



Combining Pedagogical Methods with Marketing Techniques to Increase Youth Attachment to Educational Institutions

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Abstract

The article discusses the subject of pupils' attachment to the specialization and the educational institution to which they are enrolled, through the perspective of a double approach: pedagogical and marketing. In both cases, the content of the concept, its role and the means by which it can be supported are presented. At the same time, the theoretical approach is completed by a case study on educational institutions in a locality in Romania, following the way in which the marketing strategy is used to increase the degree of attachment of pupils to these institutions.

Keywords: *educational marketing, loyalty, pedagogy, school attachment.*

JEL Classification: I20, M31.

Introduction

The tendency of pupils to give up the chosen study specialization at the beginning of high school or to migrate to other high schools, shortly after the opening of the high school study cycle, is a phenomenon that concerns teachers and education specialists. The desire of pupils to follow that profile or school that best suits their own needs and the career they have set for themselves is natural. On the other hand, this phenomenon is also favored by the difficulties of adaptation and integration in the new form of education, which is why it is necessary to pay more attention to the process of adaptation of new pupils, but also to increase their interest to the profile of studies and the chosen institution. In this sense, an important role for increasing the motivation and attachment of pupils to the chosen specialization, but also to the educational institution belongs to the pedagogical methods applied.

At the same time, nowadays, as marketing techniques are used successfully to attract young people to certain forms of education, they can also be used to increase the attachment to the chosen school, or, as it stands in terms of marketing, for loyalty.

Therefore, in this article we want to highlight how pedagogical methods can be combined with marketing techniques in order to increase the motivation of students and their attachment to the profile of school studies. In the first part we will address the pedagogical dimension of school attachment, emphasizing its advantages and pedagogical levers that can be used in this regard, and in the second part we will address the issue of attachment in terms of marketing concept and solutions that can be used by educational institutions. The theoretical exposition of marketing concepts will be completed, for example, by a case study conducted among high schools in a locality in Romania and presented in the third part.

1. Using the concept of attachment in the educational process

The concept of attachment refers to an individual's ability to adhere or the adhesion to a person or group in which he/she reflects his/her needs and aspirations. This attachment is defined emotionally, in the long run, and is based on respecting the uniqueness of each participant in the relationship.

In the education process, the positive correlation between the pupil's attitude towards a certain subject and the teacher who teaches it, is given primarily by the relationship between the parties and the passion with which he teaches his subject. In other words, for pupils, the quality of a teacher depends on the passion he manages to communicate to pupils about his subject and the information he transmits (Kennedy & Kennedy, 2004: 247-259).

A first question that arises is *the role of attachment in the education of pupils*. A complex view of this role is presented by L. Cozolino who believes that the attachment that the pupil establishes with his colleagues and teachers profoundly influences his ability to learn. Basically, attachment only enhances the quality of the human being to manifest socially, and the creation of attachment relationships stimulates not only the learning process itself, but also the motivation of pupils, through its role in regulating anxiety and facilitating neuroplasticity (Cozolino, 2017).

Stimulating pupils' motivation and increasing school performance are therefore closely linked to an attachment-based teaching method. Rogers considers the teacher-pupil relationship fundamental to understanding pupils'/teachers' classroom behavior, as well as their learning outcomes (Rogers, 2013). The main idea from his book is that teachers can improve their teaching effectiveness by developing programs that focus on improving interpersonal relationships.

Another question that arises is the conditions under which these attachments can be created and the concrete ways in which it can be built. As for the *conditions that favor the development of attachment relationships*, they refer primarily to trust and natural social interaction.

The reform of the Romanian education, in its general way, consists in switching the emphasis from the informative side of the educational process to the formative side. The role of the teacher is to help each pupil develop their own learning skills, as well as the confidence that they can discover and use these skills. Where pupils are more confident in themselves, but also in the members of the community, they will be more actively involved in learning activities. Proponents of social constructivism also acknowledge the importance of the

learning environment and the fact that learning is based on social interaction (Richardson, 1998: 147).

When children become happy, they increase their self-esteem, self-confidence, and the benefit will not only be theirs, but also their families, the socio-educational groups in which they live, the community, society in general. Children's belonging to a group and respect for moral commitments to that group make a significant contribution to learning.

If the secure environment is an essential condition in learning through attachment, *the continuous awakening of interest in the classroom activity* is another important condition. *The involvement of pupils* not only in the learning activity, but in all the activities initiated at the school level is very important. This involvement is defined by the quality of the pupil's connection with the people who work in the school, with the activities, objectives and values of the school. The concept of involvement comprises three major components, namely:

- behavioral (participation in curricular and extracurricular activities);
- emotional (positive and negative emotions about schools, teachers, colleagues, school subjects);
- cognitive (desire and willingness to invest in understanding and solving difficult problems, understanding complex ideas, acquiring certain skills).

The role of the teacher and his relationship with the pupils is important for the involvement of the pupils and their attachment. Thus, according to the *theory of self-determination*, for the motivation of pupils, it is necessary to satisfy three basic psychological needs: relationships, competence and autonomy. Teachers can support these needs by being actively involved (showing interest in the pupil and his/her particularities), by providing a clear structure (establishing logical rules), and by encouraging autonomy (providing opportunities to make decisions and choices). If these basic needs are met, then their employment in school assignments and learning activities will increase, they will perform better and get higher grades.

The effects resulting from these forms of attachment increase are manifested both in the personality of the pupil and his psycho-emotional development, as well as in social skills and learning behavior. Thus, the dynamics in the classroom is influenced by the history of the types of attachment, both of the pupils and of the teacher. Teachers, through attachment, often succeed in class to help change children's negative behaviors.

Where the nature of the relationship problems and the type of attachment developed in childhood was dysfunctional, the ability to recognize and benefit from close relationships with teachers, in many cases potentially compensatory, was affected. Problems such as: aggression, outbursts of anger, hyperactivity or depressive moods, anxious behaviors are just some of the examples that betray the difficulties of self-regulation and organization of emotions, which are associated with the ability to negotiate social relationships. These types of reactions make it difficult and sometimes impossible to involve both parties in a quality emotional relationship in the classroom.

On the other hand, when the teacher manages to make the group of children who come to school a team of solidarity for better or worse, in which everyone knows what he has to do for the good of others and is willing to do it constantly, he become a master of education through attachment.

From an extended perspective on attachment, empathetic teachers, providers of security attachment help children to explore the school environment and encourage them to

get involved in learning activities. A close teacher-student relationship stimulates learning behavior and supports the child to cope with the requirements in the school context.

Closeness and relationship successfully in the case of children with a high level of vulnerability have a special value. For example, a positive relationship with a teacher can help reduce the problems of outsourcing among aggressive children (Baker, 2006: 213) or improve the desirable behaviors in primary school of children who have shown problematic behaviors in small classes. The ability to provide care increases school satisfaction among children from low-income backgrounds or those who tend to drop out of school. Significant relationship of the pupil with people who are not from the family of origin can have a beneficial effect, serving as a protective factor and allowing the pupil with problems to convince himself of himself and the world in which he lives, developing critical behavior and socio-emotional skills (Baker, 2006: 213).

On the other hand, children with a history of secure attachment are much more likely to form internal representations of others as a supportive, helpful, and positive, and as a self-image, they see themselves as competent, deserving of respect and affection. Also, children with a secure attachment demonstrate a greater ability to adapt to difficult, stressful situations, engage in more complex games, manage to focus their attention better and participate in class, with positive results in most situations (Kennedy & Kennedy, 2004: 249).

2. The role of marketing in creating pupils' attachment to school

Marketing has taken the idea of attachment to relate it to products, companies or brands. Thus appeared the concept of "brand loyalty", but also a series of techniques designed to increase this attachment, respectively to ensure customer loyalty. If a quick explanation of this concept leads us to think about the repeated choice of the same products/brands (Vaschi, 2020), studies in this field have highlighted *three ways in which loyalty can be expressed* in marketing (Lendrevie & Lindon, 2000: 596-597):

- the cognitive dimension, that brings together the individual's opinions and beliefs about a brand and that generates a preference for that brand;
- the affective dimension, respectively those feeling of sympathy and affection or attachment to the brand;
- the conative dimension expressed by the more or less obvious intention to buy/repurchase the brand.

We see, therefore, that in marketing, loyalty is called into question not only by its objective form of manifestation (purchase/repurchase), but also by its subjective dimension, which is expressed in the form of the person's attitude, preference or emotional attachment. As a result, there is an absolute fidelity, expressed by indicators that easily quantify the behavior of the individual in relation to the brand and a relative fidelity, which refers to attitudes and preferences, requiring more complex forms of analysis.

Thus defined, loyalty can be a natural goal for an educational institution whose purpose is to increase the degree of attachment of pupils to the educational process, actions and values of the institutions.

Among the factors that contribute to the increase of the loyalty towards an entity are: the orientation towards the current clients, the efficiency of the management process, the existence of a long-term vision, the consideration of all the component processes.

The level of competition, the intensity of barriers to market entry, policies and developments in the sector can all be external factors that favor or hinder the loyalty of individuals.

The specificity of today's economy and society exposes educational institutions to increasing competition, so that the quality of educational products and services must be doubled by the value given by the image and, in particular, by the human factor involved, as well as the quality of educational act.

The learning cycle of pupils must be focused on creating and delivering value throughout life. The provision of high quality educational services is influenced by the existing human resources in an educational unit, and that is why the educational institution must carefully design its system of selection, recruitment and training of teaching and auxiliary staff, designed on the basis of competition and the need for continuous improvement and continuous training (Enache et al., 2013: 58).

In the field of education, it is natural that loyalty does not have the same purpose as in commercial areas (brand acquisition). In this case, *the goal of loyalty* can be expressed in a series of steps, namely: (a) awareness that the educational entity /offer is best for the individual, (b) gaining the belief that the choice made by the individual is the most appropriate and, finally, (c) the conviction that the choice made was the best for him (Apetrei, 2010: 4). The beginning of the loyalty process of the beneficiaries is the establishment of the objectives of the educational institution. The objectives regarding customer loyalty must be specified in the content, size, time, and category of beneficiaries (example: high school pupils from full time courses or from vocational school etc.). In addition, the loyalty of the beneficiaries is a psychological objective, which has a decisive influence on the long-term success of the institution.

Studies have shown that the satisfaction of an organization's staff is a necessary condition for meeting customer requirements and customer loyalty. Thus, the organization must consider the motivation of employees to stimulate the increase of labor productivity and the quality of results, to reduce errors and absenteeism, as well as for the long-term loyalty of deserving employees. In term of increasing customer satisfaction, marketing has a number of means to increase the value of services provided and thus pupil satisfaction. These means are circumscribed to each of the policies of the marketing mix in the field of education and must be supported by specific communication actions.

3. Case study: ways to increase the attachment to the profile and the educational institution in the case of high school pupils

Starting from the theoretical notions of educational marketing and loyalty, we will try to further point out the actions that can be taken by educational institutions to increase the degree of attachment of pupils to the chosen specialization and the institution of study followed. For example, we chose to refer to the institutions that operate in a locality in Romania, respectively the city of Făgăraș. The locality has a population of about 28 thousand inhabitants, according to the last census (2011), and high school education is provided by five institutions: "Radu Negru" National College, "Doamna Stanca" National College, the Orthodox Theological High School "Sf. Constantin Brâncoveanu", Technological High School "Dr. Ioan Șenchea" and "Aurel Vijoli" Technical College. Thus, the relatively limited number of high schools in the locality will allow us to have an overview of the actions carried

out at the educational level, but also to compare the differences between the marketing actions carried out.

In the field of education, an institution concerned with the satisfaction and loyalty of its beneficiaries must be able to identify their needs and expectations, assess the perception of the beneficiaries about educational services and products, detect errors and their causes and constantly act to improve quality of educational service.

We can consider as steps in the marketing strategy for the loyalty of the beneficiaries the following levels:

- Acquisition of beneficiaries, ie attracting beneficiaries, by providing quality education, innovative technology and value creation;
- Retaining the beneficiaries, respectively maintaining, but also increasing the number of beneficiaries in a certain area;
- Extension of beneficiaries, a situation in which the beneficiaries continue to use the services and products of the institution, becoming loyal beneficiaries due to additional acquisitions, which consist of extended quality services.

The management team of the school must have a constant concern for the elaboration and updating of a marketing plan, which should emphasize the role of institution in the academic, social, emotional and physical development of the pupils.

Acquisition of beneficiaries

This stage has as starting point the study of the economic-social environment, the central element being the labor market. This study consists in identifying, sizing and describing the market segments, the level of specialized knowledge against which the educational institution defines its object of activity (Olteanu & Cetină, 1994: 185-187).

The product strategies used by the educational institution in order to achieve the objectives are grouped according to the following criteria: the dimensions of the range of services, their quality level and their degree of novelty.

The range of services takes into account the number of specializations existing in the educational institution and the degree of specialization of the graduates, so it will be possible to opt for maintaining, restricting or expanding the range of services, respectively for a strictly specialized training or a broader profile.

Of the five high schools in the town of Făgăraș, three had an offer of full-time courses in the 2017-2018 school year ("Radu Negru", "Constantin Brâncoveanu" and "Doamna Stanca") and only two had other forms of education on offer: Technological High School "Dr. Ioan Șenchea" has full-time courses, but also state vocational education, while the National College "A. Vîjoli" has three forms of education on offer: high-school-full time courses, state vocational education and dual vocational education. For the 2018-2019 school year, the Technological High School "Dr. Ioan Șenchea" also added in the offer the dual vocation education.

By expanding the range of products, various facilities can be offered to them, such as educational services, accommodation, meals, various leisure opportunities (for example, subscriptions to swimming activities, gym, fitness, etc.)

The qualitative level of services considers the following strategies: qualitative adaptation, quality maintenance and qualitative differentiation. The degree of novelty of the services provided by the educational institution takes into account the following aspects: the novelty of the specializations, the technical-material basis of the institution, the degree of novelty of the textbooks, the modernization of some applicative activities, social services.

Innovative technologies involve the development of knowledge in the educational process and stimulate the cognitive interest of pupils leading them to learn independently. These technologies are used more often in lessons in which they are implemented: exercise companies; group tasks, work in teams or pairs; exercises that require a creative approach; didactic and educational games; use of internet sources, videos.

Modern technologies in education must be carefully selected, based on the principle of rationality, and focused on results based on both the motivation of pupils and the increase in practical value. When it comes to creating value in schools, the most important aspect of quality systems is the need for any quality assurance or assessment activity to aim at improving the quality, reflected in *student outcomes*.

Retention of beneficiaries

Beneficiaries' loyalty management means the analysis, planning, implementation and systematic control of all measures aimed at the current beneficiaries of an institution, in order to maintain and develop relations with them in the future.

The marketing mix helps to establish loyalty tools by providing support points for the beneficiaries' attachment to the institution. Thus, within *the product policy*, the institution's attention can be focused on improving the program of providing educational services. As loyalty measures for the beneficiaries can be considered: attractive educational offers, the introduction of special quality standards in the teaching-learning process.

Another way to improve the educational product mix is by initiating projects or partnering on educational projects. For example, the National College "Radu Negru" Făgăraș boasts of attending the Confucius and Erasmus projects (Colegiul „Radu Negru”, a). The Confucius project aims to stimulate educational cooperation between Romania and China, promote Chinese culture and language and is based on an agreement between the Confucius Institute, ISJ Sibiu, Făgăraș City Hall and "Radu Negru" National College. On the other hand, the Erasmus project, entitled "From Facebook to entrepreneurship" includes organizations from five promoter countries: Romania – Miez Association, Bulgaria – I am you # peace global, Turkey – Symmes Ogretmen Akademisi, Portugal – Conexao Jovem, Poland - Stowarzyszenie Sztukater and aims to highlight and address the most current issues facing young people in terms of entrepreneurship and digital literacy.

In turn, the Orthodox Theological High School „Sf. Constantin Brâncoveanu” Făgăraș has partnerships with parishes in the Diaspora, as well as partnerships for educational projects (protocol of collaboration with the Orthodox church “St. John the Baptist” Făgăraș; Educational partnership project ‘English through communicative activities’ – Făgăraș Students’ Club; Partnership agreement within the educational project “The present and the past build the future” – Technological High School “Titu Dumitrescu” Mihăilești ; Partnership project “International Water Day” together with the National College “Doamna Stanca” Făgăraș) (High School „Sf. C. Brâncoveanu”).

As a *price policy* tool applied in the loyalty of beneficiaries as they can especially influence the educational costs (thus generating the migration to another high school with lower costs), some loyalty measures can be used such as financial incentives consisting of various prizes or scholarships (“high school money”, “Euro 200”, “professional scholarship” etc.).

For example, within the "Radu Negru" National College, two specific prizes are awarded to this institution: the Comaniciu Prize and the Prize of the 1988 Generation. At the end of the 2019-2020 school year, the Comaniciu Prize amounted to \$ 2000, the amount

being awarded to students who achieved good results in: County Olympics – Computer Science, second Prize at the regional competition – Computer Science and the top 5 pupils with the highest average 4 years of high school. The Prize of the 1988 Generation had, in 2019-2020, a total value of 1600 euros being obtained by 6 graduates of the college as follows:

- A prize of 500 euros for the head of the 2020 promotion;
- For an activity and/or pupil who has very good results in learning but who has a more modest financial support;
- 600 euros distributed to qualified pupils at national phase of Olympics and specialized competitions.

Regarding the *distribution policy*, it is possible to consider different facilities for carrying out the didactic activity, but also for the learning process: using the internet inside the institution, offering electronic means of communication (laptops, tablets), necessary for carrying out lessons, subscriptions to various places for leisure (swimming, fitness room, tennis), as well as free tickets for visits to museum, etc.

An example in this case can be of the Technical College “Aurel Vijoli” Făgăraș where pupils benefit from free accommodation and meals: accommodation is in the boarding school. Pupils have all necessary conditions to live in the boarding school for a long time: wardrobes, beds and bedside tables for everyone, new bathrooms, refrigerators and a TV in each room. In addition, food is provided free of charge. *The communication policy* is applied in order to engage in an ongoing dialogue with the beneficiaries. From this category we can mention: measure of individual communication with the beneficiaries, organization of events, involvement of pupils in the publication of magazines specific to the school field (for example, the magazine of the “Radu Negru” National College), etc.

Nowadays, the operation of a web page of the institution has become a natural thing, but the combination of online media (web, social networks, and platforms) can increase the visibility of the institution. Also, other categories that contribute to the loyalty of the beneficiaries are:

- Various counseling and guidance activities, carried out by the school counselor;
- Extracurricular activities such as: visits, documentation trips, training courses, participation in various competitions.

For example, the „Radu Negru” National College organizes several types of competitions, respectively (Liceul „Radu Negru”, b):

- The zonal mathematics competition "Let's get to know the Mathematical Gazette", competition organized annually by the mathematics department.
- Environmental protection contest "I am also part of Natura 2000" organized by MILVUS Group Association. From the "Radu Negru" College, 6 crews participated in the 2019-2020 school year, out of which 3 qualified in the third final stage.
- Winners Contest - 20th edition: 267 pupils entered in the last competition, participating in 4 sections: physics, biology, chemistry, computer science.

In the category of events, the same college organizes physics and humanities competitions, as well as volunteer activities that ensure a dimension of social involvement for this education institution.

Extension of beneficiaries

Beneficiaries continue to use the institution's services and products, becoming loyal beneficiaries due to additional purchases, which consist of extensive quality services. To this

end, upper secondary school graduates are encouraged to continue their studies in tertiary education, such as post-secondary education organized in the same school, and those in lower secondary education have the opportunity to continue their studies through their forms of high school (“reduces frequency”, “evening courses”). For example, the Technical College “Aurel Vijoli” Făgăraș has an educational offer for “evening courses” level (classes XI, XII, XIII – “Technician operating computer technology” and “Technician in electrical installations”) and “low frequency” level (classes IX-XIII: human – Social Sciences).

Conclusion

In this article, we set out to address the issue of pupils’ attachment to the specialization and school they attend, through a dual perspective: pedagogical and marketing, convinced of the possibility and necessity of combining the two fields of socio-human sciences. The need to attach pupils, as we have shown, is very important from a pedagogical perspective and can be achieved in a number of ways. Thus, an increased attachment of pupils to colleagues, teachers and the educational environment as a whole has positive effects on pupil motivation, interpersonal relationships, the learning process, but also on their entire development. From the point of view of the pedagogical approach, among the factors that contribute significantly to the development of the pupils’ attachment are the development of the feeling of trust, social relations and interactions, the conditions of the educational environment, and the pedagogical means of stimulating pupils’ interest and involvement not only in learning, but also in all activities carried out at school level. A special role always belongs to the skills and quality of the teaching staff. The role of teachers is also essential in terms of ensuring the satisfaction of the educational process, so that the “workforce” in education is practically the link between pedagogical and marketing factors that ensure the attachment of pupils in the educational process.

The case study presented in this article, based on information on high school institutions in a locality in Romania allowed us to highlight concrete solutions for capitalizing on marketing techniques in education, in order to attract and retain pupils in institutions respectively, that is, for their loyalty. These techniques belong to each marketing policy and have been implemented by the analyzed institutions in close connection with their profile and the importance that the management of the institution has attributed to these techniques.

With regard to product policy, the emphasis was on maintaining or adopting that type of education that fits the profile of that high school, being the main argument for which it is chosen by the candidates. Complementary services have been added to this main solution in order to increase the attractiveness of the high school and the satisfaction of the beneficiaries (in the case of innovative technologies, partnerships, provisions and study facilities). Pricing policy has focused on awarding prizes or scholarships on the basis of certain criteria designed to motivate pupils or reduce dissatisfaction with education-related costs, while within distribution policy, steps have been taken (feeble, that’s right) to add facilities to extend the pupil-institution relationship to extracurricular activities. The communication policy has, at the level of the analyzed institutions, a potential still little exploited. Individual communication is the pivot on which both individual satisfaction and the pedagogical approach in the educational process are built. From this point of view, communication is probably the element that best demonstrates the need to combine pedagogical and marketing means. Regarding the concrete marketing communication

actions of the analyzed institutions, an important role belongs to the events, as it ensures the direct participation of the pupils and, implicitly, their direct involvement. Each institution has sought to create a tradition of events, and the characteristics of the product policy (partnerships created, type of education and specializations available) can be used to support this approach.

What is missing from the marketing strategy to increase pupils' attachment to these institutions is the inclusion of the two categories of key players in the professional development of graduate pupils: companies that hire high school graduates and universities in search of candidates for further training. We believe that the inclusion of these two categories of actors in the marketing strategy for pupil loyalty can be easily declined at the level of actions specific to each marketing policy (developing partnerships, adding educational innovation, rewarding with special awards or scholarships, extracurricular study facilities and extracurricular activities, competitions and other events in partnership and communication through complementary media) and the benefits will be visible to all parties involved.

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