

Marketing-Related Activity in a Heterogeneous Educational Organization

Actividad relacionada con el marketing en una organización educativa heterogénea

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Content

- [1. Introduction](#)
- [2. Methods](#)
- [3. Practical results](#)
- [4. Discussion](#)
- [5. Conclusion](#)
- [Acknowledgments](#)
- [References](#)

ABSTRACT:

Russian pedagogy is currently faced with a number of challenges associated with fundamental changes taking place in the nation's social-economic development and a set of major global metaprocesses, like globalization, commercialization, individualization, and mediatization, as a consequence of which society is becoming increasingly polycultural, with the nation experiencing a rise in the number of people with disabilities and spikes in migration. Heterogeneity in today's society governs the changes taking place both in the external and internal environment of educational organizations. Factors like recent hikes in the number of migrants, increases in the number of disabled children, the expansion of the spectrum of diagnoses among disabled children, the expansion of technological capabilities in working with gifted children, etc., are signaling the need for educational organizations to create the conditions for the provision of "education for all", with equal educational opportunities provided to all children in

RESUMEN:

La pedagogía rusa se enfrenta actualmente a una serie de desafíos asociados con los cambios fundamentales que se están produciendo en el desarrollo socioeconómico de la nación y un conjunto de grandes metaproses globales, como la globalización, la comercialización, la individualización y la mediación, como consecuencia de la cual la sociedad se está volviendo cada vez más policultural, con la nación experimentando un aumento en el número de personas con discapacidades y picos en la migración. La heterogeneidad en la sociedad actual rige los cambios que se están llevando a cabo tanto en el entorno externo como en el interno de las organizaciones educativas. Factores como los recientes aumentos en el número de migrantes, el aumento del número de niños discapacitados, la expansión del espectro de diagnósticos entre los niños discapacitados, la expansión de las capacidades tecnológicas en el trabajo con niños dotados, etc., están señalando la necesidad

heterogeneous educational environment. This makes it relevant for educational organizations to search for new strategies for development under conditions of diversity and, as a consequence, explore the needs of learners and their parents and seek out innovative technology for boosting the efficient use of existing resources and locating new sources of funding.

Keywords: managing diversity, heterogeneous educational environment, marketing-related competence of subjects of the educational process, quality of education, development of educational needs

de que las organizaciones educativas creen las condiciones para la provisión de "educación para todos", con igualdad de oportunidades educativas a todos los niños en un entorno educativo heterogéneo. Esto hace que sea pertinente que las organizaciones educativas busquen nuevas estrategias de desarrollo en condiciones de diversidad y, en consecuencia, exploren las necesidades de los educandos y sus padres y busquen tecnología innovadora para impulsar el uso eficiente de los recursos existentes y localizar nuevas fuentes de financiación.

Palabras clave: gestión de la diversidad, entorno educativo heterogéneo, competencia relacionada con el marketing de los sujetos del proceso educativo, calidad de la educación, desarrollo de las necesidades educativas

1. Introduction

Evolving economic, political, ideological, and sociocultural diversity in today's world is increasingly complicating the interaction of subjects of the educational process, leaving the latter unprepared to make proper use of the factors of diversity for the purposes of boosting the quality of education.

The concept of educational marketing makes it possible to order, systematize, summarize, and integrate knowledge on managing diversity in terms of factoring in the educational needs of the various heterogeneous groups: gifted children, migrants, children with special educational needs, etc.

Construing heterogeneity as a set of differences (in age, gender, ethnicity, abilities, and social origin) between learners and pedagogues alike, which are or may act as a barrier to an efficient educational process, offers a wider insight into the various groups of children depending on their heterogeneous attribute (gifted children, children with limited health capacities, children representing the various groups in terms of ethnicity, age, social origin, gender, etc.) and, as a consequence, enables taking a broader look at the issue of managing heterogeneity in educational organizations under present-day conditions (Donina, 2014). This makes it relevant to look for novel approaches to managing diversity in present-day educational organizations, the top priority being factoring in and developing the educational needs of all subjects of the educational process: learners, parents, and pedagogues, as well as reacting to the needs of society and the state, associated with expectations of high-quality education.

In this regard, special significance is taken on by the marketing strategy of educational organizations, which presupposes not only the use of educational services but the transformation of the personality of the end consumer as well.

In Russia, researches related to the development of ideas of marketing in education (or particular aspects thereof) incorporate several dimensions: the economics of education (Belyakov, 2007; Shchetinin, Khromenkov, & Ryabushkin, 1998), management of educational systems and educational organizations (Konarzhevskii, 1992; Lebedev, 2006; Shamova, 2002), and marketing in education (Bukharova, 2010; Egorshin, 2001; Litvinova, 1997). It has been suggested by researchers that a marketing approach to managing an educational organization can be effectuated through efficient interaction between personnel and consumers of services, partners and the public, "growing" a demand for educational services, cultivating a consumer culture, and meeting educational needs.

2. Methods

The methodological basis for this study is a set of the following approaches: personified, axiological, and context-competence.

A personified approach ensures that the researcher comprehends the characteristics and needs

of not just each target group but also each person who forms part of the group, as someone who is prepared for and capable of searching for the solution to a problem in alignment with a set of personal needs, cultural characteristics, physical capacity and abilities, interests, and difficulties. This helps factor in as much as possible the individual characteristics of pedagogues and learners alike and ensure their active stance in the polycultural dialogue of subjects of an institution of general learning, which is predicated on self-determination, self-assessment, self-attitude, and self-management.

An *axiological approach* implies that the making of personal values in a person is associated with their motivation-value attitude toward the world around them as a representative of a certain culture, which engages in dialogue with other cultures within a polycultural organization. Recognizing the values of the subculture of each target group in combination with common human values and cultivating tolerance and respect for the differences (primary and secondary, visible and invisible alike) is what forms the basis of an axiological approach to exploring the issue.

A *context-competence approach* implies the need to investigate the marketing competence of all participants in the educational process, above all pedagogues at educational organizations and their superiors engaged in interaction in a climate of diversity. Distilling the context component as part of a competence approach makes it possible to view the process of development of marketing competence in participants in the educational process of an educational organization in the context of the interaction of various heterogeneous groups as active subjects of the external and internal environment of an educational organization.

For the purposes of this study, the authors employed the following methods: theoretical analysis of the psychological-pedagogical, social-pedagogical, social-economic, and scientific-methodological literature on the issue being explored in the study; exploring a set of statutory, regulatory, and policy documents and a pool of experience in the area of marketing in education; observation; surveys (questionnaires, interviews); diagnostic methods (testing, expert assessment); pedagogical experiment; methods of mathematical processing of data.

The study was conducted on the basis of a set of pre-school educational and general-education organizations across Veliky Novgorod and Novgorod Oblast: Gymnasium No. 4, the gymnasium 'Istok' ['springhead'], General-Education School No. 14, the combined-type kindergarten 'Solnyshko' ['little sun'], and Kindergarten No. 42, all attended by gifted children, migrant children, and children with limited health capacities. It featured 435 preschool-age children and school students, 257 parents, 136 pedagogical staff, and 18 school and kindergarten administration staff.

3. Practical results

3.1 Quantitative characterization of target groups within present-day educational organizations

Below is a detailed look at each of the targets groups within present-day educational organizations, which are characterized by similar educational needs. This makes it possible to explore them as an independent subject of management. There will also be a brief characterization of some of the managerial actions to be undertaken in educational organizations by their pedagogues and administration in relation to some of the specific characteristics of these groups.

Among the priority objectives for present-day education is singling out, supporting, developing, and socializing talented and gifted children, who make up the 1st *target group*. A gifted child is one who is distinguished by vibrant, readily apparent, and at times even outstanding achievements in a certain type of activity (or has all the prerequisites for these achievements). There are several types of giftedness (creative, intellectual, leader, sports, etc.). Pedagogues

and managers need to know the various types of giftedness in order to be able to spot a gifted child, assess their potential, develop special curricula, and put together the right organizational-pedagogical conditions for their self-actualization.

It stands to reason that managerial actions and strategies for the development of educational organizations ought to be effectuated in alignment with present-day concepts on the development of education. Among the priority documents determining the activity of educational organizations is 'The Concept of a Russian National System of Spotting and Developing Young Talents', which has been the basis for a set of programs for the development of gifted children worked out in certain regions across the nation. Thus, for instance, Novgorod Oblast has had a program in place called 'Odarennye Deti ['gifted children'], 2012–2016', aimed at the development and enhancement of the regulatory, scientific, and methodological framework for spotting, developing, and supporting giftedness; facilitation of quality training and career enhancement for pedagogical personnel; implementation of results-oriented activities; enhancement of the multi-level infrastructure of working with gifted children and youth via cutting-edge technology and interregional partnership. Consequently, work with gifted children is becoming one of the major strategic areas for development in just about any educational organization and requires developing practically unique programs for gifted children, which are differentiated depending on the type of giftedness and the extent to which it is manifested.

As part of the study, the 1st target group was made up of children who were exhibiting proficiency in certain areas of activity: subject-cognitive (53%), artistic-esthetic (48%), sports-recreation (36%), and social (18%).

No less significant to managing the educational organization in a climate of diversity is the *2nd group of children* – children with limited health capacities (LHC). The range of potential for the development and learning of children with LHC is quite large: from the ability to study on par with able-bodied peers to following a specially constructed individual program of study customized to one's capacities. The group's inhomogeneous composition also requires differentiating the content and technology of learning for children with special characteristics of development. The major objective for the educational organization in this case is to explore the needs of learners within the target group with a view to creating the special conditions for their development and social adaptation and create the optimum conditions for the development of the potential of each child attending the inclusive class.

In this study, the group of children with limited health capacities featured quite an extensive lineup of participants: children with mild to moderate hearing loss (3%), visually-impaired children (3%), children with musculoskeletal disorders (3%), children with retarded mental development (88%), and children with Down's syndrome (3%).

In terms of the *3rd heterogeneous group*, it is worth noting that present-day educational organizations are increasingly institutions attended by not just children from a native ethnicity. Factors like the multi-national nature of many present-day states, the poly-ethnic structure of society, or the use of two official languages in some regions are triggering the emergence of poly-ethnic schools and kindergartens with a varying ethnic learner composition. Efficient management of poly-ethnic educational organizations is grounded in the principles of a positive attitude toward ethnic diversity and ethno-cultures. In a climate of a multi-confessional culture, the focus in terms of the implementation of key managerial objectives is shifting to the study and analysis of this group of consumers as well as getting the learners to adapt to both the prevalent culture and to that of other ethnicities, cultivating respect for the originality of other peoples, and getting the learners to comprehend and acknowledge the national-cultural differences between ethnicities so as to ensure efficient interaction between the learners through a dialogue of cultures.

Most of the respondents who made up the 3rd experimental group had come to Russia from the following countries: Armenia (42%), Azerbaijan (12%), Uzbekistan (11%), Ukraine (9%), Turkmenia (6%), Kazakhstan (6%), Georgia (6%), Estonia (3%), Germany (3%), and India

(3%).

The organization of interaction between subjects of the educational process and members of this target group is, largely, associated with language and cultural issues. Based on the results of a set of surveys of educators and teachers, migrant children have demonstrated the following command of the Russian language: speaking and reading – ‘satisfactory’ (42%); writing – ‘unsatisfactory’ (34%). Due to this, only 35% of learners from this segment are taking an active part in the educational process and educational activities. Many children are shut-in and unsociable. Their cultural identity is reflected in their attitude toward traditions, temperament, conduct, or accent, which may require special managerial analysis in organizing both the educational process and relevant nurturing activities and additional educational services. The presence of such children in educational organizations places additional responsibility on the administration and pedagogues alike, which is associated with the cultivation of tolerance toward each other in all participants in the educational process and searching for the optimum ways to enable intercultural interaction.

And, finally, it is worth noting the augmentation of the *gender-based learning* trend, which cannot but be factored in managing an educational organization. Class heterogeneity or homogeneity has always been a subject of debate among scholars. According to proponents of separate learning, it makes it possible to factor in the unevenness of development in boys and girls, with children developing positive self-appraisal, risks of teenage depression diminishing, and academic progress improving. Opponents of separate learning are warning of the possibility of declines in a creative atmosphere in class, the entrenchment of gender segregation practices, and girls being increasingly oriented toward motherhood and boys toward a professional career. Factoring in gender characteristics presupposes not just customizing the curricula but ensuring active communication between learners and both female *and* male pedagogues, which, unfortunately, is not always possible in present-day schools. This establishes a rationale for searching for ways to bring males into an educational organization not only as teachers and instructors but also as participants in activities and partners. A special role is played by learners’ parents (fathers). An area of educational policy worth focusing on is boosting the prestige of working in the area of education, especially with regard to males.

3.2 Marketing as a methodology for managing a heterogeneous educational organization

In research, marketing is construed as special human activity aimed at meeting needs and wishes through exchange; a social process aimed at satisfying the needs and wishes of individuals and groups through the creation and supply of goods and services possessing value and the free-flowing exchange of them (Kotler, Armstrong, Saunders, & Wong, 1998); activity aimed at the creation of demand based on people’s needs; the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large (Ries & Trout, 2006); the concept of managing market activity whereby the objective for activity in the market will be achieved on condition that you satisfy consumer needs more efficiently than your competition does it (Karlöf, 1991).

G.L. Bagiev, who views present-day marketing as a complex social-economic phenomenon, represents it as a set of 4 factors for activity within a market: 1) a philosophy of interaction and coordination of entrepreneurial activity, 2) a concept of management, 3) a means of ensuring advantages in a competitive environment, and 4) a method for searching for solutions (Bagiev & Asaul, 2001). E. **Dichtl and H. Hörschgen have singled out 3 conceptual fields for the essence of marketing:** 1) the organization and management principle, which consists in the consistent directing of all solutions dealing with the market to the needs of consumers and customers (marketing as a principle of organizing and managing an enterprise), 2) marketing as a means of achieving advantages as opposed to one’s competition, and 3) a systematic

method for searching for solutions (**Dichtl, & Hörschgen, 1995**).

J.-J. Lambin, A. A. Braverman, and E. P. Golubkov have suggested that of significance to marketing are both the *economic aspect* (building the organization into the market environment being formed and ensuring the attraction of investment) and the *social-managerial aspect* (products being created and exchanged by individuals so they could get what they need; preserving and solidifying the well-being of not just every individual consumer but society as a whole) (Lambin, 2007; Braverman, 2006; Golubkov, 1998).

Thus, *marketing* acts as the fundamental philosophy underlying the development of any organization in a climate of uncertainty and heterogeneity in the external environment, which is predicated on active interaction with that environment, the systematic study and analysis of the behavior of various groups of consumers, sales channels, and competition with a view to working out and implementing efficient strategies for forecasting and meeting consumer needs in a climate of diversity.

The direct transfer of practices related to marketing a deal from the commercial sphere into the non-commercial one (all the more so into the sphere of education) is impossible for a number of reasons: first, it is the social significance of education as a social good; second, it is the status of educational organizations as non-commercial entities; third, it is the actual specificity of educational services. The shift to managing the educational organization via a marketing-based approach is a totally novel state, where the institution relies in its activity not only on its internal resources but factors in a diversity of external factors to implement the concept of managing the organization as an "open system". This may lead to significant changes in the way most managerial decisions are made.

3.3 Functions of marketing in education

In marketing of educational services, compared with marketing of other goods and services, a great role is also played by the state and its bodies of authority (including the local ones) (Andreev, 1997; Bukharova, 2010; Egorshin, 2001; Litvinova, 1997). When taking a marketing-based approach to managing an educational organization, it is worth factoring in the consumer needs of specific target groups within clearly defined segments of the market with all the special needs and potential inherent to them in relation to demand for educational services. Thus, in a climate of diversity an educational organization ought to be managed in such a way as to not just adapt to and make the most efficient use of the changes in external factors (technological, social-economic, cultural, geographical, political, etc.), but also focus on the analysis of the educational needs and expectations of the various groups of learners and educatees (gifted children, children differing in sex, ethnicity, or age, children with limited health capacities, etc.).

I.A. Donina is proposing the following set of functions performed by marketing in education that are of significance in a climate of diversity: the *analytical (research) function* (exploring the market and selecting target markets; studying the consumers and segmenting the market; studying the needs of organizations that form part of the partner interaction system; exploring the internal environment of the educational organization); the *production (creative) function* (developing relevant educational services possessing market novelty; managing the quality of educational services); the *function of effectuating educational services* (cultivating demand for potentially necessary educational services and stimulating their provision; positioning educational services; developing image policy, a servicing system, and pricing policy); the *management and control function* (planning (operational and strategic); information support for marketing activity; control); the *educational function* (informing and enlightening educational service consumers; cultivating their loyalty and adherence through fostering an understanding of the essence of measures undertaken by the state and the educational organization (its personnel and leadership)); the *competence function* (in undertaking its marketing activity, the educational organization ought to cultivate the preparedness and capacity of pedagogical

personnel for marketing activity) (Donina, 2015).

These functions are to be effectuated using a set of marketing measures specific to each target audience.

3.4 The marketing mix as the basis for marketing activity conducted by a heterogeneous educational organization

The marketing mix forms the basis of marketing activity conducted by a heterogeneous educational organization. In every educational organization, the marketing mix is associated with the use of a unique combination of tools that are facilitative of the **efficient attainment of its objectives and effectuation of the content and technology underlying its curricula and incorporates 4 major components**. These are: *Product* (the essence of an educational service offered; concomitant servicing; concomitant educational products); *Price* (the pricing strategy and tactics; the pricing system); *Place* (the location where a service is provided and the setting in which sales take place; strategies for the match between the external and internal image and the one being positioned; channels through which educational services are provided); *Promotion* (advertising, PR, stimulation, and sponsorship) (Donina, 2015).

Below is a brief characterization of each of the components of the marketing mix.

Product supply (Product) is the foundation (leading) element in the marketing mix. Most of the time, the chief product of an educational organization is its educational services. Educational services are the most crucial and common object in education marketing. It is the “product” offered to the market that has maximum effect on decisions made regarding the rest of the components of the marketing mix in a climate of diversity: policy related to product range, pricing, communications, sales, image, and human resources.

Among the key characteristics of educational services are the following: educational services being of a creative nature; consumers taking an active part in the educational process and in growing their own potential; the state taking an active part in ensuring the quality of educational services (working out relevant standards of quality for education; ensuring the accessibility of education to everyone; facilitating quality training and career enhancement for pedagogues and administrators at an educational organization); proper legal protection for consumers of educational services; the delayed nature of the manifestation of knowledge, skills, faculties, and personal qualities; dependence on the conditions under which the above will be manifested.

The need for educational organizations to conduct robust marketing activity is linked to the differences in the way the essence of “free education” and the potential for additional paid educational services are construed by pedagogues and the administration, learners, parents, and the public and, as a consequence, the differences in the above audiences’ expectations, wishes, and degree of satisfaction with the activity of the general-education organization. Thus, most of the parents are of the opinion that all educational services provided by schools ought to be free (87%), while some are prepared to pay some of the cost of additional educational services (up to 100 rubles per month – 19%; up to 300 rubles per month – 5%). At the same time, there are such parent expectations as: keeping children busy with something in the afternoon (86%); having in place a well-developed system of additional education and extracurricular work offering a variety of services depending on children’s wishes and abilities (74%). Parents are voicing the following wishes regarding the organization of the educational process: 1) factoring in the faculties and abilities of each student; 2) employing health-saving technology; 3) creating the conditions for boosts in the preparation of students for the various types of vocational education and cultivating in them professional self-determination and the ability to resolve life problems and overcome difficulties. The proper organization of educational services that match the expectations of both parents and children requires that managerial decisions be made based on the findings of marketing research, as well as analysis of external

and internal environment.

In a climate of diversity, special significance is taken on by the strategy of differentiated marketing of educational services, when the chief criterion for diversification is the consumer's belonging to a particular heterogeneous group. Even a commonly offered, standard educational service starts having significant differences. For instance, the educational service 'preparation for school' is provided in just about any kindergarten or general-education organization. Most of the time, the service has an undifferentiated nature, and the significant differences between these services in different educational organizations are associated with the fact that the programs are put together by different authors. This proprietary school preparation program is likely to be used by 85–90% of the micro-district's schools and kindergartens. It would be a lot more efficient, from the standpoint of a marketing-based approach, to build the positioning of the educational service based on the substantial differences that characterize potential consumers of educational services. Thus, it would be possible to incorporate into the preparation program for gifted children a set of classes teaching chess, foreign languages, drawing, music, etc. With regard to visually-impaired children, it would make sense to provide special visual aids, like imitators (including computer ones). A school preparation program intended for migrant children may incorporate Russia's various national and cultural characteristics, information related to local lore and the region's history, advanced speech development courses, etc.

The next component of the marketing mix is *price*. Pricing is not the main objective for the educational organization, yet, at the same time, it has a major effect on its development, as it may need to get additional funding which can be used both for the expansion of the school's material-technical base and for extra advertising. Active marketing activity facilitates the expansion of the material-technical base, which makes it possible to meet the various needs of heterogeneous groups. Thus, for instance, the institution may acquire for gifted children a set of expensive and rare musical instruments, artistic aids, or computer programs. To effectuate the curriculum for children with disabilities, it may be worth acquiring special technical aids and rehabilitation aids, like individual hearing aids and similar technical aids for children with hearing loss, and textbooks with larger fonts and braille for visually-impaired children, setting up approach ramps at the entrance to the school, and refitting the institution's premises (installing handrails in hallways, wide doorways, elevators and stair-lifts), which may require looking for sources of additional funding under conditions of limited resources. The pricing strategy mainly concerns additional paid educational services, as the core educational services are funded by the state, are governed in alignment with relevant regulations, and do not require any additional strategies for pricing.

The venue for the provision of services and the setting where learning takes place, referred to as *place*, are of significance to both the institution's positive image and the actual process of interaction between pedagogues and learners from various groups. A comfortable setting may help set a positive emotional tone for in-class activity, motivate one to continue in the same vein, and create a unique environment in which children will feel relaxed and have the opportunity to actualize their potential in full. The heterogeneity of the community within educational organizations makes one take a different look at the issue of putting together a perfectly tolerant environment and searching for innovative solutions for the inter-penetration and inter-enrichment of each subculture. In addition to regular educational technology, there arises the need to use special aids, including computer software, which will help learners succeed at school and in society regardless of which group they represent. For instance, Text-To-Speech software gets the computer read out typed-in text. The program can recognize text and uses built-in "voices" to read it out, which may be a real help to visually-impaired children in their learning, as it lets one listen to a text, without having to read it, and then work with it.

When it comes to *promotion* policy, it is worth noting once again that a present-day educational organization is an open system that actively interacts with the external environment and reacts to diversity in it. No matter how substantive and technologically advanced a proposed

educational product may be, if no one knows about it, then it does not exist for the market. The new type of consumer we have in today's climate of globalization and informatization is prepared for dialogue and large amounts of information. The new customer makes decisions based on an analysis of existing data and experience, including decisions related to the choice of educational services. In this regard, educational organizations ought to be prepared to pursue an active communication policy with each of their target audiences. This, in large part, is linked to how correctly the administration effectuates its promotion policy and how competent each staff member of the heterogeneous educational organization is and how much they are involved in the process of marketing communications (advertising, PR, stimulation, sponsorship, branding).

While in alignment with the characteristics of the above target groups (gifted children, children with limited health capacities, children representing the various groups in terms of ethnicity, age, or gender), the effect of advertising ought to be multi-directional and the choice of advertising carriers, communication channels, and advertising message styles ought to align with the preferences of the target audience. Thus, for instance, advertising for visually-impaired children ought to be carried by radio-channels or audio-carriers, while advertising for those with hearing loss may, in turn, require the use of videos. Advertising for girls may need to focus more on emotional components, while boys are mainly attracted to technological discoveries and special effects.

For the purposes of this study, in putting together the programs for marketing-based communication in schools and kindergartens, the authors factored in the strengths of each type of advertising carrier and focused on a combination of mass media and unique communication channels that would work for one or several target groups. For instance, the staging of the event 'Den' Otkrytykh Dverei' ('day of open doors') by the 'Solnyshko' kindergarten was announced on the institution's website and through TV channels, as well as via the various social (including professional) networks ('Odarennye Deti – Nashe Budushchee' ['gifted children – our future'], 'Tvorchestvo bez Granits' ['creativity without limits'], 'Raznye Deti – Ravnnye Vozmozhnosti' ['different kids – equal opportunities']), where the characteristics of the events to be staged were delineated in relation to each target group. Pedagogues were found to be mostly interested in communicating with their colleagues on issues related to putting together a heterogeneous educational environment (85%), employing the technology of pedagogical coaching in cultivating marketing competence in pedagogues (85%), managing heterogeneity through the individualization of learning (75%), discussing the ergonomic aspects of the organization of the educational process (68%), etc., as well as demonstrating various professional ideas and discoveries through workshops, professional contests, and quests (95%). Learners were found to care the most about: communication with their peers (89%) and tolerance toward each other (76%). Most of the boys said they would prefer to hang around in a physics classroom or a gym, while most of the girls were found to be attracted to embroidery workshops, dancing, and folk art.

A special role in the implementation of marketing activity in an educational organization is played by such strategically significant focus areas in promotion as informing and consulting. It is these that make it possible to get information across both inside the school and outside it. This may be information about the resources that are available in the institution, the type of equipment installed in it, the types of educational technology it carries to suit the needs of the various categories of children, etc.

The study featured a variety of opinions from parents on the degree of openness to them of information from educational organizations and the degree of availability and accessibility of information on how children are doing in a school or kindergarten, as well as on how valuable to them is communicating with pedagogues in terms of enriching their parent experience. Thus, most of the parents surveyed, 56%, were pleased with the degree of accessibility of information from the educational organization, while just 40% were satisfied with how open the organization is to parents, 25% – with the degree of their informedness of the organization's

activity, 55.5% – with the way interaction is organized, 47% – with their relationship with pedagogues, and 23% – with the degree of their engagement in the educational process. The following questions were found to represent a matter of concern to most of the parents: 'How is the kid doing in a team of peers?' (67%); 'Does the kid have friends?' (86%); 'Does the kid like the pedagogue and the pedagogue's classes?' (69%); 'Is the kid being successful both in terms of educational and extracurricular activity?' (67%).

When it comes to consulting activity, despite positive ratings of its relevance on the part of the majority of parents (88%), some noted certain difficulties which are precluding them from engaging actively in the process, like: being busy with work and not having enough time to come to the school for a consultation with a specialist (57%), being reluctant to discuss one's personal and intra-family problems (64%), a psychological barrier, and the fear of exhibiting one's incompetence on issues related to bringing up children with special educational needs (48%).

The results of the authors' analysis of the opinions of parents made it possible to develop new and customize existing forms of consulting in educational organizations. Thus, parents were offered online consultations on the websites of the organizations and in a social network, 'Raznye Deti – Ravnye Vozmozhnosti' ['different kids – equal opportunities'], created specifically for the purpose, and provided with access to a monthly electronic newsletter, intended to tell the readers about the life of children from the various heterogeneous groups in educational organizations and possible ways to support and guide them and provide examples of specific ways of assisting you. A consequence of this backward communication was the newsletter's special section, 'Konsultatsionnaya Pomoshch'' ['consulting assistance']. This electronic resource was mailed out based on a database of the email addresses of parents who had expressed a willingness to participate in the experiment. Special attention in organizing the consultations was devoted to the creation of topic-based video-lessons and webinars conducted by specifically invited professionals specializing in assistance and support for children and families with special educational needs.

Sociological surveys substantiated the fidelity of the focus areas selected (informing and consulting) as the most significant to heterogeneous educational organizations. Many parents learnt to formulate their wishes (68%), give a credible assessment of the various aspects of the educational process (72%), and openly share their difficulties (75%) and the problems of their child (63%). There was a boost in the parents' need to cooperate with the educational organization, more specifically in terms of the degree of being informed of both the organization itself (79%) and the essence of educational services offered by it to the various target groups of learners (92%), its mission (75%), strategy for development (64%), and educational technologies employed, which make it possible to differentiate the educational process depending on the characteristics of a pool of learners (76%), and the organization's activity in relation to them as its chief customers (85%) aimed at ensuring the meeting of their expectations from the interaction with the educational organization.

Based on the study's findings, productive consulting is also hampered by the unpreparedness of members of the pedagogical team to embrace the principles of education marketing and tolerance, perceive diversity as a phenomenon of present-day culture and a factor in the development of the personality of each subject of the educational process, interact with learners and their parents as the clients of the educational organization, and provide quality educational services. Thus, 55% of pedagogues were not satisfied with their competence in issues related to cultivating a mutual relationship with the parents of children from the various heterogeneous groups; 43% – with the supply of educational materials and aids for the educational process suiting the needs and educational wishes of the various categories of children; 67% – with help on the part of the administration regarding the organization of interaction with the kids' parents. 48% of pedagogues noted the need to create a trust-based microclimate in communicating with the children and their parents in a heterogeneous school environment, which would help cultivate an efficient educational process for gifted children,

migrant children, children with disabilities, and their parents alike. The level of pedagogues' comprehension and acceptance of interaction with parents in the vein of dialogue between equal partners is not very high. Just 30% of pedagogues are exhibiting a high degree of dialogicity in communicating with parents of children with special educational needs.

The following measures have been undertaken to help cultivate marketing competence in pedagogues and administrators at educational organizations: organizing discussions on the most problematic aspects of informing and consulting parents of children with special educational needs, putting together special programs for intrafirm training on educational marketing, organizing webinars and distance learning courses on the use of new information technology in managing diversity, and arranging a series of coaching-sessions for pedagogues (pedagogical coaching), aimed at cultivating pedagogue preparedness and capacity for interaction with special children and their parents under today's novel social-economic and cultural conditions.

The development and implementation of the marketing mix in educational organizations participating in the experiment and development of marketing competence in administrators at educational organizations and pedagogical personnel as a new type of their professional competence have led to a whole new communication policy for educational organizations, thanks to the acceptance of the practices of informing and consulting the subjects of the educational process as strategic areas for marketing activity, with parents and pedagogues initiating a process of organizational changes aimed at resolving the issues identified. In organizing marketing research, pedagogues learnt to: act as interviewers, gather and process data using the latest computer software, put together relevant graphs and charts (as well as other methods of visual demonstration of the results obtained), generate a comparative characterization of the data obtained, put together forecasts, and work out recommendations on implementing the study results.

There were boosts in the frequency of the wishes and expectations of parents being taken into account (63%), in the degree of their preparedness for cooperation (51%), and in the degree of their satisfaction with the level of assistance provided by the educational organization in the way of nurturing children with special educational needs and overcoming difficulties (66%), as well as with the forms, methods, and content of organizing the interaction (57%). In addition, there was a boost in parents' attendance of activities organized by the educational organization (45%) for the various heterogeneous groups.

4. Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that educational marketing makes it possible to effectuate the marketing strategy factoring in the characteristics of an educational organization. Considering that in a climate of diversity each educational organization ought to factor in as much as possible the needs of the various groups of consumers of educational services, while trying to minimize its weaknesses and maximize its strengths and based on that put together an independent strategy for development and cultivate one's relationship with consumers, it appears to be worth conducting marketing research in a qualified manner. The findings of marketing research may help one make proper managerial decisions based on a greater degree of informedness and minimize the risk of uncertainty. To be able to conduct efficient research activity, detect potential difficulties and issues in advance, identify the favorable opportunities for further development, come up with and assess relevant strategies, assess the level of fulfilment of relevant plans for development, and successfully effectuate the strategies of an educational organization, it is worth developing and implementing a proper system of obtaining, storing, and processing marketing-related information.

Worthy of particular note is the significance of the participation of subjects of the educational process from various heterogeneous groups in marketing activities conducted by the institution. When you know for certain what it means to belong to a certain group, your knowledge about the specificity of that group will be more credible and you will be able to formulate your research

ideas in a manner that is as correct and understandable to the target audience as possible, get a better insight into the situation, see it “on the inside”, provide yourself with a tighter focus on the issue identified, and engage with confidence in the search for a solution to it. This requires that the educational organization take an active part in creating the conditions for the provision of “education for all”, with equal educational opportunities provided to all children in a heterogeneous educational environment.

5. Conclusion

Based on the findings of the authors’ analysis, today’s potential target audiences are characterized by diversity, which determines the primacy of the social order and, consequently, expands the objectives of educational organizations in relation to all participants in the educational process. Processes of globalization and integration, characteristic of the present-day period in Russia’s development, are leading to the present-day educational organization being oriented toward a set of priority values: psychological comfort for the learner and the pedagogue; freedom of creativity; cooperation; the possibility for every learner to actualize the right to any kind of education that matches their interests, propensities, and potential, the development of their abilities factoring in their ethno-psychological characteristics, cognitive processes, the traditions of pedagogy, and the present-day achievements of the science of pedagogy. These values determine the goals and objectives for the development of schools as heterogeneous organizations and shape strategic focus areas for their marketing activity.

Parents, learners, the state, and society are becoming equal partners to educational organizations, which ought to not just be oriented toward the social educational order of the person, society, and the state in terms of the implementation of core and additional curricula but also possess a certain degree of distinctive competence that would make it possible for them to put together differentiated communication processes with various groups of consumers and enable them to have the capacity for transforming their internal and external environment with a view to creating a quality educational product and ensuring its being sought after in the market for educational services for each of the target groups. Marketing activity enables the educational organization to put together an effective strategy for its development through getting all subjects of the educational process to embrace the principles of marketing. This makes it possible for the institution to conduct the analysis of the market and put together a supply of educational services sought after by the latter in a climate of heterogeneity in the institution’s internal and external environment.

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[Índice]

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