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Perception Gaps as Managerial Signals in School Governance: Evidence from a Six-Actor Survey

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Abstract

School governance is enacted through formal arrangements and through the experiences of those affected by decisions. This paper examines how perception gaps across six actor categories can guide managerial follow-up without being treated as institutional rankings. Six role-specific questionnaires were administered online in Romanian pre-university education between 15 April and 16 June 2026. The database contains 1,120 submissions, with 1,119 cases eligible for a three-component Diagnostic Index (DI core 3). Responses were concentrated in Sibiu County (82.7%). Participation and decision-making, communication/collaboration and transparency, and relations and climate were scored using a documented item–pillar matrix. Parents had a mean DI core 3 of 4.30 and students 3.91; their observed difference was 0.39 points (bootstrap 95% confidence interval [0.29, 0.49]). Communication showed the largest omnibus distributional difference across actor groups. Weighting checks preserved the parent–student contrast but changed some middle positions. Full-key reliability estimates were generally moderate to high, whereas three-factor model fit did not substantiate a stable common latent structure. Because the questionnaires differ in content and respondents were not linked within schools, these gaps cannot be attributed solely to actor position or interpreted as measurement-invariant differences. The contribution is a transparent, exploratory procedure for generating follow-up questions about participation, feedback and institutional learning, rather than a validated measure of school quality.

Keywords: school governance; perception gaps; educational management; stakeholder participation; institutional learning

1. Introduction

School governance is frequently documented through council meetings, regulations, minutes, internal decisions, consultation records and communication channels. These traces make administrative action visible, but they do not establish whether affected actors understand decisions or recognise their influence on them. A governance analysis therefore needs to consider both institutional arrangements and how those arrangements are experienced (Bäckman & Trafford, 2007; Burns et al., 2016).

The sa me routine can be encountered from different positions. A principal may focus on procedural completion; a teacher on its implications for everyday work; a student on the opportunity to influence a decision; and a parent on the clarity of information. Auxiliary and non-teaching staff encounter operational consequences, while community actors may engage primarily through partnerships. These are possible interpretive perspectives, not mechanisms demonstrated by the survey presented here.

This paper examines six actor categories within a common diagnostic framework. It treats a perception gap as a reason to ask a more specific question, not as proof that a procedure failed or that one group is correct. Three research questions guide the analysis: RQ1. What profiles emerge on the three conceptually aligned governance pillars? RQ2. Which observed contrasts provide starting points for follow-up, given their uncertainty and measurement limitations? RQ3. How might these contrasts inform feasible feedback and consultation routines? No universal numerical threshold for managerial intervention is proposed.

2. Conceptual Background

2.1. Formal and Lived Governance

Formal governance denotes the organisational architecture of roles, councils, procedures and decision chains. Lived governance denotes how people encounter that architecture: whether they understand a decision, can contribute to it, and receive an explanation of what followed. The distinction is analytical rather than a separate psychometrically validated scale in this study. It is consistent with democratic school governance and education for democratic citizenship, which connect institutional arrangements with participation in everyday school life (Bäckman & Trafford, 2007; Council of Europe, 2010).

Hard governance refers here to rules, procedures and reporting obligations; soft governance to explanation, dialogue and relational practices. These are complementary lenses rather than competing prescriptions. Their practical connection is a feedback loop: consultation produces a decision, the decision is explained, and subsequent experience can inform adjustment. The study measures perceptions related to this connection, not the effectiveness of the loop itself.

2.2. Student Voice and Stakeholder Participation

Stakeholder theory provides an organisational rationale for examining actors beyond formal leadership (Freeman, 1984). Recent education-governance work likewise stresses that engagement arrangements can differ in purpose, membership and influence (Peng et al., 2024; Reznikova et al., 2024). A six-actor perspective is useful because consultation with one category does not establish that other categories experience access or influence.

Student voice research provides a more specific distinction between representation and consequential participation. Hart (1992) differentiates tokenistic from meaningful participation. Lundy (2007) identifies space, voice, audience and influence: expression alone does not complete a participatory process. Perry-Hazan and Somech (2023) further frame participation in school decision-making as multidimensional and context-dependent. Gillett-Swan and Baroutsis (2024) situate student and teacher voice within a substantial but varied research literature. These frameworks guide interpretation; the present questionnaires are not implementations or validations of those authors' scales.

2.3. Perception Gaps as Managerial Signals

An overall mean can hide uneven experiences. A relatively low participation score may justify checking whether proposals receive a response, while a high communication score need not

imply shared decision-making. Nevertheless, a difference between role-specific scores may also reflect question content, educational level or the institutions represented. Calling it a signal therefore means a prompt for verification, not a diagnosis of its cause.

The proposed route is: observed contrast, contextual question, corroborating evidence, proportionate follow-up, and review. The evidence may come from interviews, meeting records or direct observation. Without that intermediate verification, a numerical dashboard risks converting an uncertain survey contrast into an unsupported judgement.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Research Design, Empirical Context and Participants

The study uses a cross-sectional, descriptive-comparative survey design based on doctoral fieldwork in Romanian pre-university education. Between 15 April and 16 June 2026, links to six role-specific online questionnaires were circulated through professional and institutional networks accessible to the researcher, with a request to forward the links to the relevant actor categories. Participation was voluntary and depended on access to the circulated link and willingness to complete the form. This availability-based, network-mediated recruitment was not a probability-sampling design. Neither a complete sampling frame nor a denominator of people invited was available, so a survey response rate and a formal respondent–nonrespondent comparison cannot be calculated.

The six source sheets contain 1,120 submissions. One community respondent reported no school collaboration in the preceding two years and supplied no numerical common-pillar responses; this record is retained in the received count but excluded from DI core 3. The remaining 1,119 respondents have complete responses on their assigned core items. Table 1 reports sample sizes and instrument lengths. Larger groups support more detailed within-sample descriptions, but their size does not remove selection bias. The analytic-retention fraction is 1,119/1,120 (99.9%); this describes scored cases among received submissions, not participation among invitees.

Table 1: Respondents and Common-pillar Item Allocation by Actor Group

Actor group	Received	DI valid	Likert items	P1	P2	P3
Principals	43	43	51	14	12	14
Teachers	205	205	85	15	16	15
Students	321	321	43	12	10	11
Parents	430	430	30	6	6	7
Auxiliary/non-teaching staff	87	87	34	6	5	8
Community actors	34	33	32	6	5	4
Total	1120	1119	275	59	54	59

Note. P1 = participation and decision-making; P2 = communication/collaboration and transparency; P3 = relations and climate. The item total is across six questionnaires, not the burden on any one respondent. The 172 core items comprise 59 + 54 + 59 role-specific items. Codes and reverse-scoring decisions are given in Supplementary Material S1.

The submissions cover 28 counties and Bucharest, but 926 of 1,120 (82.7%) identify Sibiu County. Student respondents comprise 117 in lower-secondary education, 136 in upper-secondary education and 68 in postsecondary non-university education. Parent respondents report children in preschool (79), primary (190), lower-secondary (114) and upper-secondary education (47). Thus, the parent and student groups do not describe a matched set of children, educational levels or schools. Institution identifiers were not available for school-level linkage

in this analysis; the number of distinct schools and within-school clustering cannot be established from these records.

3.2. Instrument Development, Scoring and Missing Data

Six role-specific instruments were developed from the doctoral conceptual framework and organised in an item–pillar matrix. The matrix records item wording, conceptual allocation, orientation, reverse coding and eligibility for each index. No separate pilot preceded field administration. The documented key was held fixed for this revision; items were not deleted or reoriented to improve reliability or model fit. This is not a claim of preregistration or independent scale validation.

Across the six instruments there are 275 Likert-type items. Of these, 249 enter the broader within-role balanced index, including the 172 used in DI core 3; the remaining 26 are descriptive-only. The 36 reverse-coded items occur across these instruments and are not an additional category to be added to the total. This paper analyses DI core 3 only. Each participant completed the instrument for their role, containing 30–85 Likert items, of which 15–46 belong to the common core.

The three pillars address voice and perceived influence (P1), access to information and explanation of decisions (P2), and trust, respect and relational safety (P3). Illustrative English translations are: P1, parents B3, "I was consulted before important decisions affecting the children were made"; P2, teachers E3, "Important information (changes to the timetable, examinations, inspections or projects) reaches me on time"; and P3, students D3, "If I witness an injustice, I feel confident speaking with a teacher or the principal." These translations illustrate the Romanian instruments; an English version was not administered. Supplementary Material S1 provides original-wording examples, the core item allocation and reverse-scoring rules.

Common labels do not mean that all indicators are identical. For instance, student participation B3 concerns Student Council activities of interest to students, whereas parent B3 concerns consultation before decisions. Community relations/climate D3 asks about pupils' skill development following collaboration, a perceived partnership outcome. Such differences limit interpretation of between-role composites, even though some specific items overlap.

Responses were coded from 1 to 5 in the direction of increasing endorsement. The response anchors express degree of truth or extent, depending on the questionnaire wording; the student form uses endpoints equivalent to "not at all true" and "completely true". Negatively oriented items were scored as $x^* = 6 - x$. A pillar mean S(i,a,p) was defined only when at least ceiling ($0.70 \times K(a,p)$) items were valid, where K(a,p) is the number of assigned items for actor a and pillar p:

$$S(i,a,p) = [\text{sum of valid recoded items in pillar p}] / m(i,a,p)$$
$$DI(i,a) = [S(i,a,1) + S(i,a,2) + S(i,a,3)] / 3$$

Here m(i,a,p) is the number of valid items in that pillar. All three pillar scores are required for DI core 3. No imputation was used. In the retained cohort all assigned core responses are complete; applying a 100% rather than 70% completion threshold therefore leaves the 1,119 cases and their scores unchanged.

Items receive equal weights within their pillar and the pillars equal weights within the index. Equal pillar weights prevent a longer item block from mechanically dominating the composite; they are a transparent design choice, not empirically optimal weights. Following the sensitivity principle for composite indicators (OECD & European Commission, Joint Research Centre, 2008), two revision-stage alternatives were examined: equal weight for every core item, and weights of 0.50, 0.25 and 0.25 for participation, communication and relations/climate. These checks assess numerical dependence on weights; they do not establish construct equivalence.

3.3. Reliability, Dimensionality and Comparability

Cronbach's alpha was recalculated from the covariance matrix for every complete actor–pillar item block. Standardised omega total was recalculated from a one-factor minimum-residual model of its Pearson correlation matrix, without automatic item flipping, following the convention documented for psych's omega procedure (Revelle, n.d.). Table 2 reports the full-key estimates. Omega and alpha describe different assumptions and are not interchangeable evidence of unidimensionality.

Table 2: *Internal Consistency for the Exact Item Blocks Used in DI Core 3*

Actor group	P1: α / ω	P2: α / ω	P3: α / ω
Principals	.776 / .813	.835 / .884	.656 / .787
Teachers	.877 / .896	.921 / .932	.922 / .935
Students	.897 / .911	.907 / .910	.821 / .861
Parents	.744 / .840	.903 / .910	.728 / .849
Auxiliary/non-teaching staff	.868 / .905	.931 / .935	.845 / .883
Community actors	.804 / .848	.874 / .897	.900 / .909

Note. ω is standardised omega total. Coefficients use the Table 1 valid cases. The relatively low principal P3 alpha (0.656), high values in some longer blocks and content heterogeneity require caution; none of these coefficients validates cross-group comparisons.

A source-output audit identified two truncated reliability specifications in the earlier revision: teacher communication omitted E16 and parent relations/climate omitted D7. Restoring the full scoring key changes their alpha/omega pairs from 0.914/0.927 to 0.921/0.932 and from 0.740/0.875 to 0.728/0.849, respectively. These are corrections to the reported item sets, not post hoc improvements to the instrument.

The audit also found that the earlier three-factor confirmatory analyses used only 29 of 33 student core items, 16 of 19 parent items and 45 of 46 teacher items. Those fit indices cannot validate the full index. The revision therefore refitted a correlated three-factor model to every core item for these three groups, with simple structure and uncorrelated item residuals. Continuous normal-theory maximum likelihood was used as an exploratory diagnostic, not as an ordinal or robust estimator. Full-key KMO values were 0.942, 0.935 and 0.929, respectively; Bartlett tests were significant, but these establish factorability rather than a three-factor structure.

Full-key CFI/TLI/RMSEA values were 0.852/0.841/0.076 for students, 0.847/0.825/0.120 for parents and 0.700/0.686/0.104 for teachers. These results do not substantiate a well-fitting, stable three-factor measurement model. No confirmatory claims are made for the smaller groups. The supplementary audit reports exact item sets, fit statistics and computational checks against the archived jamovi/lavaan results (Rosseel, 2012). These reanalyses use the same respondents and are not an independent validation sample.

Measurement invariance concerns equivalence of the measurement model, not merely use of the same response scale (Putnick & Bornstein, 2016). Configural, metric and scalar invariance were not established. The six role-specific instruments do not supply an identical three-pillar item set, and the full-key within-group models do not support a stable three-factor structure. Accordingly, latent-mean equivalence across all six groups is not claimed. Conceptually aligned composites are presented as exploratory observations, with item content and respondent context remaining possible explanations of gaps.

A limited overlap check was nevertheless feasible. A wording audit of all 172 core items found 11 identical participation items shared by principals and teachers after removal of item codes

and normalisation of typography. All 11 were retained for a two-group observed-score sensitivity analysis; no paraphrased or merely similar items were equated. The mean of the common items was compared with each group's full P1 score, without replacing DI core 3. This is not a multigroup CFA, differential-item-functioning analysis or test of scalar invariance. Item correspondences and calculations are supplied in supplementary section S8.

3.4. Data Analysis, Effect Sizes and Ethics

The revision recomputed the reported profiles from the six source sheets and the documented matrix, using Python 3.13.5, NumPy 2.3.5 and SciPy 1.17.0. The recalculated DI means reproduce the workbook's control means at unrounded precision. Kruskal–Wallis tests compare observed pillar-score distributions; rank epsilon-squared is defined here as $H/(N - 1)$. Dunn contrasts (Dunn, 1964) use pooled ranks with tie correction, followed by Holm adjustment (Holm, 1979) across all 45 pillar-level pairwise comparisons.

Seven illustrative mean contrasts were retained from the earlier revision. Hedges' g uses the pooled within-group standard deviation and the small-sample correction $J = 1 - 3/[4(n_1 + n_2 - 2) - 1]$. Within-respondent contrasts use d_z = mean difference / standard deviation of paired differences (Lakens, 2013). These effect sizes have different denominators and are not ranked against one another. Pointwise 95% percentile bootstrap intervals were recomputed with 10,000 replicates and seed 20260927. Resampling was independent within actor groups for between-group contrasts and by complete respondent pairs for within-group contrasts. Intervals are not simultaneous confidence statements and should not be used as an unadjusted post hoc significance screen.

For the additional common-item check, complete respondent vectors were resampled independently within the principal and teacher groups using 10,000 percentile-bootstrap replicates and seed 20260928. The same sampled respondent indices were used for the full and restricted P1 scores, preserving their within-person dependence when estimating the change in the gap. This additional sensitivity analysis is separate from the 45-comparison Dunn family.

All inferential calculations assume independent respondent records. Because respondents could not be linked to schools, cluster-robust uncertainty could not be estimated. The intervals therefore describe conditional, model-based precision within this convenience sample, not nationally representative uncertainty. The detailed formulas, comparison family and rounding rules are specified in Supplementary Material S1.

Participation was voluntary, no direct personal identifiers were requested, and only aggregate results are reported. The administered online student form instructed participants under 18 to obtain parental agreement and required them to confirm reading the study information and having parental permission. This is participant-reported permission, not independent guardian verification. Contextual fields can create indirect identification risks, so respondent-level data are not included in the supplement. The author confirms receiving favourable ethics notification before collection began on 15 April 2026. ULBS communication No. 1926 is registered on 30 April 2026; approval details are given below.

4. Results

4.1. Actor-By-Pillar Profile

Table 3 reports the descriptive profiles. All group means exceed the numerical midpoint, but this does not establish good institutional performance. Parents have a mean DI core 3 of 4.30 and students 3.91. Figure 1 presents all pillars on the full 1–5 colour scale, with group sample sizes. The display is not a ranking of stakeholder validity or school quality.

Table 3: Mean Pillar Scores and DI Core 3 by Actor Group

Actor group	P1	P2	P3	DI core 3 (SD)
Principals	4.02	4.34	4.04	4.13 (0.40)
Teachers	3.94	4.06	4.12	4.04 (0.67)
Students	3.65	4.15	3.92	3.91 (0.75)
Parents	4.14	4.69	4.06	4.30 (0.60)
Auxiliary/non-teaching staff	4.00	4.31	4.09	4.14 (0.91)
Community actors	3.65	4.44	4.45	4.18 (0.60)

Note. All means are calculated from unrounded respondent scores and only then rounded. Consequently, the mean of displayed pillar values need not reproduce the displayed DI exactly.

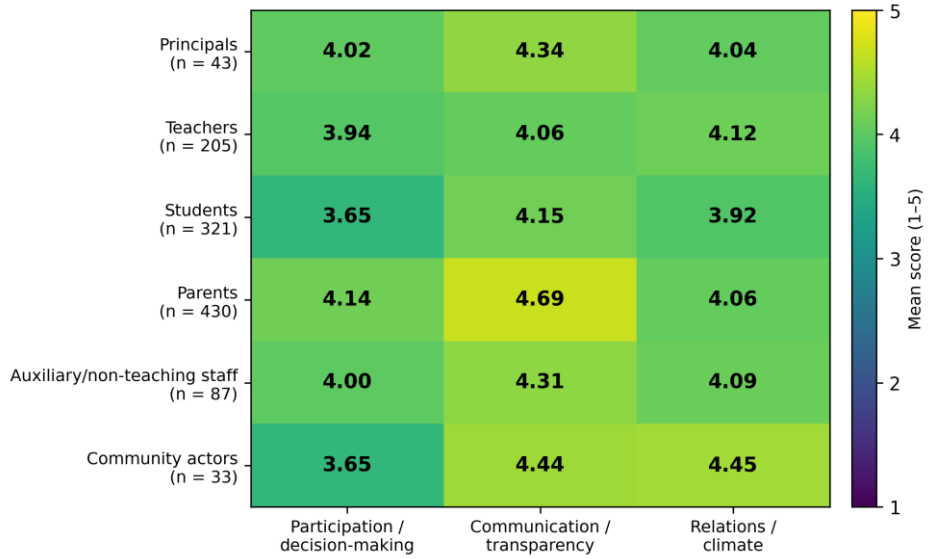


Figure 1: Six-Actor Profile on the Three Conceptually Aligned Pillars

Students and community actors both have participation means of 3.65, but their item content and contexts differ. Parents have the highest communication/transparency mean (4.69). This distribution also has a pronounced ceiling: 60.2% of parent respondents score 5 on the complete communication block. Favourable mean scores must therefore be interpreted alongside restricted upper-range variation and the possibility of response-style effects.

4.2. Global Differences and Selected Perception Gaps

Kruskal–Wallis results were $H(5) = 65.15$, $p < .001$, $\varepsilon^2 = 0.058$ for participation; $H(5) = 226.31$, $p < .001$, $\varepsilon^2 = 0.202$ for communication/transparency; and $H(5) = 29.49$, $p < .001$, $\varepsilon^2 = 0.026$ for relations/climate. Communication shows the largest omnibus distributional difference. These tests do not identify its cause or establish an invariant common construct.

Table 4 and Figure 2 show selected mean contrasts. The parent–student DI difference is 0.39 points, with Hedges' g of 0.58. The parent–teacher communication difference is 0.63 points. Within the community group, relations/climate exceeds participation by 0.80 points. These describe the scored composites; they do not demonstrate that particular respondents experienced the same school differently.

Table 4: Selected Contrasts with Newly Computed Pointwise Bootstrap Intervals

Contrast	Difference [95% CI]	Effect size	95% CI for effect
Parents − students: DI core 3	0.39 [0.29, 0.49]	g = 0.58	[0.43, 0.74]
Parents − students: P1	0.49 [0.36, 0.63]	g = 0.56	[0.41, 0.72]
Parents − teachers: P2	0.63 [0.52, 0.74]	g = 0.99	[0.79, 1.23]
Community − students: P3	0.53 [0.24, 0.79]	g = 0.73	[0.32, 1.11]
Teachers − students: P3	0.20 [0.07, 0.32]	g = 0.28	[0.10, 0.46]
Community: P3 − P1 (paired)	0.80 [0.54, 1.08]	d_z = 0.99	[0.68, 1.41]
Parents: P2 − P1 (paired)	0.55 [0.49, 0.60]	d_z = 0.90	[0.80, 1.02]

Note. Positive values favour the first-named group or pillar. "Paired" refers to two pillar scores from the same respondents, not to linked parents and students. Bootstrap B = 10,000; seed = 20260927. The intervals quantify conditional uncertainty for these observed composites and do not account for unknown school clustering.

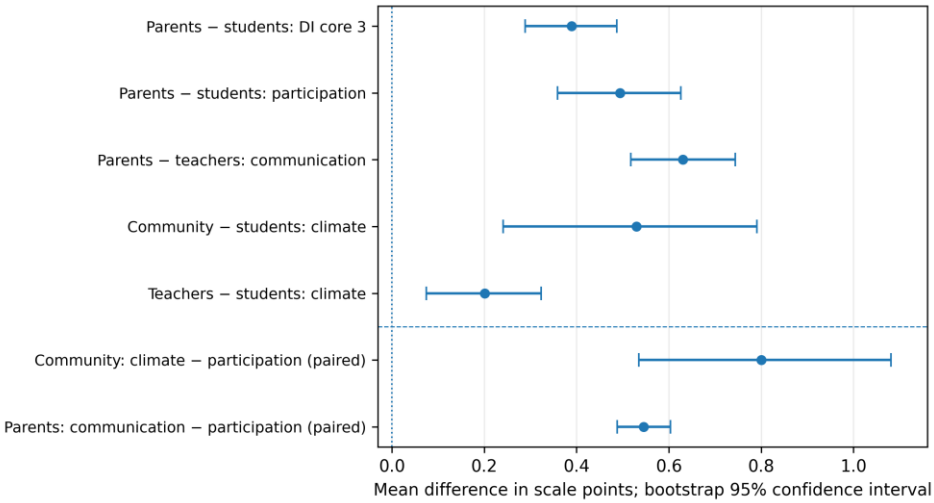


Figure 2: Selected Mean Gaps and Pointwise 95% Bootstrap Intervals

Note. The two rows below the dashed line are within-respondent contrasts. Intervals are pointwise and do not account for unknown school clustering.

After Holm adjustment over the 45 Dunn comparisons, the selected parent–student participation and parent–teacher communication contrasts have $p < .001$; community–student climate has $p < .001$; and teacher–student climate has $p = .038$. These are rank-distribution comparisons and are distinct from the mean-difference intervals. The full 45-comparison family is reported in the supplement; neither the adjusted tests nor the intervals resolve content nonequivalence or unknown clustering.

4.3. Sensitivity To Weights

Under equal-item weighting, the six DI means are 4.12 for principals, 4.04 for teachers, 3.89 for students, 4.28 for parents, 4.12 for auxiliary/non-teaching staff and 4.12 for community actors. With participation weighted 0.50, the corresponding values are 4.11, 4.01, 3.84, 4.26, 4.10 and 4.04. Parents remain above students in both alternatives, but some middle positions change. The maximum shift from equal-pillar weighting is 0.053 points under equal-item weighting and 0.133 under the participation-emphasis scenario, both for community actors. Stability of one contrast is therefore not evidence that the complete ordering is weight-independent.

4.4. Restricted Common-Item Check

Among the 43 principals and 205 teachers, the full P1 means are 4.020 and 3.942, respectively, giving a principal-minus-teacher difference of 0.078 points (pointwise bootstrap 95% CI [−0.117, 0.269]). On the 11 common items, the means are 4.230 and 4.024, giving a difference of 0.206 [0.003, 0.404]. The change in the gap is 0.128 [0.080, 0.174]. The direction is unchanged, but its magnitude is sensitive to item selection. The result narrows one content-comparability concern for this pair only; it does not establish latent equivalence, six-group robustness or differences within the same schools. All primary DI scores remain unchanged.

5. Discussion

5.1. Perception Gaps Are Not Satisfaction Rankings

The findings support differentiated descriptive profiles, not a hierarchy of legitimate viewpoints. The larger parent DI mean cannot be read as evidence that parents possess a more accurate account of school governance. Different items, educational stages and institutions may contribute to the difference. Nor can the within-role confidence intervals establish what would happen after a governance intervention. The managerial value lies in selecting questions for further inquiry, subject to contextual verification.

5.2. Participation As a Follow-Up Priority

The student participation profile makes it reasonable to ask whether representation produces visible responses to proposals. Lundy's (2007) distinction between audience and influence is useful for framing that question. However, the survey alone cannot establish tokenism, absence of influence or a particular leadership style. For community actors, the contrast between participation and relations/climate should first be checked against the partnership-oriented content of their questionnaire. A conversation about involvement in planning may be warranted, but cordial or effective partnerships should not be presumed from the aggregate score alone.

5.3. Communication Is Not the Same as Participation

Parents rate communication more favourably than participation. The within-parent contrast avoids mixing different respondents, but it still compares different item blocks and includes a substantial communication ceiling. It therefore suggests a question about whether information provision is accompanied by consultation; it does not measure the conversion of information into influence. A practical follow-up could examine a recent decision from the invitation to contribute through to the explanation of the final outcome.

5.4. Teachers and the credibility of routines

Teacher communication scores are lower than parent communication scores in this sample. These instruments concern different information needs, so the contrast is not a direct test of one channel's quality. Workload, professional recognition and the credibility of consultation are possible interview topics rather than demonstrated explanations. The poor fit of the teacher three-factor model further cautions against treating its longer questionnaire as three homogeneous latent scales.

5.5. International and Regional Context

Conner et al. (2025) distinguish opportunities for student voice, participation in those opportunities and adult responsiveness, and separate classroom from school-level practices. Their scale-development study provides a methodological comparison: explicitly developing

and testing these dimensions is more demanding than applying a broad diagnostic composite. The present study extends the actor coverage but does not reproduce that validation design or provide comparable numerical benchmarks.

For Central and Eastern European context, ICCS 2022 includes Romania alongside other participating education systems and examines civic engagement and school/classroom contexts through a structured international design (Schulz et al., 2025). Its school-linked architecture illustrates a useful direction for future multi-actor research. The present convenience sample, broader range of educational stages and different questionnaires do not allow a score-by-score comparison with ICCS results or a claim of national corroboration.

A further, geographically distinct reference is the Council of Europe's (2022) baseline work in Georgia, which discusses participation across school governance, student representation, teaching and professional development. It offers a regional example of whole-school questions, not direct empirical validation of these Romanian findings. More broadly, the emphasis on collaboration and shared responsibility is consistent with UNESCO (2024), while the specific routines proposed below remain untested proposals.

6. Practical Implications

The diagnostic approach should begin locally by checking whether an observed pattern also appears within the particular school and across comparable questions. A school should not be assessed against this convenience sample as a norm. Table 5 separates the survey signal from a hypothesis to investigate and a possible routine. These are candidate actions, not interventions whose effectiveness has been demonstrated by this study.

Table 5: Illustrative Evidence-to-Action Routes, Subject to Local Verification

Survey signal	Question to check	Possible follow-up
Lower student participation	Are proposals heard and answered?	A student forum with a short-written response to each agreed proposal.
Parent communication exceeds participation	Does information include an opportunity to influence decisions?	Consultation on a defined decision, followed by an explanation of what changed.
Teacher–parent communication contrast	Do the groups need different information or encounter different routines?	Separate interviews, then a review of timing, clarity and feedback.
Community P3 exceeds P1	Do item content and partnership purpose explain the contrast?	Review one partnership's planning, implementation and joint evaluation.
Favourable overall means	Are ceilings or overlooked subgroups obscuring concerns?	Review distributions and contextual evidence, not only a total index.

The common principle is modest: select a specific decision or process, hear the relevant actors, record the response, and check whether the agreed change occurred. Repeating that process may support institutional learning, but longitudinal evidence is needed before attributing improvements to the diagnostic model.

7. Biases, Limitations and Future Research

The study is based on voluntary self-reports rather than a probability sample. Geographic concentration, uneven actor-group sizes, educational-stage differences and unmeasured self-selection restrict generalisation. The lack of an invitation denominator prevents nonresponse-rate estimation; the absence of school linkage prevents separation of within-school, between-school and actor-composition differences. Possible dependence among respondents is not captured by the reported individual-level intervals.

Role-specific content, unequal instrument lengths, social desirability, common-method effects and pronounced ceiling patterns may affect scores. Neither anonymity nor high internal consistency removes these risks. The full-key factor models fit insufficiently well to substantiate the proposed three-factor latent structure, and measurement invariance is unestablished. The index should consequently be treated as an exploratory composite of conceptually grouped responses, not a validated common scale, school rating or causal indicator. Weighting sensitivity and pointwise intervals add transparency but cannot correct these design limitations. The restricted principal–teacher check concerns one shared participation block only and cannot validate the other pillars or actor pairs.

Future work should begin with cognitive interviews and a piloted set of common anchor items, while retaining justified role-specific modules. School identifiers can be coded securely to permit contextual linkage and cluster-aware inference. An independent sample, ordinal-model sensitivity and appropriate invariance testing are needed before stronger group comparisons are made. Repeated measurement combined with interviews, document analysis and evidence of actual follow-up would be necessary to evaluate institutional learning or improvement.

8. Conclusions

The six-actor survey identifies uneven profiles across participation, communication/transparency and relations/climate. Parents have a higher observed DI core 3 than students, and communication shows the greatest omnibus distributional differentiation. These contrasts persist as descriptive observations after the source-data corrections, but they do not demonstrate that institutional position alone explains the differences.

The contribution is an auditable exploratory procedure: define the item key, calculate the profile, examine uncertainty and sensitivity, and translate a contrast into a contextual question. Its value is not a final ranking or a claim that all six instruments measure the same latent construct. Perception gaps can guide where local inquiry begins; corroborating evidence must determine whether, why and how a governance routine should change.

Declarations

Author Contributions: Conceptualisation, methodology, investigation, analysis, writing and revision: I.M.C. The author retains responsibility for the submitted manuscript and its underlying data.

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Institutional Review Board Statement: The project “School governance - a factor of change and development of the organization for education” (application No. 1527, registered on 3 April 2026) was approved by the Comisia de Analiză și Avizare (CAA). The author confirms receiving notification of the favourable decision before data collection began on 15 April 2026. Approval is documented in communication No. 1926, registered on 30 April 2026, from Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Ethics Committee / Subcommittee for Ethics in Scientific Research, and is restricted to the application conditions.

Informed Consent Statement: Participants were informed of the academic purpose and voluntary nature of the study. The administered online student questionnaire instructed participants under 18 to obtain parental agreement and required confirmation of having read the study information and having parental permission. Permission was reported by the student; no independent guardian verification is claimed.

Data Availability Statement: Respondent-level records are not publicly released because they concern school communities, including minors, and include contextual variables with indirect identification risks. The supplementary material supplies aggregate results, scoring rules and

non-identifying instrument information. The scoring key and supporting analysis files are available upon request and are not included in the present email submission. Further access requests should be directed to the author and assessed against consent and confidentiality requirements.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies: AI-assisted tools were used for translation and language editing, manuscript restructuring, reference checking, and assistance with statistical-code preparation and verification. The author retains responsibility for reviewing the calculations, interpreting the findings and approving the final submitted content. No synthetic respondent records were introduced into the analysis.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

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