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**MANAGERIAL POLICIES FOR SUPPORTING EMPLOYEES IN
HIGHER EDUCATION**

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Abstract

The paper is based on the experience of the University POLITEHNICA of Bucharest regarding the implementation of the managerial policies for the employees' support and provides a comprehensive image on the factors involved in the implementation of the decision regarding the setting-up of a pre-university educational organization for the children of the University's employees. The motivation of this initiative lies in the need to adopt the European standards regarding the facilities and the quality of the services provided by the University to its own employees, in order to improve the working conditions. In many countries of the European Union there are schools for the teachers' children, thus being facilitated the access to school for the children of their own employees. The synchronization of the parents' and children's programs helps to reduce the teachers' efforts to raise and educate children. Among the benefits there is also reducing the distances between the parents' workplace and the place where the children are taught and cared for. Moreover, due to the special link with the university, the pupils will benefit from special educational resources such as laboratories from multiple technical areas. The paper presents the organizational context in which this innovative solution was introduced, the regulations for the organization of the educational process in the Primary School POLITEHNICA and the resources of the instructional activities. A special attention is paid to the implications of this initiative on the individuals -the employees and the organization.

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1. Introduction

Human resources represent, in higher education, as in other fields of activity, an important concern. Thus, in the managerial plans, human resources strategies or other specific documents, systematic approaches for motivating, attracting and improving the professional performance or working conditions can be identified.

Research studies in the field (Langa, 2008; Oprescu & Militaru, 2012) reveal that each organization, including a university, regardless of its size and field of activity, has its own organizational culture, which depends on the management practices. “At the university level, organizational culture can be defined as the values and beliefs of the university's stakeholders (academic and administrative managers, Senate members and Faculty Councils, teaching staff, students and administrative staff) based on tradition, verbal or nonverbal” (Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Bartell, 2003 as cited in Nica et. al., 2011, p. 7)

The Strategic Institutional Development Plan of the University POLITEHNICA of Bucharest 2016-2020 allocates a distinct chapter to the human resource that it declares as "the most important asset of an organization" (Planul strategic de dezvoltare instituțională 2016-2020, UPB, 2016, p. 34). Emphasizing that human resource management traditionally accounts for human resources as a resource as any other, bureaucratically quantifiable by the number of posts, total budgets etc., in the strategic plan it is mentioned that it must be taken into account that, when speaking about human resources, we speak of people with needs, training, different desires, people who truly represent the strength of the university and its true value.

In the Self-Evaluation Report, European University Association (EUA) Institutional Evaluation Program, University POLITEHNICA of Bucharest (2018), in the chapter Service to society, section Service for employees, reference is made to the setting-up of the Primary School POLITEHNICA, an employee support program, that responds to the demand of adopting the European standards in what concerns the facilities and the quality of the services provided by the university to its own employees, in order to improve the working conditions. In many countries of the European Union there are kindergartens and schools for teachers' children. A similar practice, which precedes the UPB's initiative, is the setting up of the Junior School and Kindergarten in 2003 at the A. I. Cuza University in Iasi.

Various guidelines on the organizational development highlight the role that changes have in the field of organization and human resources in order to improve members' quality of life and enhance the performance of the organization.

2. Problem Statement

The research aims to analyse the outcomes of the program, from the perspectives of teachers and parents.

3. Research Questions

The research questions are: What are the teachers' opinions regarding the services offered by the Primary School POLITEHNICA, considering the needs and demands of children and their parents? What are the teachers' opinions regarding their working conditions and career opportunities? What are the parents' opinions regarding the strengths of the program and the directions for the improvement of the educational and associated services?

4. Purpose of the Study

The paper aims to analyze the initiative of setting up the Primary School POLITEHNICA through the outcomes of the services provided to the main beneficiaries, the children and their parents- the university's employees.

The educational outcomes were analyzed considering the following aspects: the number of pupils enrolled in the pre-primary and primary classes; the benefits for the children/ students; the teachers' opportunities for professional development. The economic outcomes were revealed through the parents' opinions regarding the employees' retention in the university. Other aspects such as the possibility to valorize the human and material resources of the university were also considered. The social outcomes refer to: the enhancement of the positive attitude towards the employer; benefits for parents, in terms of the support given in caring for the children. The study aims to identify the barriers and success indicators, in order to improve the practice.

5. Research Methods

The research methods comprise both, quantitative and qualitative methods. A desk research, including the study of the school documents, was conducted in order to analyze similar initiatives in Romanian universities and relevant data regarding the activity carried out in the Primary School POLITEHNICA.

A questionnaire was addressed to the Primary School's teachers. It was focused on the following aspects: their opinions regarding the benefits for the children, the benefits for the parents and for themselves. Another questionnaire was addressed to the parents of the children enrolled at the Primary School POLITEHNICA. The data collected comprise aspects regarding the way the kindergarten and the school services help them to take care of their children, their satisfaction with the services, with focus on the educational services, and their opinions regarding the benefits for the employer. The interviews conducted with the teachers and the school principal allowed the data clarification and completion.

All the teachers from the Primary School POLITEHNICA were invited to fill in the online questionnaire and responded to the invitation. All the teachers in the Primary School POLITEHNICA are qualified to teach in pre-primary, primary education or K12. 50% of the pre-primary/ primary school teachers acquired a master's degree in Education Sciences, while the instructional positions they hold in the Primary School POLITEHNICA require the graduation of high school studies (pedagogical high school studies) or a Bachelor degree. 30% acquired a Bachelor degree in the Pedagogy of pre-primary education/ primary education. Two teachers occupy teaching position with the required level of education being Bachelors. One of them holds a master's degree in Education Sciences. 50% are novice teachers, 12.5% hold a definitive teaching degree and 37.5% are expert teachers (25% hold the instruction degree II; 12.5% hold the instruction degree I).

Sixty parents filled in the questionnaire. All of them are UPB employees, holding various position in this organization: financial administrator, lecturer, associate professor, professor, engineer, counsellor, pre-primary school teacher, manger etc. 46.4% of parents are between 31-40 years old; 39.3% 41-50 years old; 14.3% 21-30 years old. Most of them have been benefiting from the services provided within the

Primary School POLITEHNICA for less than one year (50%), 23.3% for more than one year and 26.7% for more than two years.

6. Findings

6.1. Benefits for the children from the teachers' perspective

The Kindergarten POLITEHNICA was founded in 2016 for the children of the UPB's employees. Starting with the school year 2017-2018, the kindergarten has been operating as the Primary School POLITEHNICA, comprising classes of pre-primary and primary education. The number of children enrolled in pre-primary classes is 75. 22 pupils attend classes in the primary school.

According to the teachers' opinions, the benefits for the children enrolled at the Primary School POLITEHNICA are as follows: ensuring continuity in the educational activities (Children have the opportunity to learn at the same school where they attended pre-school) (100% of the teachers – “to a very great extent”); the use of educational resources appropriate to the pupils' learning needs (75% of the teachers – “to a very great extent”; 25% of the teachers – “to a great extent”); the crystallization of the children's pre-professional interests (for example, the children will be able to participate in the university campus activities involving students, such as the presentation of robotics projects by the students) (75% of the teachers – “to a very great extent”; 12.5% of the teachers – “to a great extent”; 12.5% - “to a medium extent”).

Other benefits for pupils from the teachers' perspectives: “the instructional activities are held in spaces specially arranged for children at an advanced standard compared with traditional, public schools”; “children have a dining room, and a generous playground and recreation area; the teaching staff is open to new pedagogical approaches” (respondent 1); “the low of number of pupils and pre-school pupils in each class/ group allows teachers to pay more attention to the needs and demands of each child” (respondent 3); “a secured learning environment” (respondent 2); “minimizes the stress usually caused by changing the school at the entrance to primary education” (respondent 1); “the possibility to offer specialized services tailored to the needs and demands of the children and their families” (respondent 2); “a positive socio-affective climate in the class; the possibility to participate in a large number of extracurricular outdoor activities, in the schoolyard or involving off-school trips (outdoor formal and non-formal educational activities) (respondent 7)”; “develops pupil-to-pupil and pupil-to-teacher relationships based on friendship, respect for diversity and mutual help” (respondent 7).

The teachers consider that for the parents, the most important aspects regarding the kindergarten/school supplies are as follows: “the child well-being, the child's relationship with the teachers or non-teaching staff, the results of the educational process, the hygiene, the nutrition, the rest program, the outdoor activities, the child's relationships with his classmates” (respondent 2); “the parents are comfortable with the thought of leaving their children in good hands and having them so close during the working program” (respondent 3); “the quality of the education services, offered in a modern educational environment. Moreover, during the holidays the children enjoy recreational activities organized in the school” (respondent 1); “the involvement of the teaching staff, the material basis of the school and the location of the school in the proximity of the workplace” (respondent 5); “the communication with the teachers; the diversity of the extracurricular activities” (respondent 6).

6.2. Benefits for the teachers

The kindergarten/ school staff have the right conditions for carrying out their professional activities. The aspects the teachers appreciate most regarding the services offered in the Primary School POLITEHNICA are as follows: the teachers and assistants' concerns towards the children's needs; the workspaces are continually sanitized; the children benefit from healthy food; the teachers have the opportunity to use their creativity to initiate and / or support educational projects through partnerships or class / group activities.

All the interviewed teachers appreciate this initiative of setting up the Primary School POLITEHNICA as an opportunity for their professional development, for example, through the collaboration with the Teacher Training Department in order to implement educational projects.

6.3. The parents' perspective on the services provided in the Primary School POLITEHNICA

The majority of parents appreciate the most the school facilities and the teachers' professionalism (Figure 01).

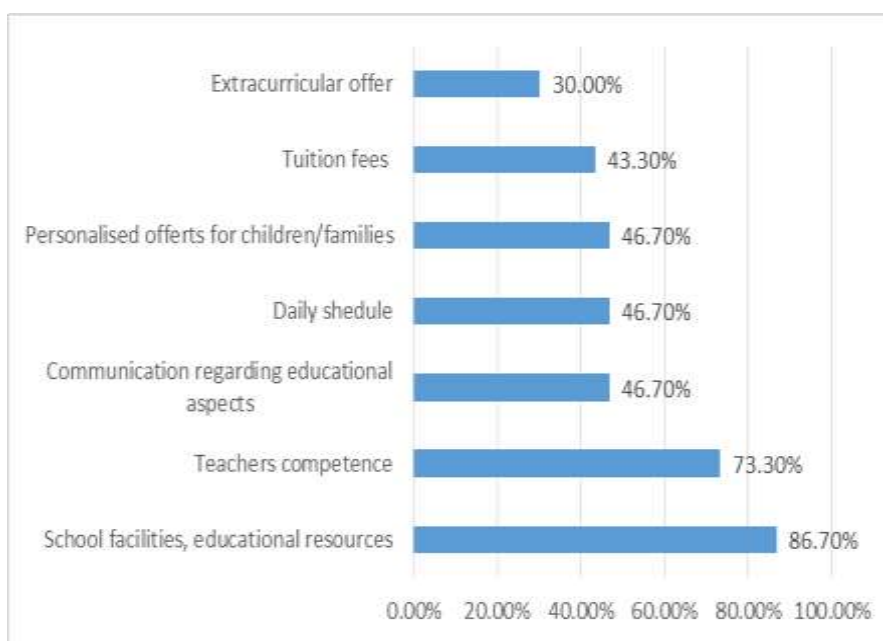


Figure 01. The aspects most appreciated by parents

A lower number of parents appreciate most the communication regarding the educational aspects (46.7%), the daily schedule, the personalized offer for the children and families (46,7%), the tuition fees (43.3%), the extracurricular offer (30%), the communication regarding the administrative aspects (26.7%), the quality and transparency of the procedures (23.30%); the relevant partners (for example, the providers of educational services) (16.7%). Some parents particularly appreciate that teachers are open to new ideas, new learning experiences and interested in continuous training, with real benefits for the children.

The parents' suggestions for improving the services are presented below Figure 02:

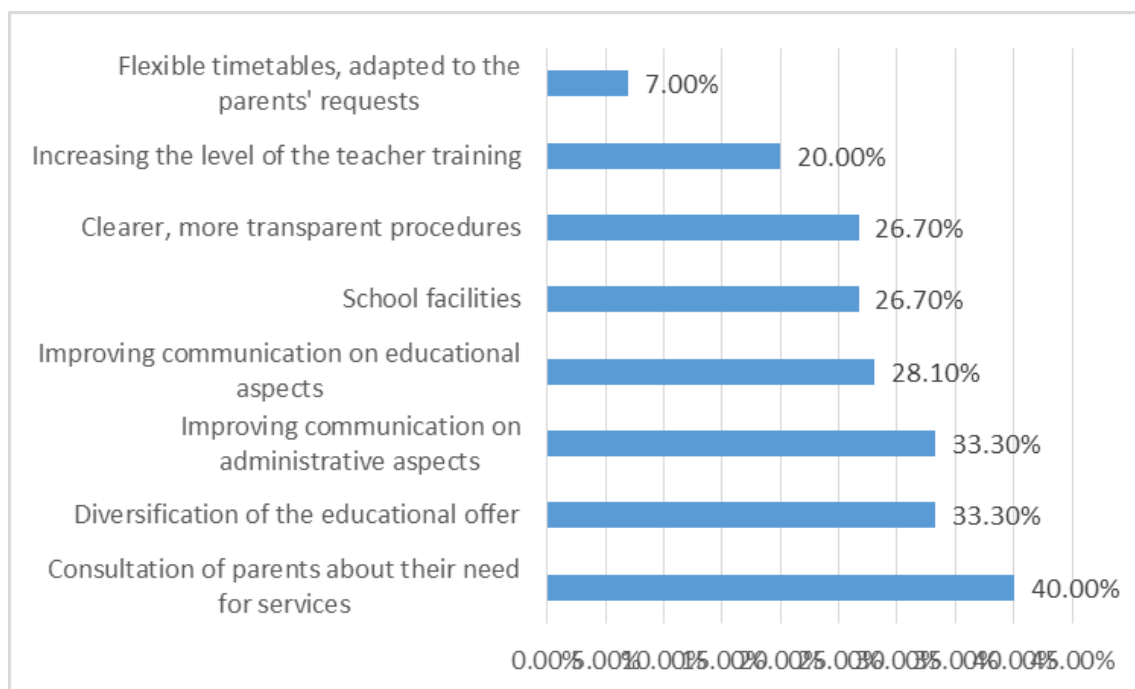


Figure 02. Parents' opinions regarding the optimization of Primary School services

Most of the parents consider that the school services contribute to reducing the time needed for taking the child to the kindergarten/school (56.7% to a very great extent, 20% to a great extent, 13.3 % to a medium extent, 6.7% to a very small extent, 3.3% not at all). They also contributed to maintaining their comfort state regarding the child education (60% to a very great extent, 26.7% to a great extent, 13.3 % to a medium extent). Other benefits mentioned by the parents are as follows: “improve the work relationships” (respondent 4), “more time spent with the child” (respondent 10); “the feeling of safety” (respondent 10), “a community of parents was created” (respondent 2), “the extended program, including the inter-semester holidays” (respondent 15), “the collegial spirit and the communication between the teachers” (respondent 30).

Regarding the benefits for the employer, most parents (76.6%) appreciate that the kindergarten/school services contribute “to a great” or “to a very great extent” to increase their confidence in the employer, usually associated with the retention of the staff. Most of them (70%) appreciated that this education facility contribute “to a great”/ “very great extent” to the increase of their organizational commitment to continuity. They are willing to stay with the employer for a longer period of time.

6.4. Difficulties encountered by the kindergarten/ school staff

Regarding the difficulties encountered by the teachers in the first two years of running the activities in the kindergarten/ school, one teacher mentioned the documents elaboration for receiving the accreditation of this educational organization. The majority of respondents mentioned that they did not face difficulties in their work.

According to the school principal the main challenge was to attract good teachers to work for the kindergarten/ school. Being a new organization at this type in Bucharest in 2016 (at present there are five similar organizations at national level), teachers were cautious in choosing the Kindergarten

POLITEHNICA as a workplace. The situation changed in the meantime, at the beginning of the school year 2017-2018 there were no problems in the selection and recruitment process. At the beginning, the pre-school also faced other personnel problems. For example, inexperienced assistants (child care staff) were responsible for the children protection activities in meeting the children's needs and demand for food, rest, human interaction. Considering the importance of the relational aspect in early childhood education, in order to create a safe learning environment for preschoolers and contribute to the children's well-being, hard work was done training the staff within the institution. Some of the care staff adapted to the preschool requirements as a result of the training sessions organized in the kindergarten, and there is also the example of the experienced assistants employed in the meantime. The administrative problems encountered were related to taking over and adapting the characteristics of pre-university education institutions by the university (hiring staff, salary, procurement, maintenance etc.). A permanent challenge involves maintaining a balance between the parents' expectations and the pedagogical principles promoted by the school.

6.5. Directions to improve services in the Primary School POLITEHNICA

Most teachers consider that the main interest of the parents relates to the care provided to the children by the kindergarten/ school staff and the preoccupation for organizing learning activities tailored to the children's needs, in order to make them come back to school joyfully and enthusiastically. The parents need open and concrete communication about any situation that concerns their child. According to the teachers, some parents expressed their need to communicate with the school representatives through a secretary service, available in the afternoon, in order to discuss the administrative aspects.

The majority of teachers consider that the parents have a high level of satisfaction with the Primary School services. After two years, the school managed to significantly increase the number of the pupils enrolled. As a consequence, as it develops, the kindergarten/ school needs new spaces for classrooms, full-time healthcare for children and a software for the electronic register.

The parents suggested that in the near future the Primary School POLITEHNICA can improve the services by: offering transport services for the children; supplementing the staff; organizing art theatre as an optional learning activity for students.

7. Conclusion

Created by the employees for the employees, the project of providing educational services at the Primary School POLITEHNICA is in continuous development. The main beneficiaries are the children of the UPB employees, but the measures taken for diversifying the services and increasing their quality have beneficial effects on all those involved: pupils, parents – UPB employees, employer and Primary School teachers.

The management team's decisions reflect the orientation towards people by taking into account their needs and the effects on the employees. For most of the UPB employees who benefit from the educational services of the Primary School POLITEHNICA, this initiative has implications on their identity, in that it increases the degree in which the employees identify themselves with the organization, respectively the degree of the loyalty to the employer.

In the medium term, the perspective for collaboration between the Primary School POLITEHNICA and the UPB Teacher Training Department, through joint activities and projects, highlights the management's interest in increasing the integration of the component units, the professional development of the teachers and the optimization of the educational practices.

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