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A STUDY ON INNOVATION CULTURE MATURITY IN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Victoria COJOCARU,
Alina Marilena BUDULEANU,

”Ion Creanga” State Pedagogical University of Chisinau

The study is focused on an investigative approach to the innovation culture of teachers active in pre-university institutions in Romania and the Republic of Moldova. Through a quantitative, descriptive-comparative design, the maturity level of innovation culture was determined, based on the multidimensional structure of the analysed construct. The research was conducted on a sample of 128 teachers, using an assessment questionnaire founded on models based on the corporate organizational environment, adapted and validated for the educational ecosystem. The data were subjected to descriptive, correlational, and non-parametric inferential statistical analyses. The results revealed a predominantly moderate level of innovation culture development in both educational contexts, with no statistically significant differences between the national participant samples. The significant correlations among the analysed dimensions confirmed the multidimensional, systemic and interdependent nature of the construct. The results underscored the relevance of assessing innovation culture maturity as an instrument for organizational diagnosis and for grounding managerial decisions and innovation-oriented educational policies.

Keywords: *innovation culture; organizational maturity; pre-university education; institutional assessment.*

UN STUDIU ASUPRA MATURITĂȚII CULTURII INOVĂRII ÎN INSTITUȚIA EDUCAȚIONALĂ

Studiul are la bază un demers investigativ asupra culturii inovării cadrelor didactice active în instituțiile preuniversitare din România și Republica Moldova. Printr-un design cantitativ, descriptiv-comparativ, s-a determinat nivelul de maturitate a culturii inovării, în baza structurii multidimensionale a constructului analizat. Cercetarea s-a realizat pe un eșantion de 128 de cadre didactice, în baza unui chestionar de evaluare fundamentat pe modele derivate din mediul organizațional corporatist, adaptate și validate pentru ecosistemul educațional. Datele au fost supuse unor analize statistice descriptive, corelaționale și inferențiale neparametrice. Rezultatele au evidențiat un nivel preponderent moderat de dezvoltare a culturii inovării în ambele contexte educaționale, fără diferențe semnificative statistic între eșantioanele naționale. Corelațiile semnificative dintre dimensiunile analizate au confirmat caracterul multidimensional, sistemic și interdependent al constructului. Constatările au subliniat relevanța evaluării maturității culturii inovării ca instrument de diagnoză organizațională și de fundamentare a deciziilor manageriale și a politicilor educaționale orientate spre inovare.

Cuvinte-cheie: *cultura inovării; maturitate organizațională; educație preuniversitară; evaluare instituțională.*

Introduction and conceptual framework

Few things have influenced human progress as consistently as the desire to improve existing ideas and practices. In education, however, this desire for innovation has often come into conflict with long-established systems and ways of working. Today, the tension is becoming increasingly difficult to ignore [8, pp.7-9]. Rapid technological development, changing social expectations and the uneven growth of digitalisation have created pressure that can no longer be addressed through small or gradual adjustments alone. Educational institutions are now expected to go beyond adapting certain practices and rethink how they function as organizations. In this context, *innovation* should not appear only during times of crisis or external evaluation, but *should become a normal and ongoing part of institutional life* [6, p.12].

There is often a tendency within institutions to speak about innovation culture without actually creating it. Lists of values, newly introduced frameworks or revised procedures do not automatically lead to genuine innovation. Rooted in organizational culture theory as one of its structural subsystems [7, p.18], *innovation culture only becomes meaningful when it begins to shape behaviour from within the organization itself*.

It influences how teachers think about change, how they make decisions and what attitudes they take toward risk, development and improvement [3, p.2]. This process cannot simply be imposed from above. It develops gradually through repeated practice, institutional support and shared experience. Once this happens, innovation stops being occasional and instead becomes part of the organization's everyday way of working.

Wang and Ahmed's (2004) understanding of organizational innovation cannot be reduced to a single factor. They define it as an institution's overall ability to introduce new products or practices [9, p.607]. According to their perspective, *innovation depends not only on individual initiatives, but also on the relationship between strategic direction, innovative processes and the behaviours through which these are implemented*. Their model highlights the importance of interaction between these different elements rather than focusing on separate components in isolation.

Dobni (2008) develops this perspective further from Wang and Ahmed by focusing on the conditions needed to sustain innovation over time. In his framework, *innovation culture is understood as a multidimensional environment that brings together intention, infrastructure, operational behaviour and support for implementation* [3, pp.1-3]. Strategic, structural and behavioural elements need to function together in a coherent way. However, this is often where the gap between institutional ambition and everyday reality becomes visible. Many organizations express a desire to innovate, but creating real alignment between goals, structures and daily practice is far more difficult.

Within education, both presented models move attention away from the creativity of individual teachers alone and towards the wider organizational environment in which innovation takes place. From this perspective, innovation becomes a collective and multidimensional organizational achievement rather than the isolated result of one teacher's work in one classroom.

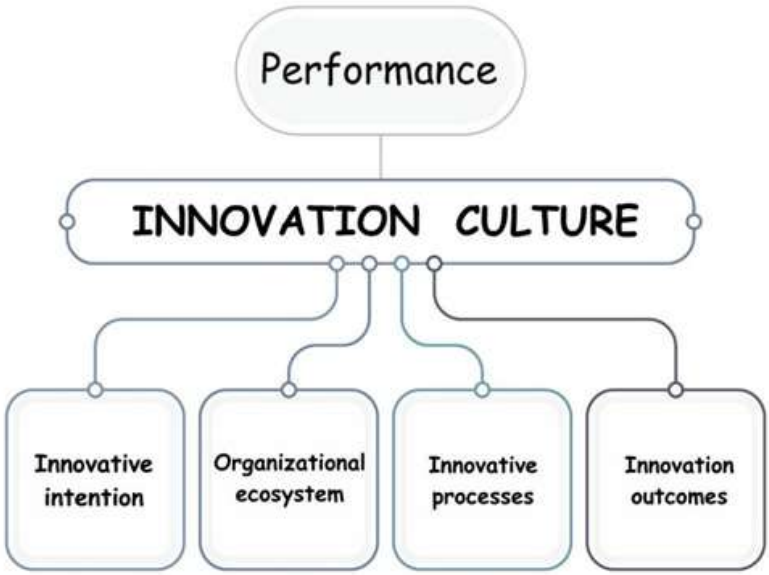


Figure 1. The model of innovation culture dimensions
(adapted for educational ecosystems from Dobni, 2008)

Four main dimensions structure this analysis, each with its own role, but none can function effectively by itself:

1. *innovative intention* – openness towards new ideas, willingness to take risks and the type of managerial support that treats innovation as a priority rather than a simple possibility;

2. *organizational ecosystem* – effective collaboration, institutional trust, access to resources and genuine opportunities for professional development;

3. *innovative processes* – the way that innovative ideas are created, developed and integrated into the daily life of the organization through planning, implementation and evaluation;

4. *innovation outcomes* – improved pedagogical practices, organizational solutions and educational interventions that contribute to added value and stronger institutional performance.

Moreover, researchers increasingly agree that the success of innovative initiatives depends not only on individual creativity, but also on *the maturity of the organizational culture* that supports and sustains them [7, p. 357]. As a result, the focus of research has gradually shifted away from isolated innovative actions towards the assessment of innovation culture as an indicator of an organization's ability to support long-term educational change. Measuring this construct can provide useful benchmarks for organizational diagnosis and can support managerial decisions with clearer evidence rather than relying mainly on intuition [5, pp. 23-26].

At the same time, empirical research focusing on the systematic assessment of innovation culture within school organization remains relatively limited. Many existing instruments are borrowed from corporate or non-educational contexts and later adapted for schools rather than being specifically designed for education. This limitation influenced the theoretical and methodological choices made in the present research.

Research objectives and hypothesis

The ***scope*** of this research was to evaluate the level of innovation culture maturity in pre-university educational institutions in Romania and the Republic of Moldova by analysing its main dimensions and the relationship between them. At the same time, the study compared the ways innovation culture is reflected across the two educational contexts.

In accordance with this scope, the study pursued the following ***objectives***:

O1. To assess the level of innovation culture maturity in pre-university educational institutions, both at the overall level and across its main dimensions;

O2. To analyse the relationship between the dimensions of innovation culture in order to highlight the multidimensional and interdependent nature of innovation culture maturity;

O3. To compare the level of innovation culture maturity between teachers in Romania and those in the Republic of Moldova, both overall and across the main dimensions.

The investigative approach was guided by the following ***hypothesis***: innovation culture maturity in pre-university educational institutions is a multidimensional construct, shaped through the interaction between innovative intention, the organizational ecosystem, innovative processes and innovation outcomes.

Research methodology

The study was carried out within ***a quantitative research framework*** based on ***the pedagogical survey method***, which is considered suitable for investigating educational phenomena at organizational level. This approach was chosen because the research required measurable and comparable data that could be statistically analysed, allowing both the assessment of innovation culture maturity and the testing of the proposed hypothesis.

The whole investigation process adopted ***a descriptive-comparative design***. This choice was made because the research aimed not only to describe the level of innovation culture maturity in pre-university educational institutions, but also to examine whether significant differences existed between teachers in Romania and those in the Republic of Moldova. Both require a design that can hold description and comparison at the same time without collapsing one into the other.

The comparative aspect of the study was particularly important. The innovation culture development is influenced by the realities of individual institutions and the wider socio-educational environment in which schools operate. Romania and the Republic of Moldova share a common language and certain elements of educational heritage, but their institutional development since the 1990s has followed different paths that may influence how innovation is understood, supported, and applied in practice. For this reason, a comparative approach was considered appropriate for the study.

The ***research instrument*** consisted of *an evaluation questionnaire* designed to measure the level of innovation culture maturity in pre-university educational institutions. The questionnaire was developed using established theoretical models of organizational innovation culture, particularly the work of Dobni (2008) and Wang & Ahmed (2004), adapted to the specific characteristics of the educational environment [3]; [9].

The questionnaire was structured around the four main dimensions of innovation culture identified by Dobni: *innovative intention* (teachers' openness towards change and new pedagogical practices); *innovative ecosystem* (the organizational environment supporting collaboration, professional learning, and innovative initiatives); *innovative process* (the way pedagogical innovations are created, implemented and evaluated)); *innovative outcomes* (the educational results that add value to the teaching and learning process) [3, p.2]. Each item included a statement based on teachers' everyday experiences of innovation culture within their schools. Responses were measured using *a five-point Likert scale* ranging from 1 (to a very small extent) to 5 (to a very great extent). Scores for each dimension were calculated by combining the related items, while the overall maturity score was obtained by summing all four dimensions. Higher scores reflected a more developed innovation culture profile.

Sample and data collection. The sample comprised *128 pre-university teachers* from Romania and the Republic of Moldova, covering all educational levels from preschool to upper secondary. Participants were selected based on availability and professional relevance to the research topic. Although the study presents statistical data, each response reflects the real experiences of teachers who engage with innovation culture in their everyday professional practice and this practical perspective adds value to the findings.

Data were collected electronically, with participation being voluntary and confidentiality guaranteed throughout the research process.

The hypothesis was tested using several ***statistical analyses***. *Descriptive statistics* were first used to establish the overall profile of innovation culture maturity in both samples, while *Spearman's rank correlation coefficient* examined the relationships between the four dimensions of the construct. *The Shapiro-Wilk and Levene's tests* were then applied to verify normality and homogeneity of variances. Finally, *the Mann-Whitney U test for independent samples* was used to identify possible statistically significant differences between the two groups.

Results and data analysis

Descriptive statistics were calculated for both national samples, both for each individual dimension and for the overall innovation culture maturity score. Mean values and measures of dispersion offered an initial picture of how scores are distributed within each group, showing where teachers tend to cluster and where greater individual variation appears. This stage was more than simply preparatory. The descriptive results outline the empirical profile of innovation culture maturity in both educational contexts, highlight the level of similarity between the two groups and provide the basis for understanding what the inferential analyses are intended to examine. In other words, before exploring whether significant differences exist between the groups, it is important to first understand the general profile of each sample.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of innovation culture maturity dimensions by country

Dimensions of Innovation Culture	Country	N	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Min.	Max.
Dimension A Innovative Intention	Republic of Moldova	63	29.38	8.05	15	48
	Romania	65	29.46	7.98	17	45
Dimension B Innovative Ecosystem	Republic of Moldova	63	29.90	7.95	17	46
	Romania	65	28.48	7.65	15	45
Dimension C Innovative Process	Republic of Moldova	63	44.73	11.71	25	69
	Romania	65	43.55	12.00	23	68
Dimension D Innovative Product	Republic of Moldova	63	29.21	7.99	15	48
	Romania	65	28.35	7.76	15	46

Mean scores across all four dimensions were relatively similar in both samples. For *innovative intention*, the results were almost identical, 29.38 in the Republic of Moldova and 29.46 in Romania. The largest dif-

ference appeared in the *innovative ecosystem* dimension, although the gap remained small, with teachers from the Republic of Moldova scoring slightly higher (M=29.90 compared to M=28.48), suggesting minor differences in how organizational support is perceived. The *innovative process* dimension recorded the highest mean score in both samples (44.73 and 43.55), which is understandable given that teachers' daily work largely involves planning, implementing, and evaluating different projects and pedagogical activities. The differences between the two groups were minimal. Similar results were observed for *innovation outcomes*, where the mean scores remained comparable and moderate levels of variability were present in both samples (29.21 and 28.35).

Overall, the descriptive results indicate *a very similar innovation culture profile* across the two educational contexts.

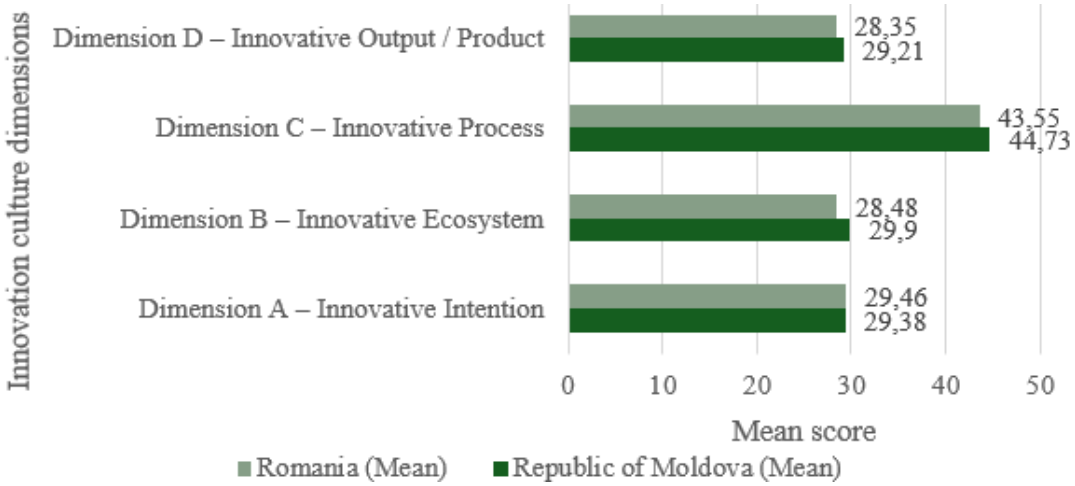


Figure 2. Comparative mean scores of innovation culture maturity dimensions by country

The results across the different dimensions point to a clear conclusion: *the two participant samples show a high degree of similarity* and the variations observed between the two samples remain modest across all four dimensions. To move beyond the analysis of individual dimensions, the study was extended to include the overall innovation culture maturity score and the distribution of development levels across both samples. This broader approach allowed for a more integrated comparison of the two educational contexts.

Table 2. Distribution of innovation culture maturity levels by country

Development level	**Republic of Moldova (n = 63)**	**%**	**Romania (n = 65)**	**%**
Low level	18	28.57	20	30.77
Medium level	32	50.79	32	49.23
High level	13	20.63	13	20.00
Total	**63**	**100.00**	**65**	**100.00**

Around *half of the teachers* in both samples were placed at the *medium level of innovation culture maturity*. In the Republic of Moldova, 50.79% of participants fell into this category, compared to 49.23% in Romania. The results are therefore *very similar* across the two groups. At the high maturity level, the percentages were also close, with 20.63% in the Republic of Moldova and 20.00% in Romania. This suggests that around one in five teachers in both educational contexts demonstrated a well-developed innovative practice. At the same time, approximately 28-30% of teachers in both samples were classified at the low maturity level. These results point to ongoing difficulties related to pedagogical innovation and suggest that this area should receive greater attention in future professional initiatives.

Overall, the distribution pattern remains very similar across both educational ecosystems, despite the differences between the two countries.

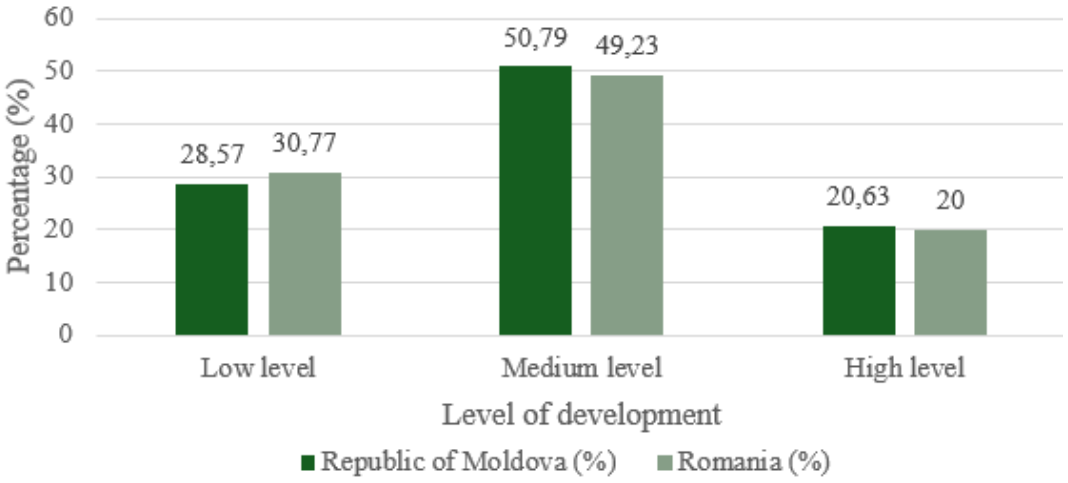


Figure 3. Distribution of innovation culture maturity levels by country

To complement the analysis of distribution levels, the overall innovation culture maturity score provides a broader perspective by offering a single value that reflects the general level of development of the construct across both samples. Examining this score descriptively allows a clearer understanding of internal variability within the groups, highlighting differences that may not be fully visible through percentages and categorical levels alone. At the same time, it provides the empirical basis for the comparative and inferential analyses that follow.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of the overall innovation culture maturity score

Country	N	Mean (M)	Standard deviation (SD)	Min.	Max.
Republic of Moldova	63	133.22	34.24	78	198
Romania	65	129.85	33.98	75	195

The two teacher samples recorded *very similar mean scores*, 133.22 for the Republic of Moldova and 129.85 for Romania, both corresponding to *a medium level of innovation culture development*. Although the differences between the groups were small, the results were consistent across both educational contexts.

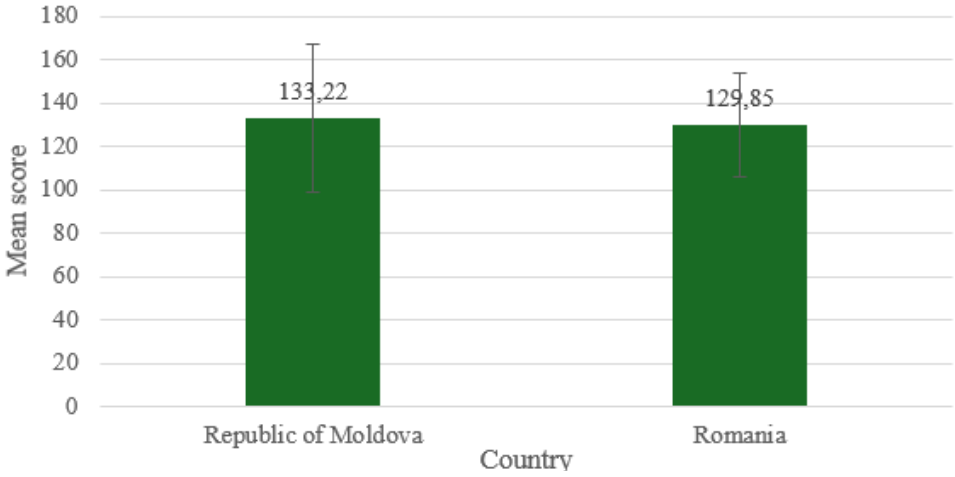


Figure 4. Distribution of the overall innovation culture maturity score

The descriptive results presented above provide an important starting point for the analysis. Finding that teachers in both samples showed a moderate level of innovation culture maturity is useful but it also raises a broader question: are the four dimensions of the construct connected to one another or do they function independently? If innovation culture maturity is truly a multidimensional and interconnected system, as

suggested by Dobni (2008), then the dimensions should not simply exist side by side but should also show meaningful relationships between them. To examine this aspect, *a correlational analysis* was carried out using ***Spearman's rank correlation coefficient***, which was appropriate given the non-normal distribution of scores identified earlier.

The results are presented in the table below.

Table 4. Intercorrelations among innovation culture dimensions and overall maturity score

	Dim. A	Dim. B	Dim. C	Dim. D	Total
Dimension A Innovative Intention	—	0.858	0.884	0.866	0.944
p		< .001	< .001	< .001	< .001
Dimension B Innovative ecosystem	0.858	—	0.866	0.867	0.942
p	< .001		< .001	< .001	< .001
Dimension C Innovative process	0.884	0.866	—	0.860	0.944
p	< .001	< .001		< .001	< .001
Dimension D Innovative product	0.866	0.867	0.860	—	0.939
p	< .001	< .001	< .001		< .001
Total score	0.944	0.942	0.944	0.939	—
p	< .001	< .001	< .001	< .001	

The results showed strong and *statistically significant correlations* between all four dimensions of innovation culture maturity (r_s=.858-.884, p<.001), as well as between each dimension and the overall maturity score (r_s=.939-.944, p<.001). These findings suggest that the four dimensions do not operate independently but function together as parts of a connected system. In practical terms, teachers who are more open to change and innovation also tend to work in more supportive organizational environments, participate more actively in innovative processes and report stronger innovation outcomes. This shows that the construct is supported not only at a theoretical level, but also by empirical data obtained in the study.

At the same time, although the correlational analysis confirms the internal coherence of the innovation culture maturity construct, it does not show whether differences exist between the two national samples. The descriptive analyses presented earlier suggested broadly similar profiles for teachers from Romania and the Republic of Moldova but descriptive similarity alone is not enough to confirm statistical equivalence. For this reason, an inferential comparison between the two groups was carried out.

Before conducting the inferential comparison between the two groups, it was necessary to verify whether the data met the required statistical assumptions. For this purpose, the ***Shapiro-Wilk test*** was applied to the overall innovation culture maturity scores in both samples in order to *assess the normality of the data distribution*. This step was very important in determining which statistical tests were most appropriate for the comparison that followed.

Table 5. Results of the Shapiro-Wilk normality test for innovation culture maturity

Country	Applied Test	Statistic (W)	Sig. (p)
Republic of Moldova	Shapiro-Wilk	0.946	0.008
Romania	Shapiro-Wilk	0.912	< 0.001

The *Shapiro-Wilk test* returned p=0.008 for teachers from the Republic of Moldova and p<0.001 for teachers from Romania. Both values fall below the accepted threshold, which indicates that the distribution of scores in neither sample follows a normal curve (p<0.05). In other words, there is *a noticeable level of individual variation within both groups*, with teachers positioned differently across the innovation culture maturity spectrum.

Before selecting the final test, one additional verification step was necessary. ***Levene's test for homogeneity of variances*** was applied to examine whether the two samples different in terms of internal dispersion. This represented an important methodological step before moving forward with the comparative analysis.

Table 6. Results of Levene's test for the homogeneity of variances of innovation culture maturity

Applied Test	Statistic	Sig. (p)
Levene	0.12	0.73

The results of Levene's test indicate *homogeneity of variances* for the total innovation culture maturity scores across the two investigated groups (p=0.73>0.05). This result confirms that *the two samples are comparable in terms of score dispersion*, providing additional methodological conditions necessary for conducting the inferential comparative analysis that follows.

Therefore, in order to compare the level of innovation culture development between teachers from Romania and the Republic of Moldova, a non-parametric statistical test for independent samples was applied, using ***the Mann-Whitney U test***, with the purpose of identifying possible statistically significant differences between the two groups.

Table 7. Results of the Mann-Whitney U test for comparing innovation culture dimensions

Dimension	M – Rep. of Moldova	M – Romania	U	p
Dimension A – Innovative Intention	29.38	29.46	2029.5	0.933
Dimension B – Innovative Ecosystem	29.90	28.48	2270.5	0.288
Dimension C – Innovative Process	44.73	43.55	2200.5	0.467
Dimension D – Innovative Product	29.21	28.35	2200.5	0.467

The Mann-Whitney U test *did not identify any statistically significant differences* between teachers from Romania and the Republic of Moldova across any of the innovation culture dimensions analysed (p>0.05).

For the *innovative intention* dimension, the similar mean ranks and mean scores suggest that teachers in both groups showed comparable levels of openness toward change and involvement in educational innovation. In the case of the *innovative ecosystem* dimension, although small differences were observed in the descriptive results, these did not reach statistical significance, indicating similar perceptions of the organizational conditions that support innovation in schools. Similar patterns also found for *innovation processes* and *innovation outcome* dimensions, where the differences observed between the groups appear to be related more to individual variation than to national context.

Overall, *the results confirm the similarity of the dimensional profiles across the two samples* and support extending the comparative analysis to the overall innovation culture maturity score.

Table 8. Results of the Mann-Whitney U test for comparing the overall innovation culture maturity score by country

Group			N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Republic of Moldova			63	66.12	4166.0
Romania			65	62.95	4092.0
U	**Z**	**Sig. (p)**			
2012.0	−0.56	0.57			

The Mann-Whitney U test found *no statistically significant difference* between the two groups (U=2012.0; p=0.57>0.05). Mean ranks were similar across both samples, which is another way of saying that where a teacher falls on the innovation culture maturity spectrum has more to do with who they are then where they teach. Individual variation, not national context, shapes the distribution.

The finding does more than raise or answer a comparative question. It confirms that *the two samples are sufficiently alike to be considered together when designing intervention and professional development initiatives*, a practical implication that the data support directly.

Conclusions

This study aimed to assess the maturity of innovation culture in pre-university educational institutions through a multidimensional framework structured around four interconnected dimensions: *innovative intention, innovative ecosystem, innovative process and innovation outcomes*. Taken together, the findings offer both a descriptive picture of the current situation in schools and a basis for understanding the factors that shape innovation culture development process.

Most teachers' organizations in both samples were situated at *a moderate level of innovation culture maturity*. This finding is consistent across both educational contexts and suggests that innovation is present within schools, but it has not yet become fully integrated into everyday organizational practice. The intention to innovate exists, the organizational environment provides some support and teachers engage in planning, implementing and evaluating innovative practices. However, these elements do not yet function together in a stable and coherent way. The results show that innovation still relies too heavily on individual effort and too little on organizational structures capable of sustaining it over time. As a result, the gap between innovation as isolated initiative and innovation as an established organizational practice remains an important issue.

The correlation analysis brings an important perspective to the results. *The dimensions of innovation culture are meaningfully connected to one another*. Particularly important is the strong relationship between the innovative process dimension and the overall maturity score. Planning, implementing and evaluating pedagogical innovations, core aspects of everyday teaching practice, appear to represent the area in which innovation culture is most strongly reflected.

For educational management and professional development policy, the implications are fairly direct. A supportive organizational climate matters. So does embedding innovation-related competencies into continuing professional development, rather than treating them as occasional add-ons. In addition, the structured assessment of innovation culture maturity can provide educational institutions with a useful diagnostic tool and a reliable baseline for monitoring progress over time.

The comparative analysis *did not identify statistically significant differences between teachers from Romania and the Republic of Moldova*, either across the individual dimensions or at the level of the overall maturity score. The similarity between the two educational contexts is itself a significant finding. It suggests that the factors influencing innovation culture maturity are not shaped entirely by national educational systems. Instead, individual professional characteristics, such as openness towards change, reflective practice and tolerance of uncertainty, appear to explain a greater part of the observed variation than broader contextual factors. This finding shifts attention from system-level conditions alone towards the importance of developing professional competencies and attitudes at the individual and institutional level.

Overall, the results provide a useful empirical basis for understanding the current state of innovation culture in pre-university education and highlight several priorities for future professional development and organizational improvement. Future research could extend these findings through longitudinal studies that track changes in innovation culture maturity over time, as well as through qualitative approaches capable of exploring the lived experiences behind the statistical data, including the everyday practices, challenges and decisions through which innovation culture process is shaped within schools.

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Data about authors:
Victoria COJOCARU, Habilitated PhD in Pedagogical Sciences, University Professor, Faculty of Education Sciences, „Ion Creanga" State Pedagogical University of Chisinau, Republic of Moldova.
ORCID: 0000-0002-5443-2875
E-mail: cojocaruvictoria@yahoo.com

Alina Marilena BUDULEANU, PhD candidate in Pedagogical Sciences, „Ion Creanga" State Pedagogical University of Chisinau, Republic of Moldova.
ORCID: 0000-0003-2661-5508
E-mail: buduleanua@yahoo.com

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