
Strategic Management of Education: Modelling Development Processes in the Context of Contemporary Educational Challenges

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Ewa Kraus¹

Abstract:

Purpose: The purpose of the article is to demonstrate the effectiveness of the implementation of the Education Development Strategy at the local level in the context of strategic management and contemporary educational challenges.

Design/Methodology/Approach: Analysis and critiques of the literature, analysis of operational (source) documentation, analysis (case study), modeling.

Findings: The article highlights the critical role of strategic management in adapting educational institutions to contemporary challenges through the use of the Education Development Strategy as a tool at the local level.

Practical Implications: The article emphasizes the importance of developing Education Development Strategies at the local level, integrating local demographic, economic, and social conditions. Such an approach ensures a better alignment of educational infrastructure with the specific needs of the community.

Originality value: The article describes the municipality's education development strategy to meet today's socio-technological-environmental challenges.

Keywords: Strategic management, Quality of education, local development, development strategy.

JEL Code: L1, M10, M12.

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¹MA., Institute of Management and Quality Sciences, Humanitas University, Poland,
ORCID: 0000-0002-1282-343X, e-mail: ewa.kraus@humanitas.edu.pl;

1. Introduction

Today's socio-technological and environmental challenges place much higher demands on education. As a result, there is a growing importance of strategic management in adapting educational institutions to modern challenges using a tool - Education Development Strategy at the local level.

The article analyzes the Education Development Strategy at the municipal level in the context of strategic management and contemporary educational challenges. Education Development Strategy in the perspective of strategic management is a key tool for sustainable development of the education system, adaptation to dynamic social and technological changes, and support of all participants in the educational process in achieving their needs and goals.

2. The Origins and Development of the Concept of Strategic Management

Strategic management viewed as a process of planning, implementation, and evaluation of actions. According to the adopted framework, strategic management is an information and decision-making process in which decisions are made with a long-term temporal horizon and a broad substantive scope. A widely recognized definition of strategic management is provided by Rafał Krupski, who describes it as a process of defining and redefining strategy in response to environmental changes, anticipating these changes, or even initiating them.

This process is closely linked to the implementation phase, where the organization's resources and capabilities are allocated to achieve long-term development goals and to ensure the organization's continuity in potential situations of disruption. (Krupski, 2007, pp. 97). Strategic management is a forward-looking business management concept based on strategic analysis, strategy formulation, and its implementation. (Thompson and Strickland, 1993, pp. 3).

In contemporary terms, to describe the nature of the management process while considering its phases, it is necessary to define the activity and develop the mission, specify the goals, formulate the strategy (conduct an analysis of the organization along with its environment, identify strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats), implement it, and evaluate the continuity of its execution. The development of a strategy requires conducting a strategic analysis of the key factors in its environment and internal structure, whose configuration either facilitates or hinders the achievement of long-term intentions (goals).

This implies that within the organization's environment, particularly in the economic, technological, and socio-demographic segments, numerous events occur that are observed and measured at specific time intervals. In an organization, these may include economic growth factors (unemployment rate, inflation) and demographic factors (birth rate, death rate, the number of people permanently

residing in a given area). As a result, time series data are obtained, which form the basis for trend extrapolation (forecasting future changes).

Forecasts derived from trend extrapolation support strategic decision-making; however, the longer the time horizon of the forecast, the greater the risk of error. The body of knowledge in strategic management offers a vast array of models and guidelines for enterprises on how to create and implement strategies. This means that in rapidly growing sectors characterized by high variability and unpredictability, strategic management will follow a different path of phase implementation compared to stable sectors with a predictable development trajectory.

There is no doubt that the strategic management system, as a comprehensive management process, addresses solutions for all identified aspects, enabling organizations and institutions to achieve their strategic goals while maintaining competitiveness in the market.

The effectiveness of this process is influenced by a number of factors/determinants, which, in the fields of management and quality sciences, are defined as: the mission and vision of the organization, strategic goals, analysis of the external and internal environment, organizational strategy, monitoring, performance indicators, organizational culture, change management, internal communication, employee engagement, budgeting and resource allocation, stakeholder relationship building, and evaluation and assessment of outcomes (Kałkowska *et al.*, 2010, pp. 10-20).

When discussing the impact of strategic management on education, it is important to mention the definition of strategic management in education proposed by Tadeusz Lewowicki. The author emphasizes that strategic management in education involves adapting educational systems to social and economic needs while preserving valuable educational traditions (Lewowicki, 1997). According to the author, this means that schools and other educational institutions should operate based on clearly defined missions, such as supporting students' development, promoting educational equity, or preparing them for the labor market.

From an institutional perspective, a definition of strategic management in education was presented by Maria Utracka, who describes it as an information and decision-making process (supported by the functions of planning, organization, and control) aimed at addressing key issues related to the functioning and development of the education system within local government units, with particular emphasis on environmental influences and critical factors of internal potential (Utracka, 2024). Lechosław Gawrecki also addressed the aforementioned issue.

According to the author, management in education encompasses two fundamental aspects:

- the management of the education system at the national and local levels;

- the management of individual educational institutions.

Management in education, according to Lechosław Gawrecki, is a process that includes planning, organizing, and controlling educational activities within a socio-legal context. A key aspect is adapting to local needs and optimizing the use of human and financial resources. This management approach must account for changes in the education system and be oriented toward serving parents, students, and local communities. The author also emphasizes the importance of a managerial approach to management at both the central and local government levels (Gawrecki, 2022).

This approach is evident in scientific publications released after 2020, which emphasize the adaptation of management strategies to global challenges such as digitalization, demographic shifts, and increasing demands for educational quality. Education is expected to deliver high quality, stability, and continuity while simultaneously adapting to ongoing civilizational and social changes, as well as aligning with the evolving needs of the labor market.

3. The Origins and Development of the Concept of Strategic Management

Strategic management in education is therefore not the same as in business, as evidenced by the limitations arising from the specific nature of this sector. The main limitations include (Witek-Crabb, 2012, pp. 231-238):

- Predefined operational frameworks (the goals of educational institutions are clearly outlined in government documents, and the development of local educational strategies must conform to these frameworks);
- Limited resources (education continually faces underfunding challenges);
- Lack of competition (research shows that cooperation is much more prevalent than competitiveness in education);
- Term limits and politics (the term-based nature of local government authorities).

Provisions regarding how education, including schooling, should function can be found in numerous official government documents (Poland), such as:

- Act of December 14, 2016, Education Law (Journal of Laws 2024, item 737);
- Act of October 27, 2017, on the Financing of Educational Tasks (Journal of Laws 2024, item 754);
- Act of July 19, 2019, on Ensuring Accessibility for People with Special Needs (Journal of Laws 2024, item 731);
- Regulation of the Minister of National Education of August 9, 2017, on the Principles of Organization and Provision of Psychological and Pedagogical

- Assistance in Public Kindergartens, Schools, and Institutions (Journal of Laws 2023, item 1798);
- Regulation of the Minister of Education of June 28, 2024, amending the Regulation on the Core Curriculum for Preschool Education and the Core Curriculum for General Education for Primary Schools, including for Students with Moderate or Severe Intellectual Disabilities, General Education for Vocational Schools of the First Degree, General Education for Special Schools Preparing for Work, and General Education for Post-secondary Schools (Journal of Laws, item 996).
 - National Development Strategy 2020: Active Society, Competitive Economy, Efficient State;
 - Long-term National Development Strategy Poland 2030: The Third Wave of Modernity;
 - Integrated Strategies:
 - Innovation and Economic Efficiency Strategy;
 - Human Capital Development Strategy;
 - Transport Development Strategy;
 - Energy Security and Environmental Strategy;
 - Efficient State Strategy;
 - Social Capital Development Strategy;
 - National Regional Development Strategy – Regions, Cities, Rural Areas;
 - Sustainable Rural, Agricultural, and Fisheries Development Strategy;
 - National Security System Development Strategy of the Republic of Poland.
 - A document of the Council of Ministers that includes actions in support of education is the National Reform Program for the implementation of the “Europe 2020” Strategy.

This document is updated annually. The Council of Ministers also adopted the Integrated Skills Strategy 2030 (Detailed Part) by Resolution No. 195/2020 on December 28, 2020. The document was created as a result of extensive consultations, taking into account: requirements arising from the Human Capital Operational Program.

- Partnership Agreement, the recommendations of the report "OECD Skills Strategy: Poland," and the objectives of the New European Skills Agenda.
- The document identifies eight strategic areas of policy for skills development:
 - Basic, transversal, and vocational skills of children, youth, and adults;
 - Developing skills in formal education – management staff;
 - Developing skills in formal education – teaching staff;
 - Developing skills outside formal education;

- Developing and utilizing skills in the workplace;
- Career guidance;
- Collaboration between employers and formal and non-formal education;
- Planning lifelong learning and validating skills.

The specificity of this education sector, as noted by Witek-Crabb, citing other authors and official government documents, also lies in the fact that development strategies are not determined by the owner (institution/facility) but by local government units responsible for education. Among the specific conditions are the responsibility and particular expectations directed toward education, stemming from the belief that there is a close relationship between the quality of education in a country and the pace of its economic growth, social development, and the quality of life.

Currently, the creation and possession of a development strategy by a municipality are optional. However, starting from January 1, 2026, such a strategy will be of key importance only for conducting spatial planning policies within municipalities. Although education plays a crucial role in the development of local communities, in the new framework, it remains an optional element. This suggests that in the coming years, municipalities may create a separate document in the form of an Education Development Strategy to meet their own needs.

A legal basis is, however, not required, as the Education Development Strategy is not a local law act and does not establish universally binding legal regulations. Therefore, it can be developed and adopted based on general task norms, particularly in accordance with:

- Article 7, paragraph 1, point 8 of the Act on Municipal Self-Government, which identifies public education as a municipal self-government's own task;
- Article 18, paragraph 1 of the Act on Municipal Self-Government, which grants the municipal council a mandate to make decisions on all matters within the scope of the municipality's activities, not reserved for other authorities.

An educational strategy may form part of the overall development strategy of a municipality; however, many local governments opt to create a separate document, which may function under various names—such as an education strategy, education development strategy, or education policy. In such cases, it is essential to ensure consistency between the general strategy and the strategy dedicated solely to educational policy.

It is important to emphasize that the Education Development Strategy is a subordinate document that sets the priorities for the development of education within the municipality over a long-term perspective. The implementation of the strategy

involves developing, executing, and undertaking actions in accordance with a schedule that aligns with the primary strategic and operational objectives.

Table 1. *Differences Between Strategic Management in Organizations and Strategic Management in Education/Educational Institutions*

	Strategic Management in Organizations	Strategic Management in Education/Educational Institutions
Legal Regulations	Flexible, adapting to national and international business standards.	Strictly regulated by educational law and government policy.
Financial Foundations	Private capital, revenues, investments.	Regulations of universally applicable law.
Purpose of Activity	Profit maximization, operational efficiency, competitiveness.	Improving the quality of education, developing educational infrastructure, enhancing communication efficiency, and expanding comprehensive support.
Organizational Culture	Focused on efficiency and innovation.	Focused on collaboration, and the development of social and professional competencies.
Approach to Competition	Competition.	Collaboration, cooperation among institutions.
Nature of Activities	Emphasis on innovative solutions. Adaptation to changing market conditions.	Long-term development, stabilization of the education system.
Scope of Activities	Encompassing diverse fields and sectors.	Focused on educational institutions and didactic processes.
Stakeholders	Customers, business partners.	Students, teachers, siblings, school principals, administrative staff, and support personnel.

Source: *Own elaboration.*

4. Stages of the Process of Developing and Implementing an Education Strategy

Krzysztof Chmura, in his publication titled *Preparation of an Educational Strategy*, outlines three main stages in the process of developing and implementing an education strategy: (1) preparatory work, (2) work of the strategic committee, and (3) the strategy document and its implementation (Chmura, 2010, pp. 11). During the preparatory phase, the primary objective is to establish a foundation for the entire strategy process by ensuring adequate resources, securing political support for the strategy, and preparing logistical arrangements.

The second stage (work of the strategic committee) focuses on developing the vision, goals, and detailed actions that will constitute the strategy. In the third and final stage, the strategic team's task is to finalize the strategy document, oversee its

implementation, and conduct evaluation and updates. The outlined process is characterized by its structured and phased approach, integrating preparation, teamwork, and practical implementation of the strategy. A critical factor for success is not only the creation of a well-developed document but also effective change management, consistency in executing actions, and flexibility in the face of challenges as shown in Table 2 (Chmura, 2010, pp. 11-12).

Table 2. *Stages of Preparing Educational Strategies*

Stage I	Stage II	Stage III	Stage IV	Stage V	Stage VI
Vision and Mission	Situation Analysis	Summary SWOT	Critical Issues	Strategic Issues	Actions
Development and explanation of the components of the educational vision and the mission of various education stakeholders in its implementation, as well as the identification of indicators to assess its realization.	Gathering and analyzing information using various existing documents and data.	Selection of the most significant conclusions from the SWOT analysis.	Identification of critical issues for the development of education, formulated as questions based on all elements of the SWOT analysis.	Selection of strategic issues. Organization of strategic and operational objectives.	Determination of methods for achieving objectives.

Source: Chmura, 2010, pp. 17.

5. Contemporary Educational Challenges in Poland

An analysis of available materials indicates that the challenges of 21st-century education in Poland should be considered from several perspectives: those of teachers, schools, students, and parents. Teachers face high expectations, often paired with inadequate compensation.

They are required to continuously update their professional qualifications, demonstrate flexibility, quickly adapt to emerging situations (e.g., the pandemic, the war in Ukraine), navigate a dynamically changing environment among young people and successive generations, understand societal transformations, and prepare students for further education stages and/or the labor market.

Schools today are expected to be accessible, ensure equal educational opportunities, be equipped with modern technologies, and provide a safe and student-friendly environment. Students, on the other hand, are expected to demonstrate independence, creativity, and the ability to cope with the consequences of the pandemic, the migration crisis, and the ever-changing demands of the labor market. They must also develop critical thinking skills.

Undoubtedly, effective educational work relies heavily on close collaboration between parents and teachers. In the contemporary context, it is essential to develop a model of collaboration that yields the best outcomes.

To achieve these results, priorities must be established to significantly facilitate and foster relationships between educational institutions and parents. Numerous scientific publications in the field of pedagogy which include:

- Active parental involvement in organizing the educational and upbringing process;
- Striving for the unification of the didactic and educational influences of schools and the family environment;
- Collaboration in identifying students' developmental potential; Raising parents' educational awareness;
- Sharing knowledge about the child's functioning within the school setting;
- Understanding parents' expectations of the school or educational institution;
- Creating a partnership-based relationship between parents and the school community.

It is worth emphasizing that these challenges are primarily reflected in the directions of the state's educational policy, as published on the Ministry of Education's website and signed by the Minister of Education, Barbara Nowacka.

The educational policy emphasizes, among other aspects: health education in schools, fostering social and patriotic attitudes, supporting the well-being of children and youth, enhancing the digital skills of students and teachers with a particular focus on safe internet use, developing analytical thinking, supporting the development of vocational skills, and working with students with migration experience.

6. The Education Development Strategy in the Municipality as a Response to Contemporary Educational Challenges

The best response to contemporary educational challenges is the Education Development Strategy for the Municipality of Michałowice, prepared in 2024. The strategy was developed with a time horizon of 2024-2030. Michałowice is a rural municipality located in Kraków County, in the Małopolska Voivodeship. In 2023, the municipality had 13,299 residents.

The Education Development Strategy document is aligned with the Michałowice Municipality Development Strategy for 2021-2030, the Kraków County Development Strategy "Kraków County 2030", and the Kraków Metropolitan Strategy 2030. To build the Education Development Strategy, an in-depth analysis of internal secondary data (sourced from the Michałowice Municipality Office and the Education Service Center in Michałowice) and external secondary data (obtained

from regional and national sources, such as statistics published by the Central Statistical Office (GUS) was conducted.

The creation of the Education Development Strategy aimed to ensure the harmonious development of the education system in the municipality by: adapting educational infrastructure to changing demographic needs, improving the quality of education at all levels, supporting the professional development of teachers, assisting students with special educational needs, and providing psychological and pedagogical support for students, parents, and teachers.

For the Education Development Strategy in the Municipality, an expert-participatory model was employed. The diagnosis of the social, economic, and spatial situation in education was clearly presented in the document, with data compiled using both quantitative and qualitative research methods. In the qualitative research area, the following tools were used: Focus Group Interview (FGI) – a focused group interview conducted with stakeholders of the local education system and SWOT analysis – a qualitative technique for assessing strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. For the quantitative research, a survey questionnaire was implemented.

The survey was conducted among parents, teachers, principals, and staff of educational institutions within the municipality. The goal of the research was to collect opinions from internal and external stakeholders on the functioning of educational institutions in the municipality. This aimed to better understand educational needs, evaluate current activities, and identify areas requiring support and development.

The vision and mission of the municipality for education development over the next six years are: to create a modern and sustainable educational environment that fosters the holistic development of children and youth, promotes social integration, and prepares the younger generation for the challenges of the contemporary world.

The Education Development Strategy of the Municipality identifies four strategic objectives, improving communication efficiency, developing educational infrastructure, enhancing the quality of education, and advancing comprehensive psychological and pedagogical support. Based on the research findings, operational objectives were defined for each strategic objective.

An analysis of research results conducted among the residents of the Municipality identified the need to enhance the efficiency of communication (information flow) between parents, students, staff of educational institutions, organizational units of the Municipal Office, and organizations involved in education. The findings revealed that, in many cases, parents and teachers lack information on certain topics, such as international exchange programs, preventive initiatives, training, and workshops organized by the Municipality.

To address this, the operational objective was set: Implementation of modern communication tools to improve communication efficiency among parents, students, educational staff, municipal organizational units, and educational organizations. As part of this goal, the Municipality will create and launch an integrated online communication platform (e.g., Educational Newsletter) to provide quick and easy access to information for parents, students, and teachers. Additionally, an important organizational element will be the introduction of reporting mechanisms on the organizational, educational, and didactic activities of educational institutions.

The analysis of research results conducted among the residents of the Municipality identified both a significant demand and substantial potential for the development of educational and childcare services within the Municipality, with a particular emphasis on adapting educational and childcare infrastructure for the youngest children.

The Municipality Development Strategy incorporated the planning and implementation of several initiatives aligned with this direction of action, identifying the following operational objectives:

- Adapting educational and childcare infrastructure for the youngest children through the construction or expansion of public educational facilities;
- Adjusting educational facilities to the needs of individuals with special requirements, including children and students requiring specialized learning arrangements, particularly individuals with disabilities, by removing architectural barriers in educational buildings; - Modernizing primary schools and preschool units within the Municipality, including improving educational infrastructure;
- Supporting the development of educational infrastructure by fostering collaboration with the socio-economic environment;
- Establishing partnerships with local businesses, public institutions, and non-governmental organizations to jointly implement educational projects;
- Creating a Team for Collaboration with the Socio-Economic Environment, whose goal will be to facilitate partnerships between schools, universities, and businesses, is a priority for the Municipality.

Based on the analysis of research results conducted among the Municipality's residents and an examination of source materials, a significant issue was identified concerning support for overcoming learning difficulties. According to teachers, students frequently attend additional tutoring sessions.

Respondents indicated that the reasons for seeking tutoring include difficulties with motivation for independent study at home, the need to help students achieve better academic results, learning challenges, and the necessity of improving poor grades.

To enhance the quality of education, the Municipality has undertaken the following initiatives:

- Upporting education tailored to the individual needs of students, both in terms of overcoming learning difficulties and fostering talents;
- Internationalizing educational activities and encouraging student engagement in advancing education;
- Organizing regular training sessions and postgraduate studies for teachers in areas such as: new didactic methods, emerging technologies, augmented reality, artificial intelligence, personal development, management, law, safety, and special education pedagogy;
- Implementing mentoring programs/courses that support teachers in developing their pedagogical skills and preventing professional burnout.

The analysis of research results conducted among teachers identified a significant demand for the establishment of a Psychological and Pedagogical Counseling Center within the Municipality. Currently, children, students, parents, and educational institutions utilize the services of the Specialist Psychological and Pedagogical Counseling Center of Kraków County, located in Kraków.

Participants in the focus group study also highlighted the lack of sufficiently effective, systemic measures to increase the availability of psychological assistance for individuals facing learning difficulties or mental and emotional challenges. The research also revealed a strong demand for organizing preventive and promotional programs in the areas of mental health and healthy lifestyles.

7. Conclusions

There is no doubt that strategic management presents the education system with numerous challenges arising from dynamic socio-economic changes and global trends in the field of education. The primary goal of developing an Education Development Strategy at the local level should be to ensure equal educational opportunities through investments in infrastructure, scholarship programs, psychological and pedagogical support, and improving communication among education stakeholders.

A Local Education Development Strategy should incorporate education in the spirit of sustainable development, including environmental, social, and civic education. The challenge lies in integrating these topics cohesively into curricula and the core educational framework at all levels of education in Poland. One of the key challenges for modern education is internationalization.

Polish education must increasingly integrate with the European and global education systems, which necessitates the implementation of solutions used in other countries. The Education Development Strategy in Poland should be based on a long-term

vision that considers the evolving needs of society and the economy. It is essential that the actions undertaken are coherent, sustainable, and account for technological, social, and environmental aspects. Only in this way can the education system address the challenges of the 21st century effectively.

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