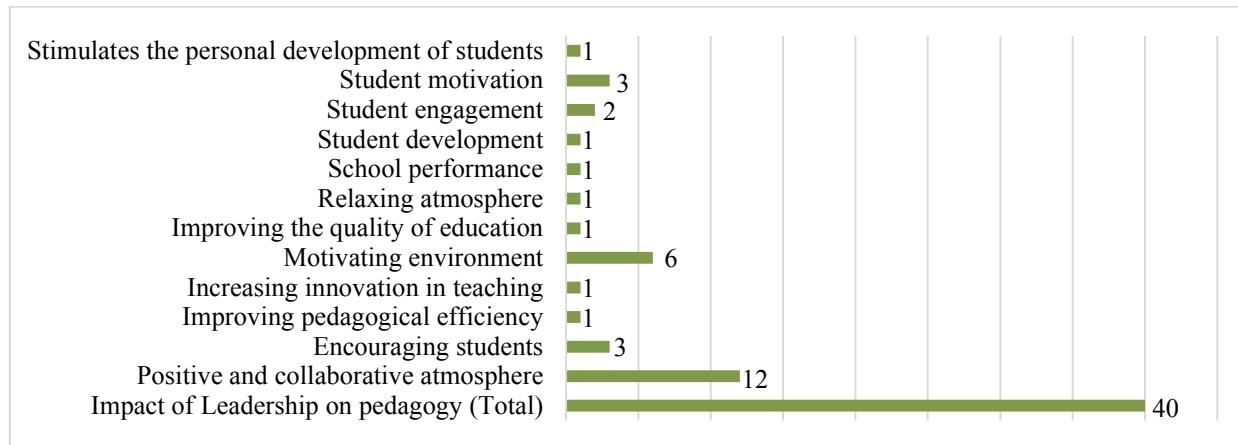


Figure 3. Subtopics in the Impact of Leadership on Pedagogy

Source: Authors' own research, based on data extracted from ATLAS.ti.25.0.

It is worth noting the presence of flexible perspectives for approaching a leadership style in education, either using a mixed style or an authentic or personalized style depending on the context. These trends in Romanian education are also found in the literature, in the study by Mengmeng, et al. (2024) which treats mixed variants of educational leadership as the most effective in achieving a motivating and innovative learning environment. We also observe the approach of leadership styles less used in Romanian education, such as Laissez-Faire (Delegative) and Transformational, supported by the real examples offered by T8 and T9, and confirmed by the theoretical explanations of Leithwood & Jantzi (2005). Although the impact of each leadership style is not exhaustively presented by the interviewees, nevertheless aspects of this theme (creating a positive, collaborative and relaxed atmosphere, encouraging students, innovation, creating a motivating environment, personal development, increasing student performance, boosting confidence) are also found in the study by Robinson et al (2008). Interview data and analysis highlight that teacher leaders have a direct impact on student motivation, academic performance, and school organizational culture (Hallinger, 2011).

Conclusions

The study is one of the few qualitative research initiatives on the implications of leadership in the Romanian pre-university education system. The research was conducted with the participation of 22 teachers who named essential aspects of a pedagogue capable of creating the desired change in a school through his example, but also through a combination of vision, motivation, personality traits, skills and specific strategies. By integrating the personal reflections of those interviewed with empirical data, we were able to develop a more complete understanding of educational leadership in Romania. Study found that teacher leaders in Romania perceived the perspective on educational leadership both in terms of necessary qualities and skills, answering the first 2 questions. To solve the third and fourth questions, the interviewees also described the leadership styles met in Romanian pre-university education and their impact on education, giving practical examples from their activity. Thus, the research confirmed hypotheses of some studies that showed that participatory styles are predominant and have a positive impact on employee performance, while authoritarian styles are less used, but there are also teachers who approach either a transformational leadership style as effectively as possible, or by combining various leadership styles depending on the context (Mengmeng et al., 2024).

One of the thematic gaps of the interviews was about the teachers' perception of the organizational culture and the need for common aims for the actors involved in the school's activity. Although all interviewees emphasized that leadership plays a key role in developing a high-performing educational system, influencing both student outcomes and pedagogical efficiency, issues related to the importance of educational culture are very important and should be addressed in further research. Another limitation of the research refers to the fact that the qualitative analysis of the phenomenon of Romanian educational leadership must also be supported by concrete quantitative information. Being carried out with a limited number of participants, the conclusions could have a low degree of transferability, as the non-probability sampling criteria used make it difficult to generalize the results at national level. Thus, the categories and subcategories identified with the help of the 22 teachers will constitute the variables that will be the basis of a quantitative investigation based on a questionnaire on this topic. This will provide a depth to the research and will contribute to a better understanding of the phenomenon of leadership in Romanian education. The research results showed that capitalizing on personality traits, improving skills and leadership style are decisive factors in making pedagogical activity more efficient and for developing continuous training programs in the face of new challenges for teacher leaders. The homogeneous conclusion of the 22 interviews is that students guided by teacher leaders achieve better academic results, and the principal's leadership style can lead to performance. Therefore, leadership can be a driver for making pedagogical activity more efficient, but also an indispensable aid in solving current problems in Romanian education.

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Appendix

Table 4. Demographic features of the participant teachers

Interviewee codes	Gender	Activity environment	Type of school	Domain	Experience in education	Positions in education
T1	Female	Urban	Public lyceum	Teacher	29 years	School inspector
T2	Female	Urban	Public gymnasium	Geography	31 years	Assistant principal
T3	Male	Rural	Public primary school	Teacher	22 years	Director TSH
T4	Female	Urban	Public gymnasium	Physical educ.	20 years	Assistant principal
T5	Female	Urban	Public lyceum	Romanian	23 years	Assistant principal
T6	Male	Urban	Public lyceum	Physical educ.	29 years	School inspector
T7	Female	Rural	Public lyceum	Chemistry	16 years	Methodist
T8	Male	Rural	Public primary school	Teacher	26 years	Principal
T9	Female	Urban	Public gymnasium	Physics	41 years	Methodist
T10	Female	Rural	Public gymnasium	Social education	30 years	Principal
T11	Female	Urban	Public gymnasium	English	22 years	Assistant principal
T12	Male	Urban	Public lyceum	History	31 years	Principal
T12	Female	Rural	Public lyceum	Chemistry	41 years	Methodist
T13	Male	Urban	Public lyceum	German	24 years	Principal
T14	Male	Rural	Public lyceum	Mathematics	40 years	School inspector
T15	Female	Urban	Public gymnasium	French	5 years	Teacher

Interviewee codes	Gender	Activity environment	Type of school	Domain	Experience in education	Positions in education
T16	Female	Rural	Public primary school	Teacher	19 years	Principal CCD
T17	Female	Rural	Public lyceum	Chemistry	39 years	Director TSH
T18	Female	Urban	Private lyceum	Psychology	17 years	Expert Teacher
T19	Male	Urban	Public lyceum	History	31 years	Principal
T20	Female	Urban	Public lyceum	German	18 years	Professor
T21	Male	Urban	Public lyceum	Economy	5 years	Professor
T22	Male	Urban	Private lyceum	Sociology	41 years	Expert Teacher

Source: Authors' own research.

Table 5. The Impact of the Leadership Style in Romanian Pre-University Education

Leadership style	Participants	Strategies/ methods	Effects of leadership style	Supporting quotes from participants
Auto-crat	T3, T22	focus on strict rules.	lack of flexibility; low innovation low motivation	<i>T3 "the teacher should not approach an authoritarian style, only he is right, he keeps the limits through language and attire, first of all,</i>
Democratic	T1, T2, T3, T4, T7, T8, T10, T14, T16, T19, T20	interactive and active-participatory methods	stimulates the creativity, involvement and receptivity of students, avoid demotivation, effective learning, respect reciprocal, productive	<i>T1: "The only style that works is the democratic style, not the permissive one or the delegative one, I see an equality between teacher and student, doubled by respect; The teacher must awaken receptivity, motivation, using interactive, active-participatory methods, in which they become partners in education,"</i> <i>T8: "A democratic teaching style, which encourages accountability and open discussion, is essential for effective learning"</i>
Laissez-Faire (Delegativ)	T9, T8	total freedom in the choice of methods	can diminish the teacher's credibility, responsible students	<i>T9: "if you are too relaxed, they discredit you in the department, if you are too permissive with them"</i> <i>T8: " "when I entered his class, all the children did what they wanted and managed to learn, he had a very warm and patient style that touched my heart."</i>
Transformational	T6, T9,	promoting change, collaborative learning	inspires and motivates students to reach their full potential	<i>T9: "It was a collaborative style. We were practically the professor's collaborators. And he treated us with respect. And we appreciated this very much".</i> <i>T6: "A cooperative style is preferred, but there must also be a clear structure in the learning process"</i>
Mixed style	T5, T11, T12, T15, T18,	well-defined rules, avoidance of punishment	effective communication, learning some rules of communication, student awareness,	<i>T5: "This is to establish by mutual agreement some rules, some rules of behavior, insisting a lot on the rules of communication, so that students form the habit of communicating. We remind them of the rules every time, but in a tone. calm, relaxed".</i> <i>T11: "there is no perfect style, there is no total style like this, I would go for a combination of democratic, like 50%, with authoritarian 10% and delegative"</i>
Authentic style	T13, T17, T21	differentiated treatment, approach a style according to the context	adaptation to the needs and particularities of students	<i>T13: "I think the teacher must adapt to the particularities of each class, each group, the age level, the level of understanding"</i> <i>T21: "An effective teacher maintains discipline, but without being overly authoritarian, promoting mutual respect in the classroom."</i>

Source: Authors' own research.