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NARCISSISM, PERFECTIONISM, DEPRESSION AND WELL-BEING IN A SAMPLE OF TRANSYLVANIAN HUNGARIAN STUDENTS. EXPLORING UNIQUE RELATIONS, GENDER DIFFERENCES AND SATISFACTION WITH FAMILY INCOME

ÉVA KÁLLAY[1]

ABSTRACT. Despite significant increases of life-conditions specific to the western world, the increasing changes at social, economic, political, cultural, etc., levels, may have significantly contributed to the development of some malfunctioning patterns (mental health indicators, narcissism, perfectionism), which may have seriously impacted overall personal and interpersonal functioning. The major aim of our study was to investigate the relationship between the three dimensions of perfectionism, narcissism, and mental health indicators as depression tendencies, subjective and psychological well-being in a sample of Transylvanian Hungarian students. Our study included 305 Transylvanian Hungarian first and second year students, from Babes-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca, Sapientia, Targu-Mures, Romania, assessed on: depression symptoms, subjective well-being, psychological well-being, narcissistic traits, multidimensional perfectionism, and demographic variables (gender, age, satisfaction with family income). Our results indicate significant gender differences in narcissism. Male participants experienced significantly higher levels of happiness (subjective well-being), than female participants, who attained significantly higher levels of positive personal relationships with others, as measured with the relations sub-scale of the psychological well-being scale. Our findings also yield significant negative associations between subjective well-being and socially prescribed

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perfectionism, highlighting the negative effects of perfectionism on optimal human functioning. Interestingly self-oriented perfectionism presented a significant positive correlation with autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, planning in life, and self-acceptance, the strongest associations being found in the case of personal growth and planning in life. Those participants who reported moderate satisfaction with income presented significantly lower levels of adaptive functioning, while those who reported the lowest satisfaction with family income seemed to function best. Our results may be useful in the development of prevention and intervention programs, targeting the enhancement of the psychological functioning of Transylvanian Hungarian students.

Keywords*: narcissism, perfectionism, subjective well-being, psychological well-being, depression.*

Introduction

In the recent several decades the Western world has experienced significant enhancement of life-conditions. Notwithstanding, adult life is forced to face an increasing number of challenges (Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006), which infuse both the personal and the professional life. Massive demographic shifts, impending financial insecurity, modifications in basic value systems, the increasing number and variety of daily hassles, the increased rhythm of life, highly stressful encounters, etc., may all have a profound impact on the individual's overall capacity to adapt efficiently (Banyard, Edwards, & Kendall-Tackett, 2009; Kendall-Tackett, 2009; Lanius, Vermetten, & Pain, 2010; Weehuizen, 2008). According to Curran and Hill's (2017) study, presently, young individuals encounter more difficult social and economic conditions than their parents did (Ipsos MORI, 2014). Intense interpersonal and professional competition and high internal and external pressure (Twenge, 2014; Verhaeghe, 2014) may considerably increase the number of stressful encounters that may negatively impact the young generations' abilities to adapt. Not surprisingly, the number of individuals suffering of mental health problems (depression, anxiety disorders, loneliness, etc.) is constantly increasing worldwide (Cunningham, Rapee, & Lyneham, 2006; Collins, Patel, Joestl, March, Insel, & Daar, 2011; Erzen & Çikrikçi, 2018; Hawkley & Cacioppo, 2010; Perissinotto, Stijacic Cenzer, & Covinsky, 2012; Prina, Victor & Bowling, 2012; WHO, 2017). Depression is one of the most frequently encountered mental health problems, over 298 million people suffering of depressive symptoms (i.e., over 4.4% of the population of the world) (Cuijpers, Smit, & van Straten, 2007; Ferrari, Charlson, Norman, Patten, Freedman, Murray, et al., 2013; WHO, 2017). It is also predicted that by 2030 depression will become the second most serious illness worldwide (Gustavsson et al., 2011; Wittchen et al., 2011). The personal and economic costs of these increases in mental health problems are extremely high (Weehuizen, 2008).

Narcissism and Perfectionism

Literature indicates that cultural and societal norms significantly influence the way personality traits are expressed, and how the individual views him/herself (Foster, Campbell, & Twenge, 2003; Heine & Lehman, 1997; Millon, Grossman, Millon, Meagher, & Ramnath, 2004; Verhaeghe, 2014). Thus, specific changes in the western society (consumerism, the constant pressure for excellence and success) may have to some degree contributed in recent years to the unexpected increase in two somewhat interrelated aspects of malfunctioning – narcissism and maladaptive perfectionism (Curran & Hill, 2017; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Twenge & Campbell, 2009; Verhaeghe, 2014). Apparently, narcissistic traits have started to increase beginning with the 1980's, attaining increasingly higher scores after 2000 (Twenge & Campbell, 2009). The *DSM-5* defines clinical manifestations of narcissism as a "*pervasive pattern of grandiosity (in fantasy or behavior), a constant need for admiration, and a lack of empathy*" (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Despite the fact that the DSM (DSM-IV-TR, 2000, *DSM-5,* 2013) definitions describe narcissism as a single, relatively homogeneous syndrome, a large body of literature supports the existence of different subtypes or variations of Narcissistic Personality Disorder (Levy, 2012; Pincus & Lukowitsky, 2010; Ronningstam, 2005). The most frequently investigated subtypes of narcissism are: (*i*) the grandiose (overt) subtype, characterized by grandiosity, authority, superiority, exhibitionism, entitlement, exploitativeness, lack of insight regarding the impact their behavior may have on others, etc. (Raskin & Terry, 1988 as cited in Sherry, Gralnick, Hewitt, Sherry, & Flett, 2014; Røvik, 2001) (characteristics mostly reflected in the DSM), and the (*ii*) vulnerable (covert) subtype, characterized by shyness, high levels of manifested distress, hypersensitive reactions to the evaluations of others, chronic envy, outwardly self-effacing, appearance of empathy, entitlement, secret grandiose fantasies about the self and expectations of oneself and others (Dickinson & Pincus, 2003; Gabbard, 1998). In the same time, besides the grandiose and vulnerable forms of narcissism, literature also describes a type of individuals who even if suffer from narcissism, are still able to function relatively well. These are the "*high-functioning/exhibitionistic", "autonomous*" narcissists (Caligor, Levy, Yeomans, 2015; Russ, Shedler, Bradley, & Western, 2008), using their narcissistic traits to succeed (competitiveness, attention seeking, sexually provocative, etc.).

Research regarding correlates of narcissism produced mixed results. On the one hand, there are studies that evidence its negative effects, while other studies highlight the positive sides of narcissism. Thus, a plethora of research indicates that narcissists tend to be motivated more by extrinsic than intrinsic values and desires (Kasser & Ryan, 1996), are less agreeable (Bradlee & Emmons, 1992), frequently manifest arrogance (Paulhus, 1998), etc. However, healthy, adaptive forms of narcissism, present positive associations with self-esteem (Sedikides, Rudich, Gregg, Kumashiro, & Rusbult, 2004), emotional intelligence (Petrides, Vernon, Schermer, & Veselka (2011), subjective well-being, and negatively correlates with daily sadness, dispositional depression, dispositional loneliness (Sedikides et al., 2004).

A plethora of research indicates that perfectionism is one of the central features of both grandiose and vulnerable narcissistic styles of thinking, behaving and forming relationships (Millon & Davis, 2000; Ronningstam, 2010, 2011; Smith, Sherry, Chen, Saklofske, Flett, 2019). Perfectionism is a personality trait in which the person strives towards flawlessness, sets extremely high standards of performance, and evaluates the results of his/her achievements in an excessively critical way (Flett & Hewitt, 2002). Besides its evident benefits, i.e., higher levels of accomplishment (Hewitt, Flett, & Mikail, 2017), perfectionism may be considered as a "*core personality vulnerability factor*" (Hewitt et al., 2017, p. 1), that may have important negative consequences, especially amidst confrontations with stressful situations. According to Hewitt and Flett (2002), perfectionistic traits are also involved in the exaggeration of the magnitude of the stressful event as well as in the frequency with which such events occur, mostly determined by the extreme, unrealistic expectations imposed by the person.

One of the most comprehensive models of trait perfectionism was proposed by Hewitt and Flett (1991), positing the existence of three different forms of perfectionism:

(i) *self-oriented perfectionism* (SOP), characterized by unrealistic demands and expectations from the self, completed with punitive self-evaluations; SOP has a strong motivational component, which determines the individual towards perfection (Hewitt & Flett, 1991). SOP was frequently found to strongly correlate with achievement-related behaviors (Curran & Hill, 2017; Hewitt & Flett, 1991). When perfectionists with SOP start connecting self-worth to achievements and satisfaction with one's accomplishments, this trait may in certain situations become a vulnerability and a risk factor. Literature indicates that SOP is frequently associated with depressive symptomatology, anorexia nervosa, greater physiological reactivity, suicidal ideation and negative affect in general (Besser, Flett, Hewitt, & Guez, 2008; Fry & Debats, 2009; Smith, Sherry, Gautreau, Mushquash, Saklofske, & Snow, 2017).

(ii) *other oriented perfectionism* (OOP), characterized by unrealistic demands and expectations from others combined with extremely critical evaluation of others, who, in case do not rise to the expected levels, are blamed and criticized, treated with hostility by persons high on OOP (Hewitt, Flett, & Mikail, 2017). OOP is negatively associated with altruism, compliance and trust (Hill, Zrull, & Turlington, 1997), negatively impacting intimate relationships (Haring, Hewitt, & Flett, 2003), and positively associated with narcissistic desire to obtain admiration from others (Nealis, Sherry, Sherry, Stewart, & Macneil, 2015).

(iii) *socially prescribed perfectionism* (SPP) is characteristic to individuals who consider that the social context is demanding perfection from them, that others judge them, and in order to attain approval, they have to constantly display a perfect image of themselves (Curran & Hill, 2017). SPP is the most debilitating of the three dimensions of perfectionism, determining the individual to believe that others have excessive, uncontrollable, and unfair expectations of them, frequently leading to intense negative emotional states and major intense forms of psychopathology, as anxiety, depressive symptomatology, suicidal ideation, etc. (Sherry, Hewitt, Flett, & Harvey, 2003; Smith, Sherry, Rnic, Saklofske, Enns, & Gralnick, 2016).

Parallel to the literature indicating a significant increase in narcissism in the last decades (Twenge & Campbell, 2009), Curran and Hill's (2017) meta-analysis highlights a similar increase in perfectionism in birth cohorts from 1989 to 2016. Even if research indicates that perfectionism is one of the core features of narcissism, the relationship between these two concepts is extremely complicated and still not clearly understood (Pincus, Cain, & Wright, 2014; Sherry et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2016). Some studies indicate a moderate correlation between perfectionism and narcissism (Hewitt, Flett, Sherry, Habke, Parkin, Lam, et al., 2003), while other studies indicate a propensity of individuals with Narcissistic Personality Disorder to demand perfectionism from others, and criticize them harshly for their flaws and perceived shortcomings (McCown & Carlson, 2004). Even if a plethora of research indicated significant differences in depression between men and women (Bebbington, 1996; Davidson, 2000; Kuehner, 2003; Nolen-Hoeksema & Girgus, 1994; Rutz, 2001; Sprock & Yoder, 1997), literature has no stable results indicating similar gender-related differences in narcissism and perfectionism (Sherry et al., 2014), and very little is known regarding the subjacent mechanisms involved in the relationship between narcissism and depression (Marčinko, Jakšić, Ivezić, Skočić, Surányi, Lončar, Franić, & Jakovljević, 2014).

Well-being

The World Health Organization defines health as "*a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity*" (WHO, 2018). For a considerably long period of time, research has mostly concentrated on the investigation of negative aspects of functioning.

Relatively recently, research has broadened its spectrum of investigations, and started studying both the positive and negative forms of functioning (Mayne, 1999).

Adaptive and optimal human functioning has been most thoroughly investigated within the domain of well-being, treated through two major traditions: ***hedonic/subjective*** (associated with satisfaction, happiness, and the experience of positive emotions), and ***eudaimonic/psychological*** (attainment of human potential) well-being. The subjective approach equates well-being with the human tendency to seek pleasure and happiness, simultaneously avoiding pain and suffering (Kahneman, Diener, & Schwartz, 1999). The psychological approach considers that well-being transcends mere happiness, and consists in the actualization of human potential (Waterman, 1993).

Investigations consider well-being as being a multidimensional phenomenon, composed by both elements of the subjective (hedonic) and psychological (eudaimonic) approaches (see e.g., King & Napa, 1998; McGregor & Little, 1998). In other words, SWB and PWB are "*related but distinct aspects of positive psychological functioning*" (Keyes, Shmotkin, & Ryff, 2002, p. 1009). In Ryff and Singer's (1998, 2000, 2008) approach, psychological well-being is a multidimensional construct, encompassing six specific dimensions:

(1) ***self-acceptance*** - the non-judgemental acceptance of one's self together with one's past - central aspects of mental health, self-actualization, optimal functioning, and maturity.

(2) ***positive relations with others*** - the ability to maintain warm, affectionate relationships with others. This component of psychological well-being was found to be both related to superior positive functioning, as well as a protective factor in adversity.

(3) ***autonomy*** - refers to one's ability to function independently of other's approval, to regulate emotions and behavior from within, establishing personal standards and evaluating oneself towards this standard.

(4) ***environmental mastery*** - the individual's capacity to create an external environment that would enhance his/her functioning and adaptation (Ryff, 1989).

(5) ***purpose in life*** – refers to one's capacity to find meaning in life, ability that was frequently found to be related to better mental functioning (Skrabski, Kopp, Rozsa, Rethelyi, & Rahe, 2005).

(6) ***personal growth*** – refers to the human need to attain and realize one's potential is a central aspect of personal development.

Literature has identified some factors that may affect well-being, as: age, wealth, level of education, personality factors, the ability to frequently experience positive affect, adaptive emotion-regulation strategies, etc. (e.g., Chang & Farrehi, 2001; Diener, Lucas, & Oishi, 2002; Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004; Keyes, Shmotkin, & Ryff, 2002; Lyubomirsky & Della Porta, 2010; Ryff & Singer, 2008). A very interesting finding refers to the relationship between wealth and well-being. Thus, literature has repeatedly evidenced that excessive preoccupation with the acquisition of material goods does not seem to increases in either happiness or well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Diener, Lucas, & Oishi, 2002; Schmuck, Kasser, & Ryan, 2000). Money is necessary for a decent life, but exaggerating the importance of economic development above a certain financial threshold, may negatively impact the eudaimonic well-being (Kasser, 2002; Ryan & Deci, 2001)

Objectives

A considerable number of studies have shown that perfectionism is a significant predictor of psychological dysfunctions in college students (Chang, 2000; Chang, 2006; Rice, Ashby, & Slaney, 1998), as depression, anxiety, hopelessness, hostility, suicidal ideation (Enns & Cox, 1999; Enns, Cox, & Clara, 2002; Frost, Marten, Lahart, & Rosenblate, 1990; Hewitt, Flett, & Ediger, 1996). Much less is known about the relationship between perfectionism, narcissism and subjective and psychological well-being.

The major aim of our study was to investigate the relationship between the three dimensions of perfectionism, narcissism, and mental health indicators as depression tendencies, subjective and psychological well-being in a sample of Transylvanian Hungarian students.

Study

Participants

Our study included 306 Transylvanian Hungarian first and second year students, 203 from Babes-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca, Romania, and 73 from Sapientia, Targu-Mures, Romania. The minimum age of the participants was 18 years, while the maximum 38, with a mean age of 20.01 years (SD=2.11). Of the 305 participants 79 were male (25.97%), and 226 female students (74.03%). After providing informed consent, participants completed the questionnaire packets that took 45 minutes to fill, in a face-to-face assessment session with the researcher.

Instruments

Demographic variables were: age, gender and satisfaction with family income (not at all, so-so, very much).

Depression tendencies were measured with the Beck Depression Inventory-II (BDI, Beck, Rush, Shaw & Emery, 1979; translated and adapted into Hungarian by the author). The BDI is a 21-item, multiple-choice format inventory, designed to measure the presence of depression in adults and adolescents. Each of the 21 items assesses a symptom or attitudes specific to depression, inquiring its somatic, cognitive and behavioral aspects. By its assessments, single scores are produced, which indicate the intensity of the depressive episode. Scores ranging from 0 to 9, represent normal levels of depression. Scores situated between 10 and 18 represent mild to moderate depression; values between 19 and 29 represent moderate to severe depression, while scores above the value of 30 represent severe depression. Internal consistency indices of the BDI are usually above .90. For the present sample, the internal consistency indices for the BDI was .87.

Narcissistic traits were measured with 16-item Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI-16, Ames, Rose, & Anderson, 2006; translated and adapted into Hungarian by the author) derived by the authors from the long, 40-item NPI scale (Raskin & Hall, 1979). The test consists of sixteen pairs of statements, and for each pair subjects should select the one that they feel best reflect their personality. The NPI-16 is a short measure of subclinical narcissism, presenting a good face, internal, discriminant, and predictive validity (Ames et al., 2006). The internal consistency of the NPI-16 for the present sample was .81.

Perfectionism was measured with the 45-item self-report Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (MPS, Hewitt & Flett, 1991; translated and adapted into Hungarian by the author). The MPS contains three sub-scales: self-oriented perfectionism (SOP) (e.g., "*One of my goals is to be perfect in everything I do*"), other-oriented perfectionism (OOP) (e.g., "*Everything that others do must be of top-notch quality*"), and socially-prescribed perfectionism (SPP) (e.g., "*I find it difficult to meet others' expectations of me*"). Responses are given on a 7-point Likert scale, from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The psychometric properties of the scale (reliability and validity) were found across studies to be very good (Hewitt et al., 2003). Cronbach's alpha for the present sample ranged from .74 to .87.

Psychological well-being was measured by the 44-item scale developed by Ryff (1989) and adapted by Kállay & Rus (2014) (translated and adapted into Hungarian by the author). This scale has 6 sub-scales measuring the basic components of eudaimonic well-being: self-acceptance (PWB-SA), positive relations with others (PWB-PRO), autonomy (PWB-A), environmental mastery (PWB-EM), purpose in life (PWB-PL), and personal growth (PWB-PG). Items are assessed along a 6-point scale, 1 = total agreement, and 6 = total disagreement. The psychometric properties of the Romanian translation are good (.81-.88). On each sub-scale high scores mean high WB, while low scores mean low levels of psychological well-being. The internal consistency of the Psychological Well-being scale for the present sample ranged from .81.

Subjective well-being was assessed with the 5-item WHO well-being questionnaire (WHO Collaborating Centre in Mental Health, 1999; Hungarian version available on www.psikiatri-regionh.dh/who-5/Documents/WHO5_Hungarian.pdf), focusing on the assessment of positive affective states. Each of the five items is rated on a 6-point Likert scale from 0 (not present) to 5 (constantly present). Scores are summed, with raw scores ranging from 0 to 25. Then the scores are transformed to 0-100 by multiplying by 4, with higher scores meaning better well-being. This scale was adapted for Hungarian population by WHO (WHO Collaborating Centre in Mental Health, 1999). Cronbach's alpha for the present sample was .79.

Results

Firstly, we present the descriptive characteristics of our data (see Table 1).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics

	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD	Shapiro-Wilk	p
BDI	0	34	10.48	8.21	.91	.000
WHO-5	4	84	51.19	17.41	.97	.000
PWB-A	19	42	31.25	4.94	.98	.005
PWB-EM	9	46	34.43	6.36	.95	.000
PWB-PG	27	54	45.64	5.30	.93	.000
PWB-PRO	18	36	29.83	4.01	.92	.000
PWB-PL	8	41	31.33	6.21	.94	.000
PWB-SA	10	41	31.26	5.82	.95	.000
MPS-SOP	26	68	48.22	7.21	.99	.129
MPS-OOP	30	66	44.87	5.81	.96	.000
MPS-SPN	31	75	46.39	7.09	.97	.000
NPI-16	19	32	27.89	2.91	.94	.000

Next, we conducted a correlation analysis, and the results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Correlation matrix between narcissism, subjective well-being, psychological well-being, and multidimensional perfectionism

	NPI	WHO	PWB_ AUT	PWB_ EM	PWB_ PG	PWB_ PRO	PWB_ PL	PWB_ SA	MPS_ SOP	MPS_ OOP	MPS_ SPP	BDI
NPI	1											
WHO-5	-.03	1										
PWB_AUT	-.27**	.30**	1									
PWB_EM	-.09	.55**	.46**	1								
PWB_PG	-.05	.34**	.43**	.49**	1							
PWB_PRO	.09	.36**	.23**	.49**	.59**	1						
PWB_PL	-.15**	.53**	.50**	.78**	.59**	.49**	1					
PWB_SA	-.19**	.51**	.53**	.66**	.58**	.46**	.74**	1				
MPS_SOP	-.14*	-.08	.16**	.14*	.29**	.08	.25**	.14*	1			
MPS_OOP	-.06	-.04	.06	.07	-.03	-.01	-.03	-.02	.39**	1		
MPS_SPP	.01	-.21**	-.03	-.19**	.02	-.03	-.17**	-.13*	.41**	.41**	1	
BDI	-.01	-.62**	-.32**	-.58**	-.26**	-.41**	-.59**	-.01	.02	.02	.21**	

Note
*p < .05; **p < .01

As the correlation matrix presented in Table 2 indicates, narcissistic traits present a significant negative correlation with Autonomy (PWB_AUT) (r=-.273, p< *.01*), Purpose in Life (PWB_PL) (r=-.153**, p< *.01*), Self-Acceptance (PWB_SA) (r=-.191, p< *.01*), and Self-Oriented Perfectionism (MPS_SOP) (r=-.148, p< *.05*). Moreover, Self-Oriented Perfectionism (MPS_SOP) was positively correlated with Autonomy (PWB_AUT) (r=.169, p< *.01*), Environmental Mastery (MPS_EM) (r=.149, p< *.01*), Personal Growth (MPS_PG) (r=.269, p< *.01*), Planning in life (PWB_PL) (r=.255, p< *.01*), and Self-Acceptance (PWB_SA) (r=.142, p< *.05*). Other Oriented Perfectionism does not present any kind of association with the variables assessed. Socially Prescribed Perfectionism (PWB_SPP) presents significant negative correlation with Subjective Well-Being (WHO-5) (r=-.214, p< *.01*), Environmental Mastery (PWB_EM) (r=-.198, p< *.01*), Purpose in Life (PWB_PL) (r=-.175, p< *.01*), and Self-Acceptance (PWB_SA) (r=-.135, p< *.05*).

Quite surprisingly, even if depression scores significantly correlated with both measures of well-being (Subjective and Psychological), our investigation did not yield any association between Narcissism and depressive tendencies as measured with the Beck Depression Inventory and subjective well-being. Furthermore, our data indicate only one significant association between depressive symptomatology and only one of the dimensions of perfectionism (Socially Prescribed Perfectionism – MPS_SPP) (r=.21, $p< .01$). The positive side of mental health (Subjective Well-Being) presents a significant negative correlation only with the Socially Prescribed Perfectionism (r=-.21, $p< .01$).

We continued our investigation with the identification of possible differences in scores depending on gender. The Mann-Whitney non-parametric test indicates gender differences in subjective well-being [Z=-2.43, $p=.015$] with male participants attaining significantly higher levels of subjective well-being than female participants, although the effect size of the difference was small (r=.01). We also found significantly differences in narcissistic traits [Z=-2.10, $p=.03$], with female participants attaining significantly higher levels of narcissism than male participants, but in this case also the effect size of the difference was small (r=.01). The last significant difference depending on gender was found in Positive Relations with Others (PWB_PRO) [Z=-3.31, $p=.03$], female participants relating significantly higher scores than their male counterparts on this sub-scale of Psychological Well-Being. Nevertheless, in this case too, the effect size of the difference was small (r=.018). Effect sizes were calculated with the following formula: $r = Z/\sqrt{N}$ (where, N = number of participants* number of observations), which according to Cohen's (1988) classification is a large statistical effect.

Finally, we investigated whether there are differences in the assessed variables depending on the satisfaction with the family income. We conducted an ANOVA analysis, using post-hoc Grabriel, due to uneven sample sizes (see Table 3).

Table 3. ANOVA (post hoc Gabriel), with differences in depression tendencies, subjective well-being, psychological well-being, narcissism, and perfectionism

	Mean	SD	F	p	ŋ2
BDI	Group 1=3.92 (2, 3)	1.44	7.00	.001	.162
	Group 2=12.24 (1)	9.04			
	Group 3=9.91(1)	7.72			
WHO	Group 1=62.15 (2)	14.20	10.73	.001	.162
	Group 2=45.47(1, 3)	16.22			
	Group 3=53.64(2)	16.48			
PWB_AUT	Group 1=34.07 (2)	3.98	11.00	.001	.205
	Group 2=29.32 (1,3)	5.76			
	Group 3=31.83 (2)	4.34			
PWB_EM	Group 1=38.23 (2)	2.16	5.26	.006	.142
	Group 2=32.95(1)	6.15			
	Group 3=34.74	6.38			
PWB_PG	Group 1=49.00 (2)	2.88	5.48	.005	.163
	Group 2=44.46 (1)	5.14			
	Group 3=45.94	5.27			
PWB_PL	Group 1=35.30 (2,3)	3.47	4.72	.01	.175
	Group 2=30.07 (1)	6.12			
	Group 3=31.52(1)	6.26			
PWB_SA	Group 1=33.84 (2)	4.16	4.62	.01	.148
	Group 2=29.84 (1,3)	5.67			
	Group 3=31.65 (2)	5.77			
NPI	Group 1=26.30 (3)	2.35	3.57	.029	.081
	Group 2=27.55	2.96			
	Group 3=28.17 (1)	2.86			
MPS_SPP	Group 1=41.92 (3)	2.53	5.60	.004	.199
	Group 2=45.11 (3)	5.68			
	Group 3=47.37 (1,2)	7.94			

Note:
group 1 - lowest satisfaction with family income, group 2 - moderate satisfaction and group 3 - highest satisfaction with family income

Our results indicate that the significantly highest level of depression is attained by those participants who relate a moderate satisfaction with family income [$F_{(2,295)}$=7.00, p=.001], with participants least satisfied with family income reporting the significantly lowest levels of depression, while the highest levels are obtained by those who are moderately satisfied (so-so) with their financial resources. Moreover, the situation is similar in the case of subjective well-being: those who report the lowest satisfaction with the family income report the significantly highest levels of subjective well-being, followed by those who are very satisfied with family finances [$F_{(2,299)}$=10.73, p=.001]. The lowest levels of happiness/subjective well-being are attained by those who are moderately satisfied with family income. These results are similar with those reported in the literature (Kasser, 2002; Ryan & Deci, 2001). Regarding psychological well-being, our results indicate the same tendency, namely, those who report the greatest dissatisfaction with family income report the highest levels of autonomy [$F_{(2,299)}$=11.00, p=.001], environmental mastery [$F_{(2,299)}$=5.26, p=.006], personal growth [$F_{(2,299)}$=5.48, p=.005], purpose in life [$F_{(2,299)}$=4.72, p=.01], and self-acceptance [$F_{(2,298)}$=4.62, p=.01]. Again, the significantly lowest levels are reported by those individuals who declare a medium level of satisfaction with family income. Finally, the highest levels of narcissistic traits are reported by those who report the highest satisfaction with the financial status of the family [$F_{(2,298)}$=3.57, p=.029], and socially prescribed perfectionism attains also the highest levels by those who report the highest satisfaction with family income [$F_{(2,299)}$=5.60, p=.004]. Furthermore, as our results indicate, the effect size of these differences are large (above .14), except the case of narcissism, where the effect size is medium (above .06) (see Table 3).

Conclusion and Discussions

Scientific literature has closely and rigorously followed the worldwide tendency of significant increases in time of mental health problems, depression, anxiety disorders, loneliness, etc., presenting an alarmingly increasing patterns (Banyard, Edwards, & Kendall-Tackett, 2009; Collins, Patel, Joestl, March, Insel, & Daar, 2011; Erzen & Çikrikçi, 2018; Hawkley & Cacioppo, 2010; Kendall-Tackett, 2009; Lanius, Vermetten, & Pain, 2010; Perissinotto, Stijacic Cenzer, & Covinsky, 2012; Prina, Victor & Bowling, 2012; Weehuizen, 2008; WHO, 2017). On the other hand, the specific changes in the western society (inclination towards consumerism, the constant pressure for excellence and success) may have to some degree contributed in recent years to the unexpected increase in two somewhat interrelated aspects of malfunctioning – narcissism and maladaptive perfectionism (Curran & Hill, 2017; Twenge & Campbell, 2009; Verhaeghe, 2014).

The investigation of the correlates of narcissism produced mixed results, with some studies highlighting the positive sides of narcissism (e.g., higher levels of emotional intelligence, higher self-esteem), while others underscoring its negative effects (e.g., higher levels of depressive symptomatology loneliness) (Petrides et al., 2011), Sedikides et al., 2004). Furthermore, literature also indicates that perfectionism is a central feature of narcissism (Millon & Davis, 2000; Ronningstam, 2010, 2011), and a strong predictor of depression (Hewitt, Flett, & Ediger, 1996).

Our results indicated that in the assessed sample of Transylvanian Hungarian students, despite our expectations, we did not find a significant correlation between narcissism and depressive tendencies, however we found significant gender differences in narcissism, with female participants reporting higher levels of narcissism than male participants. Moreover, male participants experienced significantly higher levels of happiness (subjective well-being), than female participants, who on the other hand attained significantly higher levels of positive personal relationships with others, as measured with the relations sub-scale of the psychological well-being scale. Our findings also yielded significant negative associations between subjective well-being and socially prescribed perfectionism, highlighting the negative effects of perfectionism on optimal human functioning. Interestingly self-oriented perfectionism presented a significant positive correlation with autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, planning in life, and self-acceptance, the strongest associations being found in the case of personal growth and planning in life. These last correlations may evince the positive contribution of perfectionism to psychological well-being, which may in time positively impact the subjective side of emotional functioning. Finally, very interesting results were produced by the comparisons of the assessed variables depending on the satisfaction with income, which indicates that those participants who report the moderate satisfaction with income present significantly lower levels of adaptive functioning, while those who report the lowest satisfaction with family income seem to function best.

Our study has several limitations, which should be resolved by future research, one of these limitations referring to the relatively low number of participants. Furthermore, it would be useful for future studies to investigate narcissism in a more nuanced way, paying attention to its different forms (grandiose and vulnerable), which may have different implications in adaptive and maladaptive functioning, as presented in the introductory part of this study. In our study we did not use clinical cut-off points for analysis or selection of participants, but treated depression tendencies as a continuum ranging from minimal to maximal scores obtained by participants on the BDI scale. Future research may benefit from analyzing data by grouping participants depending on clinical cut-points on depression.

The results of our investigation may have informative value for the continuation of more thorough investigations of these aspects of malfunctioning (narcissism, perfectionism), and may become a starting point for future studies that intend to investigate the evolution in time of these aspects of functioning. Furthermore, we also consider that our results may be useful in the development of prevention and intervention programs, targeting the enhancement of the psychological functioning of Transylvanian Hungarian students.

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A BRIEF ANALYSIS OF THE PROS AND CONS OF ONLINE ADAPTIVE LEARNING AND EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT. Ever since ancient times, education has been a topic of interest for many civilizations. Seen as a means of progress, education was the main focus for some countries like Finland, and almost ignored by others.

In the last decade, a new term has appeared in regard to education: adaptive learning. Used almost ubiquitous, the term has gained fame due to its presence in a 2013 program launched by the Gates Foundation, abbreviated ALMAP (Adaptive Learning Market Acceleration Program). This program changed into a grant that funded 14 higher education organizations to implement 9 adaptive learning products into 23 courses. The aim was to test and gather data on the impact of these programs of student outcomes. Almost instantly, the term became famous and used by many in their marketing and promotional strategies. In this brief analysis, we discuss the definitions, terminology, use, and pros and cons of adaptive learning in online education.

Keywords: *adaptive learning, teaching, education, online, classical, students, teachers, schools, universities*

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Introduction

Adaptive learning refers to a non-linear approach to online education that adapts to the needs of the students, as they advance in the courseware. This leads to a specific and personalized educational experience for the students, based on previous information and knowledge. Classical education, on the other hand, is mode linear and does not include any personalized educational means. To achieve this goal, adaptive learning is based on algorithms, course analytics, assessment information taken from knowledge and personality tests, students' feedback, teachers' feedback and information presented in different formats such as video, photo, text, animations (Educause, 2017). This allows for new learning information for those that have achieved mastery or for those that are still struggling to achieve a certain level of expertise (Educause, 2017).

Among the first researchers to study adaptive learning is Bloom (1971), who proved that the differences in performance among students can be solved through personalized and differentiated learning. For this, Bloom implemented a teaching strategy called learning mastery, where content and learning skills are organized in individual units, presented to the students at the beginning of teaching and followed by a formative evaluation (Murray & Pérez, 2015). The feedback achieved from this evaluation identifies if and what sort of remedy teaching is necessary. This way, activities and lessons that correct students' lacks are implemented and the "evaluation - feedback - correction" cycle is done over and over again, until mastery is achieved. Testing this method, Bloom (1984) managed to prove that the expertise achieved in a one to one teaching has higher benefits than conventional teaching. These learning benefits have been assigned to the constant adjustments and personalization done by teachers, based on the progress achieved by students. Bloom was a strong believer in the idea that all students can achieve superior results if given the proper learning conditions, meaning teaching adapted to their rhythm, learning rate and style (Murray & Pérez, 2015).

Bloom started this idea based on his taxonomy of educational objectives (Bloom, 1956) and divided the cognitive processes from the simplest such as knowledge remembering to the more complex, like making judgements about the value of an idea. Later on, in 1999, Lorin

Anderson wrote an updated version of Bloom's taxonomy, which accounts for a larger number of factors that have an impact on learning and teaching. Unlike the former version, this new taxonomy makes the difference between knowing what and knowing how.

Technical implementation

In terms of technical implementation, although different, these adaptive systems have three things in common:

A student model, which involves student characteristics, such as personal data, learning habits, level of knowledge and learning styles (Huong, 2016). In this model, there are two options - a static model, that uses the students' attributes just once and a dynamic model, that constantly and continuously updates students' attributes. These characteristics can be explicitly achieved through scales and assessment tools or implicitly, by watching students' interaction with the system (Murray & Pérez, 2015).

A domain model, which aims at organizing knowledge in an area, by mapping learning resources such as content, exercises, evaluations and other learning objectives (Murray & Pérez, 2015). In other words, this model shows what needs to adapt and the most important aspect of this model is represented by breaking knowledge into learning elements. This model is implemented as a set of resources described as meta-data, that includes traits, knowledge, instructor role. A proper model is built from a collection of materials that are diverse in terms of format, type and teaching method.

An adaptation model, that represents the teaching strategy that defines how and where adaptation takes place, by analysing students' characteristics and adding learning resources (Murray & Pérez, 2015).

Types of adaptive systems

In terms of teaching systems, there are three types, and some of those are adaptive: closed, open and hybrid systems. Closed systems have predefined content and courses, for a fast implementation. Open systems allow students to control all configurations of a teaching and learning platform, as well as to take decisions regarding the content. Hybrid systems allow a limited configuration, such as selecting the lessons to include or importing parts of courses. Presently, there is a preference for hybrid systems, because they combine the time necessary for developing adaptive courses with the flexibility of platforms to control content and evaluations.

Within the adaptive learning systems, learning content, concepts sequence and evaluations are configured in such a manner to reflect the learning objectives of the course. The systems show the content based on a series of factors such as students' performance, demographics or similar skills or use some predetermined learning paths based on the information gained from evaluations. As students progress based on their evaluations, they can see the information presented in diverse ways, personalized according to their learning needs. From the interactions with the students, the systems learn and adjust their learning rhythm. This personalization means adapting the learning environment to the students' needs (Monova-Zheleva, 2005). Most of those personalized learning systems are done for e-learning or m-learning (mobile learning) and only few are built for cloud-based learning (Nedungadi & Raman, 2012).

There are several platforms and content creators that offer such adaptive learning tools, like Khan Academy, McGraw-Hill or Pearson. Some new platforms appear like Acrobatiq, Cerego or Smart Sparrow, that offer systems with a certain degree of personalization. There are also schools and universities that are using and testing adaptive education: Arizona State University, Arizona North University or Florida University.

Pros and Cons of Online Adaptive Education

In terms of advantages, an adaptive education system allows students to apply the knowledge they accumulated previously and learn faster. Also, students can achieve mastery before moving to a new topic and teachers can avoid teaching for the average students. Also, it was proven that, after being enrolled in an adaptive course, students come back for more similar courses and they consider the time spent as a good investment (Freda, 2016). Teachers can monitor students' needs easier and also measure their performance (Educause, 2017). Adaptive education can help students remember more information and achieve higher outcomes (Nakic, Granic & Glavinic, 2015). In an adaptive learning system, students have the possibility to personalize their learning, which can increase their competence (Dziuban, Moskal, Johnson & Evans, 2017). Liu & Lim (2020) suggest using AI (Artificial Intelligence) to solve the balance between scalability and quality and propose a model named SEAL (Self-Evolving Adaptive Learning), which is a system that allows personalized learning. This is definitely a plus, since AI is a widely studied concept, with a lot of funds invested in research and development.

Sangineto et al. (2008) noticed significant differences in students' performance before and after using an adaptive learning system, with a sharp progress. Latham et al. (2004) showed that students learning with an adaptive system recorded higher test scores than those learning in a classical approach. Adaptive learning is an excellent way of helping both at risk students and advanced ones (Educause, 2018), especially by measuring the data through analytics, which can predict what will happen with those students and how to make that happen. Other pluses are the scaling of this type of teaching, the lower costs and downsizing fraud attempts due to a personalized content and evaluation (Educause, 2017).

Simply put, the adaptive learning approach transforms the current education paradigm (Elmunsyah, 2020) and allows anyone to learn from anywhere, at any time.

On the negative side, some scientists cautioned that the technological transformations we are now experiencing can enrich and guide the learning experience (Stracke & Tan, 2018), and at the same time they have the potential to neglect students' affective learning (Näykki et al., 2019). It was shown that, at the beginning, students spend more time with an adaptive course compared to a traditional one (Freda, 2016). Implementation costs are higher at first, sometimes the support is inappropriate, the amount of information and training needs are bigger (Freda, 2016). Adaptive teaching requires a considerable amount of time to build a detailed curriculum and a content to support learning objectives (Educause, 2017). Last, these systems are useful in competence based programs, where students learn at their own pace. Although not exactly a minus but rather a myth or a misconception, is the idea that adaptive learning systems will replace the teachers currently teaching in a classical format (Cavanagh, Chen, Lahcen & Paradiso, 2020). Yet this could not be further from the truth because, though automatized, the process of adaptive learning still needs humans to design, implement, test and continuously adjust the process. Rather, adaptive learning is and will become a complementary approach to classical teaching. Means et al. (2010) proved in a meta-analysis that blended learning (a combination of both traditional teaching and online adaptive learning) yields more positive effects than a simple face to face teaching alone. Karam et al. (2016) studied these issues and mentioned the importance of two main concepts - fidelity and quantity. By fidelity, they measured whether a course was implemented exactly as it was meant, and by quantity, they measured the amount of an intervention needed to achieve an effect. Phillips, Pane, Reumann-Moore & Oluwatosin (2020) consider that one of the challenges in online adaptive learning is to keep the students on task. For this, the technology must be engaging enough to prevent the students from doing something else during teaching. Also, teachers will need constant support to help them understand and integrate the online adaptive learning strategies with the classical approach (Phillips et al., 2020).

Conclusions

Currently, with few researches that have tested these systems, there are a lot of challenges when supporting adaptive learning education (Cavanagh, Chen, Lahcen & Paradiso, 2020), such as finding funds and grants, convincing students and teachers to use these platforms, selecting the right people to teach, collecting and analysing big data and, last but not least, understanding and accepting that adaptive education is not a holy grail with solutions for everyone and everything. There is a growing need to continue to develop apps and programs that implement and test adaptive learning, both in academic and private endeavours. It is clear that the classic - linear education we have used so far can no longer be successfully applied with nowadays students, because their environments and needs have changed, and ultimately, the world has changed. And these changes bring the need for schools and universities to accept a harsh truth: adapt or become obsolete.

All these studies prove that further data and research is needed to clarify how adaptive learning should be implemented in real practice (Miaomiao & Rui, 2020). It is obvious that studying and incorporating adaptive learning is the right path to choose in the current worldwide development. And that, for optimal results, educational best practices should consider implementing adaptive learning, complementary with the classical face to face teaching.

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DIDACTIC STRATEGIES, CLASS MANAGEMENT PRACTICES AND LEARNING PERFORMANCES IN THE HIGH SCHOOL ECONOMIC EDUCATION. A CRITICAL REALISM PERSPECTIVE

COSMIN-FLORIN LEHENE[1]

ABSTRACT. There are two main classical fields of research which have been trying for decades to give explanations of the class molesting problems or the low performances of pupils in learning. One is the educational psychology and the other is the pedagogy. The educational psychologists put at the center (among other factors) the human centric aspects such as cognitive processes, emotions or behavioral aspects involved in educational processes such as learning, memory, cognition, or attention. On the other hand, the pedagogy-oriented researchers, put at the center the didactic strategies used by the teacher, the formal planning, the projection of lessons, or the evaluation done in educational contexts. In this paper, I argue that in many cases, there are important contextual aspects which are not considered as seriously as they should. Put simple, for instance, if the adolescents are not interested in the discipline because the discipline taught is not a baccalaureate discipline the interest in learning and the learning achieved by the adolescents will be poor, no matter what didactic strategy, or class management practice the professor uses. In this line of thinking, in this paper, I try to investigate through a case study research strategy, the contextual aspects responsible for the class problems and for the low performances in economic learning, giving the context a central role. Based on the four contextual causes of problems

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identified in the paper, I proposed four practical solutions/short term solutions applicable in the classroom, in order to improve the immediate attractiveness of the educational context.

Key words: *didactic strategies; class management; performance in learning; high school economic education.*

1. Introduction

Modern education can be seen as a set of activities devoted to the formation of new generations of citizens, through the dissemination of knowledge, development of abilities and behaviors, assimilation of values and cultural norms inherited in time by one particular society (Ionescu *et al.,* 1995). Although the education has to achieve some specific finalities, in many cases, this fact is not as simple as is desired by the teachers. In many cases, the teachers have developed formal planning, projects of lessons, have drawn operational objectives and sketched didactic strategies suitable for application (Albulescu and Albulescu, 1999; Ionescu and Bocos, 2009/2017) and despite all this planning the result from the teaching-learning activities could be disappointing.

In this paper, I try to examine through a case study research strategy why some high schools perform poorer (under average) in economic education, despite all the planning mentioned above. I do so, through taking into account the learning experience of 81 adolescents and the general context in which this study was conducted. More specifically, I search for the causal explanations of problems in the classroom and in consequence, low performances in learning, trying to penetrate the empirical surface to deep structures. The search for a causal explanation, rather than generalizable patterns, requires moving beyond what can be observed to why the observed events have occurred (Piekkari and Welch, 2018).

In this line of thinking, the paper brings some original contributions with respect to the following domains. First, I looked at the social phenomena from other/a different philosophical position. The relationship between the didactic strategies, class management practices and learning performances are well enough understood within the scientific literature from a positivistic point of view. It means, there are developed scientific theories framework, models, regarding the didactic strategies, class management practices which all are assumed that work in all the situations. What I bring into discussion is the *main importance of the context* in determining the performance in learning. Particularly, in medium and low performers high schools.

Second, the paper is original regarding the fact that is an action research paper. Action research is a method of introducing into the practice some tools/procedures/solutions derived from existing theories and checking the discrepancies between the existing theories and empirical data and drawing conclusions which aim to refine/improve the existent theories (Bhattacherjee, 2012). Until now, there is a lot of scientific knowledge within the fields of educational psychology and pedagogy. But what is missing here, at least at the author awareness, is how the existing theories are actually applied into the practices and if these theories, in specific environments, have an impact in improving the learning performances. As we are going to see in this paper it seems that in the problematic contexts the performance in learning will be poor, no matter what advanced class management practices, or didactic strategies are implemented by the docent. This fact comes in contradiction with what we are already know in the present moment regarding the topic of our study.

Third, the research method is new regarding the fact that uses complementarily deductive research and inductive research. It means, the author has started with a deductive research (identifying and describing the discrepancies between the existent theories and the data in the reality) and continued with an inductive research (based on the discrepancies identified, the author developed assumptions in the form of lessons learnt which aim to refine/improve the exiting theories). It aims to refine the existent theories not through a theory testing approach, neither through a pure theoretical paper but through a theory building approach.

In this rationale, overall, from a research life-cycle perspective (Bhattacherjee, 2012; Carlile and Christenses, 2004; Eisenhardt, 1989) adopting a Critical Realism (CR) philosophical position (Bhaskar, 1998;

Ragin, 1992, 1997) I have elaborated an article which aims to refine/ improve the theories in the field of educational psychology and pedagogy. Through a single case study, based on empirical qualitative and quantitative data analysis, collected through observations, interviews, discussions, and secondary data analysis I found some explanations for the problems and the lack of interest of the adolescents regarding the economic education, within the specific context. I investigated the learning performances in the high school economic education in a medium performer high school.

Drawing upon the existent theories in the field of educational psychology, pedagogy and managerial economics the paper may be important for several reasons: (1) it can help the practice of economic pedagogy at the high school level be improved, (2) the paper develops some lessons learnt which can be transferred - not generalized - to other similar contexts; (3) the paper brings into discussion the need of considering building an appropriate educational context first, before considering other factors of learning, in medium and low performers high schools, (4) it makes a call for prioritizing the introduction of social and emotional interventions (SEL – Social and Emotional Learning) in medium and low performers high schools, (5) it develops practical solutions, applicable in the classroom, in order to improve the immediate attractiveness of the educational context.

The rest of the paper continues as follows. I will begin by discussing the main contributions within the literature review section, contributions which may have an impact or are related with the topic adopted in this paper. Next, I will present the research methodology I have chosen for this paper and I will continue with the empirical part. The paper ends through discussing the practical implications for the economic pedagogy at the high school level and the main limits and possible future avenues for research.

2. Literature review

There is a scientific fact stating that the attention of high school pupils, class disturbing, and peer molesting are some of the most important problems facing the teachers and schools in the modern academic environment (Mih, 2010/2018). Normally, the high schools within which these problems occur more often are characterized by lower levels of learning performances such as: lower semester and annual grades; lower grades at the baccalaureate exam; lower chances regarding university admissions and so on. These facts are easily observable through consulting specialized data bases in Romania such as *Admitere liceu* (www.admitereliceu.ro, 2020). The psychological and pedagogical schools have tried for decades to identify the determinants of the problems such as those mentioned above in order to increase the performance of the educational process as a whole.

Along the time, one stream of researchers tried to seek explanations regarding the problems in schools and the poor performance of children in learning activities from a psychological orientation (Piaget, 1965; Vygotski, 1971). Despite the fact that there are now well-established theories explaining, for instance, the cognitive development of children (Piaget, 1965; 1973), behavioral theories developed by Pavlov, Watson, Skinner, Thorndike (David, 2000) applied to the educational fields, decades of research in the cognitive educational psychology field developed by Sternberg, Atkinson, Shiffrin (Mih, 2010/2018) – many times the contextual aspects are playing a secondary role in the scholars' explanation regarding the performance of adolescents in high school. The contextual aspects, in many cases, are integrated into psychological or pedagogical explanations but are not view such as the main cause in determining the poor learning or the problems occurring in high school.

For instance, in the classical theory of cognitive development Jean Piaget (1965; 1973) considered the contextual aspects impacting the cognitive development of children. Starting with behavioral observations the swiss professor integrated child's abilities with their environment and found some cognitive operational structures characterizing each child along developmental stages in his cognitive development process. Even though the Piaget's theory takes the environment into account in explaining the operational cognitive structures development along ontogenically stages, the theory does not put at the center the context.

One practical implication for education resulting from Piaget's theory is the fact that the type of didactic instruction should be aligned with the level of maturation of the kid's cognitive operational structures

(Mih, 2010/2018). Despite the fact that I align with this idea, one can see in everyday teaching that because of some contextual factors (e.g. the discipline's importance in the high school curriculum, the school's importance in the adolescent's family and in his social relationships) the same adolescents from more favorable contexts will obtain better performances no matter the didactic strategy is used by the docent. Therefore, the relationship between the adequate didactic strategy (which should be aligned with the kids' level of cognitive development as professor Piaget stated) and the performance is influenced by the context (moderated, or at the extreme even mediated). In short, the context it seems to be the main cause/determinant of learning performances, at least in medium and low performers educational contexts.[2]

In this line of thinking, in this paper, I examine some of the contextual factors (such as the importance's of the discipline in the high school curriculum, or the importance of the discipline for the future career of the high school adolescent) in order to better explain the performance of the adolescents in high school economic education. More specifically, from a critical realist perspective I try to seek some credible and transferable explanations (Welch and Piekkari, 2017) regarding the performance of adolescents in economic education in Romania, giving the contextual factors a *central role* in explaining the performance in learning.

Another stream of researchers is giving the didactic strategy used by the professor a central role in explaining the problems and the poor performance of adolescents in high school. Some authors argue that the didactic strategy used by the docent can be one source of this kind of problems (Albulescu and Albulescu, 1999; Bocoș and Jucan, 2008). For instance, the authors in this orientation argue that the adolescents are non-attentive and class disturbing in the situations when the teacher uses expositive didactic methods such as exposure, lectures and didactic talks. The supporters of this theory argue that the teachers should abandon the expositive methods and instead replace the lectures with some more adequate active-participative didactic methods. For instance, academic

[2] The concept context in this paper refers to the general, institutional (the educational organization's context) and classroom specific contexts (Cerghit, 2002). Each component of the context it is divided in many other subcomponents which influences the performance in learning.

heuristic debates, didactic dialogue, case studies etc. This orientation, however, may be even more pronounced among teachers in practice. The idea is, in this orientation, that the problem with the adolescents not paying attention, disturbing the class, molesting their colleagues is the expositive strategy per see. Through replacing the lectures and exposures with case studies, heuristic conversations and didactic dialogues – the supporters argue – the problems will be resolved. In this orientation, the proponents put at the center the didactic strategy used by the docent as the source of the problems in class management.

What I do in this paper is to question this orientation and I argue that there are possible contextual factors which can better explain the performance of adolescents in economic education in high school, rather than the didactic strategy used by the docent. In this rationale, my suppositions are aligned with the socio-constructivism paradigm of learning (Vygotski, 1971). What I did in this paper is to investigate some specific contextual factors explaining the problem in schools and the performance of adolescents in the high school economic education from a vygotskian theory of learning. The idea is that the performance of pupils in the high school and the problems they make in the classroom cannot be explained correctly without giving the context a major role. As the cognitive development of children cannot be explained without taking in consideration the culture and social relationships of the children (Vygotski, 1971) the same with the performance in learning in the high school. The class molesting problems, the lack of attention, the skipping classes and the poor performances are the result of social and cultural aspects rather than to be a result of the didactic strategy.

I actually make a call for combining active-participative didactic strategies with lectures and other traditional approaches rather than totally abandoning the expositive oriented didactic strategies[3]. More specifically, I argue that the didactic strategy per see is not the cause of the adolescents' problematic behavior instead there are other factors. The relationship between the didactic strategy per see, no matter its orientation, is influenced (moderated, or even mediated) by some situational/contextual

[3] Lehene (2019) also makes a call for continuing using expositive and active-participative didactic strategies in university level management education, rather than totally abandoning the cultivation of the informative dimension of education.

variables. It means, it is necessarily a certain contextual climate in order to exist a relationship between the didactic strategy and the performance in learning. In turn, each didactic strategy has its advantages and its disadvantages (Albulescu and Albulescu, 1999). I argue that both are necessarily for a proper economic education in high school. But, the performance of the adolescents in high school economic education, particularly in medium and low performers high schools is determined mainly by the context (some situational/contextual variables), and not the didactic strategy.

In the next paragraphs, we are going to see how the reality looks like in a medium performer high school, from the perspective of an action research. We are going to see which are the discrepancies/anomalies between the existing theories (didactic strategies and class management) and the empirical data, within the specific context.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Philosophical position

The present paper seeks to offer an explanation regarding the determinants of the problems in class and the poor learning performances of the adolescents in the high school economic education from a critical realism philosophical perspective. Critical realism (CR) is a modern paradigm which seeks to offer plausible explanations for a social phenomenon taking the context into account (Welch *et al.*, 2011). The critical realism allows the researchers to develop a causal explanation of a social phenomenon, through a holistic approach, considering the breadth of the organizational and social factors having a causal role in the explanation of the phenomenon (Bhaskar, 1998; Ragin, 1997, 1992; Wynn and Williams, 2012). In this case, the CR takes into the account, for instance, the emotions and attentional abilities of the adolescents (Goleman, 1995/2006), their cognitive distortions and unconscious information processing (David, 2006), and all the adolescent experiences happening within and outside the class, but which influence the activities within the class.

According to Welch *et al.* (2011) critical realism was developed as an alternative to the classical positivism and interpretative philosophical positions, combining components of both in order to develop new knowledge. Through evidence from a single site, we try to offer a credible, transferable, dependable and confirmable theory (Welch and Piekkari, 2017) regarding the problems occurring in the high schools in economic education. Within the research methodology literature, the studies conducted in the critical realism tradition are broadly known such as "contextualized explanations" (Welch *et al*., 2011). What I specifically do in this paper I search for the explanations for causes and importantly, the contextual conditions under which the causes occur. (The cause being the low performance in learning in medium and low performers high schools, regarding the economic education.)

From a research life-cycle perspective this paper is theory refinement/improvement oriented. Although there may exist also scholars not accepting that one theory may be also refined with other scientific methods, beyond the utilization of statistical tests, there are now some papers published in world-class journals, which have demonstrated how a theory can be tested/refined with other methods. For instance, case studies (Gilbert, 2005; Szulanski and Jensen, 2006; 2011). In this line of thinking, through observations and interview-based methods (such as daily conversations and observations of adolescents' cognitions, emotions and behaviors in class) I developed some assumptions in the form of lesson learnt for transfer to other similar cases or contexts.

Aligned with the philosophical position adopted in this paper the output resulting from the paper are assumptions in the form of lessons learnt which can be transferred with careful considerations to other similar contexts (Welch *et al.,* 2011; Welch and Piekkari, 2017). More specifically, the critical realists, despite the fact that they align with the positivists at ontological level (there is a truth), they assume that there is not possible to fully understand this truth, aligning with the interpretivists at the epistemological level. Therefore, giving this philosophical base, the generalization from the scientific theories built in the CR tradition is limited (Piekkari and Welch, 2018; Wynn and Williams, 2012). To be contrasted this assumption with the interpretivist philosophical positions which even assume that the generalization is not possible. All the truth is time and context bound (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Stake, 1995 *apud*

Welch *et al.,* 2011). In this line of thinking, the lessons learnt from this paper, according the CR, could be transferred - not generalized – to other medium and low performers high school, in the domain of economic education.

3.2 Methods

The main research strategy adopted in this paper is the case study. I chose a single case study design with three embedded units of analysis. The single case studies have some advantages in comparison with multiple case studies and with statistical/quantitative studies. According to Yin (1984/2014) the single case study is an appropriate research design under several circumstances: critical, unusual, common, revelatory, or longitudinal social phenomena all fit better with the in-depth and rich descriptions pursued through single case studies. The main advantage of this research strategy results from its nature: the in-depth analysis of the social phenomena, focusing on many constructs and variables (not only few), taking the context into account and, very important, considering the personal characteristics of the subjects involved in the study (Dyer and Wilkins, 1991; Ragin, 1997).

Data sources

Observations. The author carefully observed the behavior and registered the subjective experience of 81 high school pupils during six intensive months. The adolescents were involved in educational activities related to the economic high school education in the site mentioned above. As a direct teacher (with a daily meeting with the older adolescents – 11^{th} and 12^{th} grades and a two-day meeting a week with younger adolescents – 9^{th} grade) the author was able to find some explanations of the class problems (why the adolescents make problems in class) and for the lower performances in economic learning (why the adolescents do not learn as they should). The observations were coded by the teacher regarding the following scheme: the cognitive pattern [rational/irrational (David, 2006)]; the emotions displayed during the learning activities in class [functional/dysfunctional – Goleman, 1995/2006)], and the behavior displayed during the learning activities in class [adaptive/nonadaptive (David, 2000)]. Table 1.

Table 1. Description of the methods implemented

The case: AM technological high school	**Hours of observation (400 hours)**	**Number of adolescents observed (81)**
IX grade	60	31
XI grade	160	27
XII grade	180	23
Methods		
• Informal structured interviews		43
• Secondary data analysis (classbook; secondary analysis of the formal tests, power point presentations elaboration, comparative analysis; regulatory documents)		81 (minus absents)
• Daily observations of adolescents' behavior		81 (minus absents)
• Informal discussions regarding adolescents' future		81 (minus absents)

(Source: author's own elaboration)

Interviews. All the older adolescents present to the class in one day (eleventh and twelfth grades) were asked to complete an informal document regarding some aspects of interest, for the purpose of understanding their motivation behind the engagement / lack of engagement in the teaching-learning activities. Were pursued three main dimensions: (1) social and economic status, (2) their future career, (3) what they like to do in life – pleasant life, good life, meaningful life (David, 2000). According the existent knowledge in the educational psychology literature these dimensions were focused such as the main motivation for the engagement/lack of engagement in the educational activities conducted at school. Table 2.

Table 2. Informal structured interviews

Questions adolescents needed to answer
Where are you from (rural or urban area)?
What was your level of scholar performance last year (annual mean)?
What do you want to do after the high school?
What do you want to do on long term (your career)?
What are your hobbies? What do you like to do in your life?

(Source: author's own elaboration)

Secondary source and other data. Regulatory documents were examined such as The Standard for the Professional Development, Year Planning, Curriculum for Technological Education and class related archives such as the classbook, the tests given for formative evaluation along the year, the power point presentations, and the comparative analysis between two companies. In this line of thinking, the classbook was investigated in order to check the grades obtained by the adolescents in relation with the disciplines taught. The formal tests, power point presentations and the comparative analysis were analyzed for consistency in writing and the development of adolescents intellectual working abilities (capacity of argumentation, capacity of analyzing and synthesizing data, critical thinking, capacity of elaboration).

In this category I classify also various informal discussions conducted with the adolescents along the year with the purpose of calming and leading the class toward a functional educational climate. In this line of thinking, I coded these interactions such as functional (happened few times) or dysfunctional (happened many times). Table 1.

Data analysis

First, I developed some theoretical constructs (not variables – Bhattacherjee, 2012) and the underlying assumptions and logic linking the constructs from the existent literature, around which I developed the theoretical framework. Then, I synthesized the collected data and based on the pattern matching analytical technique (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin 1984/2014) I continuously iterate back and forth between the proposed theoretical framework (which captures the existent theories in the pedagogy and educational psychology literature) and empirical data. Based on the discrepancies identified between the theory and data I search for explanations of the discrepancies. Yin (1984/2014) calls this analytical strategy *Relying on theoretical propositions*. Each unit of analysis (in our case, each class) provided empirical evidence showing anomalies/ discrepancies between the preexisting theories and data.

In this line of thinking, the theoretical constructs around which I develop this paper are adopted from the pedagogy literature. I refer to a didactic strategy to an integrated/holistic approach composed from teaching methods, didactic tools, resources and procedures, forms of didactic activity organization; all combined together, in order to help the teacher to conduct the class to achieve its stated learning objectives (Ionescu and Bocoș 2009/2017). According to Albulescu and Albulescu (1999) the didactic strategies can be classified in two main categories: expositive (lectures, demonstration, explanation) and active-participative (heuristic conversation, didactic dialog, case studies, elaboration of projects, discovery-oriented learning, problematization).

In this paper, when I refer to the learning performances, we refer to an observed alteration in the subject's behavior due to the educational actions applied by the teacher (Mih, 2010/2018). The performance in learning was monitored according to the operational learning objectives theory (Bloom, 1971 *apud* Albulescu and Albulescu, 1999). Therefore, during six intensive months I monitored the advances in learning of the adolescents in our sample in the following domains: cognitive informative (the assimilation of new knowledge), cognitive formative (the development of analyzing and synthesizing abilities, critical thinking, elaboration of projects), affective (the attitude and emotions displayed toward the economic education) and psychomotor abilities (the elaboration of power point presentations and public speaking).

Finally, I refer to the class management practices implemented by the teacher to the specific behavioral interventions developed by the psychologists – such as the *Verbal Promting, Premack Principle, Contingency Contract, Skinner's Model for Behavioral Control* (reinforcements and punishments), *Gradual Strengthening* – in order to manage the class by keeping the adolescents in the appropriate emotional state (David, 2000; Mih, 2010/2018). Table 3.

Table 3. Description of the constructs

What didactic strategies and methods were implemented	Expositive: Lectures, heuristic conversations, academic debates, didactic dialogues Formative: Power point presentations elaborations Comparative analysis between companies Economic analysis of firm resources and competences	
What class management practices were implemented	Verbal Prompting, Premack Principle, Contingency Contract, Skinner's Model for Behavioral Control (reinforcements and punishments) Gradual Strengthening	
How was the performance in learning assessed	Pure cognitive (assimilation of economic principles, theories and concepts)	As expected/as stated at the beginning Below the standards set Above the standards set
	Cognitive formative (ability to elaborate projects and power point presentations)	Minimum grade 8: yes
	Affective-attitudinal (attitude and emotions displayed toward the economic education)	Professor subjective appreciation: yes or no
	Psychomotor-actional (elaboration of power point presentations and public speaking)	Minimum grade 8: yes

(Source: author's own elaboration based on the cited references)

3.3 Specific advantages of using this methodology

The theory life cycle starts with some researchers having some ideas, developing a research plan, gathering the data, inducing theory from data and then testing the theory with statistical tests and methods, closing temporarily the circle of life cycle theory. The theory is then accepted temporarily within the scientific community until new contradictory findings or until some new advancements refine the existent framework (Bhattacherjee, 2012; Carlile and Christenses, 2004; Eisenhardt, 1989). This paper is addressed to theory refinement. It means, currently there are educational psychology and pedagogy well established theories regarding the improvement of the education system as a whole, but they are developed such as generalist frameworks. In order to refine an established theoretical framework, there are possible two strategies: 1) improving with a pure theoretical paper (which then should be pursued through a research-oriented strategy) or 2) improving with a research-oriented paper. The theory refinement with a research-oriented paper is suitable to be improved with two strategies: 2.1) theory building or 2.2) theory testing. This paper is theory improvement/refinement oriented, but not with a theory testing approach, rather, with a theory building approach (2.1). In short, I aim to incrementally refine the existent knowledge regarding the class management theory, respectively the didactic strategies and the relationship of these theories with the learning performances through a theory building approach, not theory testing. The goal is to build theory, not to test the theory (Eisenhardt and Grabner, 2007).

The main advantage of using this methodology is that through a single case study with an embedded design the author provides some propositions in order to refine (incremental advancement) the existent theories in the field of educational psychology and pedagogy. First, in comparison with the pure theoretical advance of the theory this paper is grounded in empirical data, in the sense of the grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Starting with observations of adolescents' behaviors, informal discussions, secondary data analysis the author was able to penetrate under the surface and identify some patterns regarding the poor performance in learning. Second, in comparison with a theory testing approach – statistical theory testing in order to advance/refine the existent theories – using a single case study with an embedded design the author was able to take into considerations the broader system within which the case was embedded and all the experience of the adolescents in the educational context.

4. Observations, data analysis, and lessons learnt for theory improvement

AM is a state funded high school in the city of Cluj-Napoca, Romania. Cluj-Napoca is the fourth city in Romania by number of inhabitants, after the capital Bucharest, Iasi and Timisoara with a population of 323.108 inhabitants (National Institute of Statistics, 2020). The city is an economic hub and a cultural center with an intercultural population. The city has the largest number of students in Romania. Every year thousands of foreign and Romanian students come to the Cluj for studies. The city is characterized by a cosmopolite and university-oriented culture (Wikipedia, 2020).

The site is a medium performer technological high school in Romania. It was founded in the 1980's due to the anticipation of the local engineers of the explosion of the new emerging technologies such as personal computers, information technology services and the development of modern electronics devices. With a 50 years history, AM occupies now a traditional, leading position in Romania in its industry education orientation (*www.admitereliceu.ro*, 2020). The high school has passed from 80's to our days through various reforms, 'flirting' between two major scientific fields: engineering and economics. If in the burgeoning period the focus of the high school was on engineering disciplines, in our days the economic specialization represents an important educational component in order to try to assure the survival of the high school.

According to the Institute for Educational Sciences in Romania - IES (2020) AM is a technological high school institution, offering high-school educational programs in both fields: engineering and economics. Judging after the performances obtained in the last years, AM is a medium-lower performing high school depending criteria such as pupils' baccalaureate exams, admission criteria and the participation in Olympics. According to the specialized website *www.admitereliceu.ro* (2020) AM is situated in top 350 high schools in Romania, with an average admission exam note 7.50, 6,52 baccalaureate's mean, and 78 % baccalaureate's successful mean (*www.admitereliceu.ro*, 2020).

The economics and business education in Romania start formally at the high school level (IES, 2020). There are now three broad economic related specializations, at the high school level, the pupils can choose in order to enter into the field for the first time and get contact with the economic and business objective laws, principles and concepts. They are called: public alimentation and tourism, economic-administrative-post services, commerce and services (Ministry of Education in Romania, 2020). The main purpose of the high school economic education is to introduce the pupils for the first time to the economic and business disciplines such as firm's administration, marketing, accountancy, service quality, marketing policies, negotiation and contracting, financial analysis etc. Beyond these economic disciplines, in Romania, the pupils in high school also study in their 10th grade Education for Entrepreneurship and Economy, respectively Applied Economy in their 11th and 12th grades.

Within the tables 4, 5 and 6 there is presented the summary of the results of the educational activities conducted within the three classes/ grades in our case site. Based on the discrepancies/anomalies observed between the preexisting theories and the empirical data, the author next is going to discuss some explanations regarding those poor results in learning. According the CR position, the author tries to go deeper than the observed evidence and portray the main causes of the problems, within this context, considering the breadth of the social linkages the case was embedded and the characteristics of the adolescents.

As one can see in the tables above the results were poor despite the formal planning at the beginning of the scholar year. Particularly, regarding the informative dimension of education. Because of the problematic emotions and behaviors discussed next, the assimilation of economic principles, theories, concepts, objective laws were seriously hampered. The lack of interest and the disengagement conducted to a hard implementation of the lectures, heuristic conversations and didactic dialogues. For instance, if the teacher asked some questions in order to problematize the topic of the lesson many times nobody wanted to participate at the conversation. (Normally, the same two, three kids were participating.)

On the formative dimension, the results obtained are aligned according the stated objectives (for the cognitive-formative and psychomotor domains). But even here, because of the problematic emotions and behaviors discussed next, the implementation of the power point presentations, for instance, was very hard. The goal was to help the adolescents to build their analytical and synthesis skills, to cultivate their elaboration abilities and critical thinking and to improve their public speaking abilities. For all the objectives, we can assume that they were attained (according the grades obtained by the adolescents in the classbook). On the other hand, the affective-attitudinal objective (improving adolescents' perception and cultivating a positive attitude toward economic disciplines) was not attained, giving the low interest and disengagement manifested by adolescents the entire period of observation.

Table 4. Tabulation of the adolescent's responses within the interview

Question	**Responses grouping (N =43)**	
Where are you from?	Urban	14
	Rural/Neighborhood	29
What was your level of scholar performance last year (annual mean)?	Above nine	16
	Above eight	22
	Less than eight	5
What do you want to do after the high school?	University	24
	University (specialization economics)	11
	Other activities	
	Undecided	7
		1
What do you want to do on long term (your career)?	Economic related professions	12
	Other professions	
	Undecided	21
		10

(Source: author's own elaboration)

Table 5. Results of the educational activities after six months

Dimension of education	Educational activities	Results
Operational objectives related to the informative dimension	Didactic strategies and methods implemented: lectures, heuristic conversations, didactic dialogues, collective academic debates Many behavioral interventions needed to be implemented: Verbal Prompting, Skinner's Model for Behavioral Control (reinforcements and punishments) Gradual Strengthening	Much below the standards set at the beginning of the scholar year
Operational objectives related to the formative dimension	Didactic strategies and methods implemented: projects elaboration, comparative/economic analysis, power point elaborations Many behavioral interventions needed to be implemented: Verbal Prompting, Premack Principle, Contingency Contract, Skinner's Model for Behavioral Control (reinforcements and punishments) Gradual Strengthening	As stated at the beginning of the scholar year (for the cognitive-formative and psychomotor domains). Below the standards set at the beginning of the scholar year for the affective-attitudinal domain

(Source: author's own elaboration)

In the table 6 I have synthesized the main problems encountered during the period of observation. These problems conducted to the poor performances in learning as discussed above.

Table 6. The main problems observed

Patterns observed among adolescents	Class and problems observed
Patterns of dysfunctional emotions displayed during the economic class	**IX grade** Boredom Nervousness Impatience Euphoria/exaggerated enthusiasm Shyness
	XI grade Boredom Impatience Distrust Mental fatigue
	XII grade Boredom Nervousness Impatience Euphoria/exaggerated enthusiasm Shyness Distrust Mental fatigue
Patterns of maladaptive behaviors displayed during the economic class	**IX grade** Playing different games on their smartphones Speaking with the peer repeatedly, totally ignoring the professor Walkaround the class repeatedly

Patterns observed among adolescents	Class and problems observed
	XI grade Playing different games on their smartphones Speaking with the peer repeatedly, totally ignoring the professor Skipping classes often **XII grade** Listen to music Playing different games on their smartphones Speaking with the peer repeatedly, totally ignoring the professor Walkaround the class repeatedly Making the assignments to other disciplines Eating repeatedly during the class Skipping classes often

Note. In this paper the notions functional/dysfunctional emotions and adaptive/ maladaptive behaviors are evaluated according the functional/pragmatic criteria: help or hamper the class to attain its planned objectives or favor/disfavor a positive educational climate (processing after David, 2000, 2006).
(Source: author´s own elaboration)

As one can see in the table 6 there were a lot of problems in the classes the author taught. Since the author is not a clinical psychologist the cognitive domain will not be assessed in this paper, although some irrational cognitive patterns were identified (e.g. global evaluation by the adolescents of their peers/teachers) [David, 2006]. However, the displayed emotions and behaviors during the economic class were observed and can be described, from a managerial economist perspective, with some psychology related training, in order to give some empirical based advices to accredited psychologists, educational policy makers and economic educators.

The most important problem (the main problem) which led to the poor performances in economic learning was the disengagement and the lack of interested displayed by the adolescents toward the economic disciplines taught by the professor. This lack of interest was observed in the displayed emotions and behaviors during the period of observation. The adolescents were listening to music during the class, doing their homework for other disciplines, playing on their smartphones, speaking continuously to each other totally ignoring the professor and many more problematic behaviors. This lack of interest and disengagement conducted to poor performances in economic learning (table 3 and 4). At the base of this lack of interest and disengagement stood some causes, which will be discussed next in patterns.

What were the patterns of causes which led to poor performances?

A lack of importance of the discipline for the adolescent's future/future career

The first main cause (main pattern) regarding the problems in the class and in consequence the poor performance in learning is a lack of importance of the discipline for the adolescent's future, or for his/her future career. Because of the early stage in their life and the problematic stage the adolescents face regarding their cognitive, social and cultural development during the high school period, many of the adolescents enrolled in technological and economic oriented specializations are there because some other factors, rather than their consciousness election per see. As an example, the author of the paper asked the adolescents one day: „How many of them are there because their election?". It means, how many of the adolescents are enrolled in high school economic education because they implicitly wanted this. At this question, many of them have said that there have been other factors regarding their election of the economic specialization. For instance, many of them said "we were assigned here" and for this reason they are here and not because it was their own election.

The author also wanted to find answer to the next question: “Ok, so you are here because some other factors, but now that you are here, how many of you want to follow and keep studying in the economics or business universities?” In our case site, we asked 43 older adolescents in 11th and 12th grades what trajectory they want to pursue in their career. I wanted to know how many of them want to pursue a career in economics. From the 43 pupils interviewed, only 11 have explicitly said that they want to pursue a career in economics (Table 4). In this line of thinking, in these circumstances, the idea I develop in this paper is that no matter what didactic strategy the teacher uses the motivation for learning in adolescents could be absent. Even if we use the most modern tools and didactic methods the adolescents who are not interested in one discipline (as in our case the pupils explicitly remembered the teacher this fact several times) they will not learn and will make a lot of problems in the class, such as peer and class molesting, listen to music during the class, skipping classes and so on.

Additionally, for the older adolescents (11th and 12th grade) this assumption is more likely to be supported by data and facts. We have a window of opportunity to model the behavior of younger adolescents (9th and 10th grades) and attract them to a wanted trajectory but for older adolescents (11th and 12th grades) the importance of the discipline for their future career, we argue, will impact the motivation and the involvement in learning, no matter what didactic strategy the teacher is using or the practices of class management applied.

The conclusion is that in our case site, many adolescents in the economic specialization they want to pursue other careers in their lives and do not want to become economists. In this line of thinking, we argue that the importance of the economic disciplines for their future career election, as it is perceived by the adolescents, may impact the performance in learning. And I referring here not only to adolescent his/her perception. Parents or even peer teacher may reinforce this assumption with negative consequences for we as economic educators. The same is also true for the class management practices implemented by the teacher during the class. One can use the *contingency contract technique* or the *verbal prompting practice* in order to try to control the behavior of the adolescents, keeping them motivated and attentive to the class discussions, but the situation is going to ask for more interventions in comparison with the case the adolescents perceiving the discipline as being important for their future career. We will spend more time in trying to control the behavior of the adolescents rather than on the lesson per see. (As it was the case in our case site.) Probably, the behavioral control practices will work even if the adolescents have no interest in the discipline but will require more resources such as time and effort for the situation in which they perceive the discipline as not being so important for their future career as other disciplines.

The inappropriate class leadership style

The second main cause identified by the author through examining the whole educational context, in search for explanation of the poor performance in learning, is the inappropriate leadership style of the class. Some classical theories, regarding the class management practices, have stated that the teachers should avoid the dictatorial role in order to produce positive results in learning. For instance, the model developed by Gordon (1981) - *apud* Mih (2010/2018). What I argue in this paper is the fact that this orientation can have also one flip side. For instance, in the case the teacher is excessively tolerant and avoids using the authoritarian style, the adolescents may do not take seriously the teacher and may perceive the tolerance displayed by the docent such as a lack of importance of the discipline. Pedagogical literature suggests, that naturally, some teachers may be oriented toward tolerance and others toward exigency (Stan, 2000). I argue that the problems occur at the point the teacher may slip in each one of these directions. On the one hand, if the teacher is too tolerant, as we have discussed above, the adolescents may perceive the discipline as not being important. On the other hand, if the teacher is excessively authoritarian/dictatorial he/she may push away and chase away the adolescents from his disciplines. Sliding in any direction can be a sign of dysfunctionality. The assumption developed in this paper, based on the empirical evidence, is that being tolerant, balanced with some aspects of authority, may enhance the learning achieved, may signal the pupils that the class and the discipline are important, and may contribute to maintaining a learning favorable climate atmosphere.

As an empirical example, to support the assumption above, the author was too tolerant with a 9th grade during an entire month. As an output, the class was continuously excessively noisy, the kids were not following the professor and the lesson, and they were speaking to each other continuously during the entire lesson. As an experiment, in one class, the teacher investigated the kids which were speaking and molesting the class and graded the kids (not officially) with the lowest grades because they did not know the answers to the questions raised by the docent. As a result, following the kid's examination and grading them with the lowest grade the class was very calm, attentive and the lesson could be continued in normal conditions.

At the same class, in one day, the author asked the pupils to work in teams and complete some tasks regarding the activities done by employees in the firm´s departments (marketing, hr, production). The class was again excessively noisy. Of course, from 30 pupils only two, or three, did the task assigned to them. The rest of the class, they were playing on their smartphones, they were eating, they were doing totally other things in comparison with what the teacher told them to do. Even in the situation when the teacher walked around the room and told each pupil personally to do the task assigned, they were not even taking into account the professor and were continuing with what they were doing.

Another example, from the same class. This time we discuss an empirical example regarding the failure of an active-participative didactic strategy. At the beginning of the semester, the younger adolescents were assigned a task to realize a power point presentation regarding one company they know, love and use its products. The structure of the presentation was flexible in order the task to do not be very difficult. Regarding the specific task, 75% of the adolescents did rather good the task. The problem was that the pupils which do not need to present their work, they interpreted their peer's presentations such as a relaxation time. As an estimation, I would say that from 30 pupils in the entire class just five were normally attentive to their colleagues. The rest of them they are playing on their smartphone, sleep, eat, listen to music, sing and so on. Like in the kindergarten, even though they are now 16 years old.

The lesson learnt is that an exaggeration of the tolerating style may have negative consequences such as the lack of interest from the adolescent's part, the perception of the discipline as not being important and the development of a noninterest toward school in general. From another angle, the assumption developed above is the same with that discussed in the management theory regarding the leadership style. As in the management theory where is argued that there no exist a best leadership style and each leadership style is best suited in some specific circumstances (Goleman, 2000; Popa *et al.,* 2013), the same occurs in teaching. The best teaching style depends on the situation. There is no best teaching style. It all depends on the situation, the pupils in the class and the classroom atmosphere/climate. In some specific circumstances the professor should be tolerant and in some circumstances he/she should be authoritative.

Regarding the refinement of the extant theoretical framework, based on the pattern matching technique, I can say that in order that a didactic strategy to help the teacher to lead the class to achieves its operational objectives there is an important moderating, or even mediating variable, which I call *the teaching leadership style*. I define a *teacher's teaching leadership style* the ability one teacher possesses, which allow him/her to lead the pupils/students and the classroom as a whole in the direction that the operational objectives to be accomplished. One can see that in order the adolescents learn the scientific content and achieve greater results in learning, there is probably no direct correlation between the didactic strategy and the adolescents' learning performance. The effectiveness and efficiency of the didactic strategy no matter its orientation – expositive or active-participative – is moderated or even mediated by the teacher's teaching leadership style.

As in the previous discussion, the same is also true for the class management practices. The teaching leadership style moderates or mediates the relationship between a class management practice, such as the verbal prompting, and the learning performance. In the case the teaching leadership style is appropriate the verbal prompting (or other class management practice) will determine higher performances in learning. By contracts, if the teaching leadership style is not appropriate the verbal prompting will not be likely to produce positive performances in learning, or at least will require additional resources such as extra time and extra effort in order to produce better educational results.

A lack of importance in adolescent's general perception regarding school's importance for his/her life

The third main cause identified by the author through the pattern matching technique, regarding the problems in the classroom and in consequence the poor performance in economic learning is the influence of the family and the social relationships where the adolescent is involved and their perception regarding the importance of education. Studies reveal that adolescents pertaining to a higher-level socio-economic status family may experience more favorable educational situations in comparison with those pertaining to medium or lower-level socio-economic status (Mih, 2010/2018).

Overall, there is a perception regarding the lack of importance of the school within families characterized by poor socio-economic status. We can observe these facts in the discussions of the people on the street, in the daily life or during the practice of teaching. All these social groups where the adolescent is involved, implicitly or explicitly, unconscious or conscious, influence his/her perception, attitude and motivation regarding the importance of the school for his/her life. As a consequence, I would say that no matter what type of didactic strategy the teacher uses, if the adolescent comes to the school with the belief that the school is not important, if the parents and in his group of friends and social relationships there is a general view that the school is not important for life, the learning performance of the adolescent – no matter the didactic strategy or class management practices implemented – would be very poor.

As an example to support the assumption above, in our case site, we asked 43 older adolescents (11th and 12th grade) where they come from, since some of them were normally arriving late at the beginning of the class. From 43 pupils, 29 adolescents told the author that they came at school from the surroundings of Cluj-Napoca. We cannot judge automatically the fact that someone lives in one village that he or she has a lower socio-economic status compared with someone living in the city but we can make some assumptions after discussing with them a specific period of time and after several discussions with the head teacher of the class. Many of the problems which are described above and those that follow to be discussed next, are caused by the perception of the lack of importance of the school for life by the adolescents and the social groups he/she is involved (family, friends, neighbors).

The pattern observed in our case site is that the adolescents who value the school were alert, attentive, proactive during the class discussions, they were involved in class tasks, no matter what type of didactic strategy the professor used. By contrast, the adolescents who do not value the school arrived late to the class, they were not paying attention, spoke with their colleagues the entire lesson, listen to music, skip classes, disturb the class and so on. In our case site, the author used combinations of active-participative didactic strategies such as case studies, heuristic conversation, exercises/application of knowledge, didactic dialogue etc. and expositive oriented teaching strategies such as lectures, exposures, explanations. No matter what type of didactic strategy the author used there were again and again the same students participating.

The author used the problematization, heuristic conversation, didactic dialogue and the result was the same: participated two, three pupils. Those who value the school. The other played on their phones, did their homework for other disciplines, listen to music, talk to each other about other topics and so on. And the biggest problem is that this situation is not a particular situation, rather is the normative, happening every day.

The conclusion is that there are other factors influencing the learning achieved, beyond the didactic strategy use by the docent, being expositive or active-participative oriented, or the class management practice implemented. The effectiveness of the didactic strategy applied by the teacher no matter its orientation – informative or formative – is moderated, or even mediated by the adolescent's perception regarding school's importance for his/her life. The same is also true, for the class management practices. We can try to control the behavior of the adolescents in the class, but this does not mean that the problems will not be arising again. If the adolescents are not interested in school, tomorrow will do the same, and the day after tomorrow and so on. We will spend more time trying to control their behavior rather than teaching and transmitting them some scientific knowledge.

A lack of importance in the adolescent's perception regarding the importance of the discipline in the high school curriculum

The fourth main cause of the problems in classroom and the low performance in economic learning is the perception of the adolescents regarding the fact that the economic modules/disciplines are not important in the overall high school curriculum. Currently, in Romania the high school pupils after finishing their 12th grade have to pass a final exam called Baccalaureate. In order to be eligible for continuing their studies at the university level the adolescents need to pass the exam. The exam consists in oral and writing tests in multiple disciplines. Because the adolescents do not need necessarily to be assessed in their final exam regarding their knowledge, abilities and attitudes gained from economic related disciplines, in many cases, many of them during the high school do not take these courses as serious as they should. The rationale for the pupils in this situation is that they want to study more seriously and devote more attentional resources to the disciplines which are included in the curriculum for the baccalaureate exam. As a direct consequence, as the pupils perceive the economic related disciplines as being less important – since they are not baccalaureate disciplines – they pay less attention during the classes, they skip classes, listen to music during the class, eat, watch videos online and so on. There is an entire portfolio of dysfunctional behaviors in classes which are perceived by the pupils as being less important because they are not disciplines required for the baccalaureate.

As an empirical example, to support the assumption above, in one day, the author was holding a class in Negotiation and Contracting at a 12th grade. After the introductory moment, at the point the teacher was starting to talk to the class one student asked with loud voice she's colleague, totally ignoring the professor: "Do you have the homework for the literature class?" In another day, in the same context, other adolescent was asking his colleague "Do you know what we have to prepare for today for the math class?". Other adolescents were rounding the class for additional personal problems such as transportation, weekend parties and so on. And these are just few problems the adolescents make in classes which they explicitly said many times: "*I don´t care these disciplines*!" No matter what didactic strategy the teacher uses if the adolescents do not care the economic related disciplines the results of the learning will be completely nullified. The idea is that if the pupils in high school perceive the economic related disciplines as not being important or being less important, no matter what didactic strategy the teacher uses, the adolescents will be non-attentive and will continue making a lot of problems.

The empirical evidence in this case underlines the fact that no matter what didactic strategy the teacher uses if the discipline is being perceived as being not or less importance for the adolescents the result will be a very low economic learning performance. And from the class management practices perspective, the same is true. If the adolescents perceive that the discipline is not being important the impact of the behavioral interventions will be weakened or at least will need additional resources such as time and effort in order to control the adolescents' behavior.

Theoretical model/framework refinement: the learning performance depends on the context first, in medium and low performers high schools

Next, I am going to summarize the findings discussed above which all *deviate/contradict* more or less from the existent theories in the field of educational psychology and pedagogy.

First, in medium and low performers high schools, not in general, in the case the adolescents are not interested in the disciplines are taught, because the disciplines/modules do not fit with their career/ future, the performance will be poor, no matter the didactic strategy, or class management practices are implemented by the teacher.

Second, in medium and low performers high schools, not in general, in the case the adolescents are not interested in the disciplines/ modules are taught, because they perceive that the school is not important for the success in life, the performance in learning will be poor, no matter what the didactic strategy, or class management practices are implemented by the teacher.

Third, in medium and low performers high schools, not in general, in the case the adolescents are not interested in the disciplines are taught, because the disciplines/modules are not being perceived as being important in the scholar curriculum, the performance will be poor, no matter the didactic strategy, or class management practices are implemented by the teacher.

Fourth, in medium and low performers high schools, not in general, the teaching leadership style do have an influence in creating a positive climate favoring learning, which in turn influences the performance in learning (the classroom climate is a contextual construct). The adequate leadership style it depends on the context (situational leadership, not always democratic).

Overall, the findings tell us that in medium and low performers high schools there should be considered building a favorable prolearning context first. According the evidence in this study the context and its appropriateness for learning should be considered before the didactic strategies, class management practices or the transmission of the scientific content, in order to improve the learning performances in medium and low performers high schools. In the case the context does not favor the learning, the performance in learning will be poor, no matter the other constructs.

5. Lessons learnt and specific implications for similar high school contexts

5.1 Implications for economic teachers involved in medium and low performers high schools

There are several important contributions our paper seeks to bring for the pedagogy literature and for the practice of economic pedagogy at the high school level. The implications are mainly developed in order to help the practice of economic teaching at the high school level be improved. As we have seen in our case there are some lessons learnt which can be transferred to other similar sites with careful consideration. Next, we are going to discuss these implications and the practical solutions, applicable in the classroom, in order to improve the immediate attractiveness of the educational context.

The first important implication is the fact that the teachers involved in high school economic education, as a first step, should be aware regarding the "perceived importance" of the economic disciplines/ modules taught in high school, as they are perceived by the adolescents, probably their parents and in some cases probably peer teachers. If the economic teachers are not aware of the importance of the economic disciplines as being perceived by the adolescents, they will not be able to find appropriate solutions.

In this rationale, the teachers involved in the high school economic education should start promoting and awakening the adolescents regarding the importance of the economic and business disciplines for the *contemporary* society development. The main modality any economic teacher has, in order to correctly influence the adolescents, their parents or any peer teacher is concrete data from research. For instance, as an example, in Scimago Journal Rank (2020) among the first 50 journals according to their ranks, ten are economics, management or business-related journals. The presence of the economic and business journals in the first quartile of this database denotes the fact that the economy is a very important subject for both: research and teaching. The adolescents enrolled in high school economic education should be aware of this fact.

Even if the classical orientation among teachers, parents and adolescents is that in the high school the focus is on math, literature, languages, chemistry, biology and the disciplines so called of being of "primary importance", they should not forget that we live in a market economy and the entire global or national world functions according to the economic objective laws. Therefore, the assumption among adolescents, their parents or peer teachers that the economic related disciplines are not or less important has no rationale. No matter the domain in which the adolescents will work in their life, they will work in organizations, functioning according to the economic principles and objective laws. Through promoting, giving more information in order to awake the adolescents regarding the importance of the economic related disciplines for contemporary society development not all the pupils enrolled in high school economic education will become economists but probably a much higher percentage of them will start reconsidering the economic education and will pay more attention, not skipping classes and a greater percentage of them will start considering an economist career.

The second important implication for the educational practice is that as the evidence in our case site suggests many of the adolescents in the medium and low performers high schools are displaying behavioral problems and are not paying attention on economic classes because *they have no interest* in the disciplines and in pursuing a career in economics. What the teachers in high school economic education can do is to reinforce and keep motivating the adolescents through presenting them the various options and advantages a such career will have for themselves. For instance, the author of the paper presented in various occasions the various options the adolescents have if they want to pursue an economic career (e.g. to become an accountant, to work in a bank or in finance, to become a statistician or a manager, to work in marketing etc.) and the advantages of a such career. Is particularly important to speak positively and with enthusiasm regarding the economic career. A such reinforcement/ approach applied various times along the year probably will attract or make more curious the adolescents regarding the economic career, with better chances to create and maintain a positive learning climate and better chances to increase the learning performances of the adolescents.

The third practical implication for the economic pedagogy at the high school level is resulting from the relationship between the teaching leadership style, the classroom climate and the learning performance. As the evidence in our case site suggests, the modality the teacher conducts his/her pupils during the class in order to accomplish lesson's objectives is an important moderator, or importantly, even mediator, between the didactic strategy used/class management practice implemented by the docent and the learning performance. The implication is that the teachers involved in the high school economic education, particularly in medium and lower performers high schools, should not be willing to tolerate to many behavioral problems. A style more akin to tolerance with some elements of authoritarianism I would say that is acceptable. This practical implication is more important in the economic education than in other disciplines since as we have seen in our case, in the classical view the economic education is not so important (the adolescents told the author many times that they are not interested in these disciplines). The teachers in the high school economic education should be aware regarding their teaching leadership style and its influence on the adolescents. On the one hand, as I have told, an exaggeration of the tolerating style and the lack of enthusiasm is not appropriate in economic education since accentuates the lack of importance of the discipline in the eyes of the adolescents. On the other hand, an exaggeration of the authoritarian style will keep away and move away the adolescents from the economics education.

The fourth practical implication. The evidence in our case suggests the fact that the relationship between the didactic strategy/class management practices implemented by the teacher and the learning performance is positively or negatively moderated by the adolescent's perception regarding the importance of the school for his/her life. What the teachers in medium or low performers high schools can do is to elaborate some specific actions in order to try to increase the attractiveness of the school by the pupils' part. They can do this through several discussions regarding the importance of the school for people life, explaining them how the world function, the existent levels of education, future career they can choose etc. The next practical implication for the high school economic pedagogy practice is linked with this assumption.

I argue that the role of the economic teacher in high school should be view different than his role in university. In this line of thinking, the economic teacher in high school should assume a role more akin to a *tutor,* rather than strictly speaking a professor transmitting the knowledge embedded in the society. In high school, in comparison with university, the adolescents' level of cognitive development requires a tutor, *a* "second" mother or father, metaphorically speaking. In this line of thinking, the transmission of economic knowledge, principles and theories in high school should be as important as is the tutorial role of the economic professor. Often, the pupils search for a tutor or counseling support in disciplines which are perceived as not being so important. In this line of thinking, the practical implication is that the economic teachers in high schools should view this challenge (the tutorial role) such as an opportunity to orient and attract the pupils toward university level economic and business education.

5.2 Implications at the educational policy level

The conclusions derived from this study may have some implications at the educational policy level. Particularly, for building an educational context which favors higher learning performances. As we have seen in our study, building an appropriate educational context is more important than the didactic strategy or the class management practices used by the teacher, in medium and low performers high schools. There are some social, cultural and emotional interventions required in order that the teaching and education achieve their objectives in medium and low performers high schools. Next, I am going to discuss these implications.

The first practical implication at the educational policy level is the fact that the economic formation is important at the high school level in order to introduce the adolescents for the first time to the economic and business theories and familiarize/attract them with/to a possible economic career. The economic education is very important in the contemporary context and there should be developed direct interventions at the educational policy level/macro level to promote the importance and the attractiveness of the economic education among adolescents in high schools.

The second type of educational policy implication is counseling oriented. I argue that in the primary attention of the medium and/or low performers high schools regulators should be programs and interventions oriented toward growing the level of school's importance among the adolescents, their family and their social relationships and second the transmission of the scientific content per see. Or, at least being as important as the transmission of knowledge. By contrast, as we have seen in our paper, the resources may be wasted without too many benefits. In medium and low performers high schools, the primary importance should be devoted to developing programs such as personal counseling, family mentoring and counseling, parenting, Social and Emotional Learning – SEL (CASEL, 2020; Goleman, 1995/2006). As we have seen in our case, without these special programs we can teach again and again with what type of didactic strategy we want, the content will not be assimilated if the adolescents are not in an appropriate emotional state or if they do not care the school or the discipline. After the adolescents are perceiving correctly the importance of the school for life development and they are in an appropriate emotional state they will be ready to learn the scientific content.

6. Limits

There are several limits one should consider at the point reading this paper. Firstly, it is important to mention that the approach I have chosen for this paper is a case study, based on qualitative and quantitative analysis of the learning experience of high school pupils, involved in economic education activities. The main limit resulting from a such approach is the fact that one cannot generalize the findings to other contexts, previously testing the assumptions through quantitative/ statistical methods. The propositions in order to be suitable for transfer to other contexts should be first tested through the rigorous procedures of the statistical tests. Although the propositions seem to be very logical at the first look, in science we cannot generalize to other contexts without previously assuring ourselves the fact that the findings are not idiosyncratic phenomena (David, 2006). This limit results from a positivistic philosophical orientation.

On the other hand, the main assumptions developed from case studies, aim at analytical generalization, to theories and concepts, not statistical generalization to the number of subjects and population (Yin, 1984/2014). Therefore, the study aims to refine/improve the theories in the educational psychology and pedagogy (analytical generalization) and not aims to provide statistical generalizable assumptions. The output are some theoretical assumptions, which aim to refine the theory in the form of lessons learnt which, according critical realists, can be transferred to other similar contexts with careful considerations (Welch and Piekkari, 2017).

Secondly, it is also important to consider the fact that for all the aspects mentioned in the paper there is a higher predisposition to happen in medium and low performers high schools than in higher performers high schools. As I have derived the conclusions based on empirical data from a medium performer high school, probably the context will have a less influence on the performances in learning in outstanding high schools. It means, in outstanding high schools the relationship between the didactic strategies, respectively class management practices and performances in learning is less influenced by the contextual variables (e.g. all the pupils are interested and motivated to learn; or, they all already have been assigned to the specialization they wanted to pursue).

7. Conclusions

In this paper, through a case study research strategy, I have intended to discuss and analyze the problems encountered in teaching economic modules, in a medium-low performer high school. The problems were identified based on a pattern matching analytical technique, constantly iterating between the existent theories and empirical data, as discrepancies/anomalies between the two. Then, I have discussed the causes of the problems with the main purpose of refining/improving some aspects in the extant theories in the field of educational psychology and pedagogy. The main contributions of the paper, aimed at analytical generalization, not statistical generalization, are derived from a critical realist philosophical position, which assumes that the scientific content is better developed in the situations where the *context* and the implicit characteristics of the actors involved in the study are taken into account.

The first conclusion resulting from the present study is that there are other important factors responsible for the better or poor performances in learning in medium and low performers high schools, beyond the didactic strategies used by the professor or the class management practices implemented. More simple, in the case the adolescents are not interested in the economic discipline since they perceive the economic modules/ disciplines as not being important: 1) for their career, 2) not being important in the high school curriculum, or 3) they perceive the school as not being important for their life; no matter what didactic strategy the teacher is using at the class, or class management practice, the performance in learning will be poor. To be contrasted this lesson learnt with the prevailing theory existent within the pedagogy literature which says that there are generic didactic strategies and class management practices universal applicable. Yes, there are universal, for this reason I call them generic, but the context and building an appropriate educational context should be considered first, particularly/especially in medium and low performers high schools.

The second conclusion is the need to reconsider the adequate teaching leadership style giving the context a central role. The prevailing view within the existent theory is that there should be a democratic leadership style put in place in all the circumstances. Instead, I found that there is a need of a situational leadership style, depending the contextual aspects (e.g. predisposition to study, level of interest and engagement etc.). According this view, in some situations the teacher should be authoritarian, in some situations democratic, and in some situations should be tolerated/permissive. When I refer authoritarian, I do not refer to yelling or treating disrespectfully the pupils. Instead, I am referring to displaying a prosocial/proactive behavior/attitude in order to activate, for instance, the bored adolescents.

The third conclusion, resulting from this study conducted in a critical realism tradition, is that in medium and low performers high schools, the social and emotional learning programs (SEL) should be more important (or at least as important) than the scientific content transmitted to the adolescents (no matter the discipline). These programs, studies tell us (Goleman, 1995/2006), have the main implication in improving the context of the teaching-learning activities, and in consequence, the learning performances. Contrary, as we have seen in our case the performance in learning will be very poor if the kids/adolescents are not prepared for learning, if they are in an inappropriate emotional state, if they are not able to pay attention because they have underdeveloped attentional abilities, if they don't like or value the school. We may think that the problem is the didactic strategy, or the class management practices when in fact the problem is a low level in SEL. As we have seen in our case study.

Overall, as a main conclusion, the findings from this paper make a call for considering the importance of the context (general, school, class, emotional) as a priority, as a first step, in order to improve the performances in learning, in the medium and low performers high schools. By contrary, in the case building an appropriate prolearning context is not considered first, the performances will be poor no matter the other variables. Based on the four causes of problems identified in the paper, I proposed within the present work four practical solutions/ concrete solutions (short term solutions) applicable in the classroom, in order to improve the immediate attractiveness of the educational context.

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PARENTS' OPINION REGARDING THE USE OF DISTANCE LEARNING DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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ABSTRACT. Through this research paper, we aimed at studying the conditions in which distance learning processes have taken place at primary school level, during the temporal suspension of the face-to-face courses in pre-university education from Romania. We have also proposed some recommendations for decision-makers, educational researchers, and primary school practitioners. The questionnaire was applied in the online environment, between March 29th - May 5th of 2020. The sample of participants consisted of 1456 parents of primary school students. The results of the study revealed that some of the students faced various technical difficulties or emotional problems, and for some pupils, the level of motivation for learning decreased. Also, from the perspective of the parents, coherent and effective health education programs need to be implemented in schools, now or immediately after the end of this pandemic.

Keywords: *learning at the distance, COVID-19 pandemic, school-family partnership, family involvement*

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1. Introduction. The Relationship Between the Quality of the School-Family Partnership and Academic Achievement During Covid-19 Pandemic

The suspension of pre-university education courses, due to the current epidemiological context, has had negative effects on students' quality of life, as well as on the learning processes which take place exclusively in the online environment (Prime, Wade & Browne, 2020). Researchers, practitioners, and decision-makers in the field of education are concerned with identifying optimal solutions that ensure the continuity of learning and the effectiveness of cooperation between school and family. Distance learning activities involve a higher involvement of the parent in the learning processes. The school-family partnership ensures the efficiency of the training activities carried out during this period, because the parents supervise the learning activity and offer the students immediate communicative feedback, fulfilling some of the teacher's attributions. High family involvement in children's education is correlated with good school results and more developed social skills (Powell, Son, File & San Juan, 2010; Sheldon, 2003). Trust, mutual support, and respect ensure the functionality and resistance in time of the school-family partnership (Adams & Christenson, 2000; Lazar & Slostad, 1999). Adams & Christenson (2010) showed that, at the level of primary education, the degree of parental trust in teachers is generally high. Addi-Raccach & Arviv-Elyashiv (2008) highlighted that a high involvement of parents in education can negatively affect teachers' activity, who, in many situations, feel vulnerable and make efforts to avoid conflicts with parents. Bidirectional communication and decision-making transparency are some of the proposed solutions for strengthening the school-family relationship (Addi-Raccach & Arviv-Elyashiv, 2008; Swick, 2003). Effective communication between parents and teachers has beneficial effects on children's school performance (Cox, 2005). The higher the socio-economic level of the family is, the more significant will be their involvement in the students' learning activity (Cakiroglu, A., & Kuruyer, 2012). Also, studies on the factors that can influence the degree of family involvement in children's education have shown that the educational level of parents is an important predictor of family involvement (Cankar, Deutsch & Kolar, 2009). Thus, in the current context, it is expected that parents with a high socioeconomic level to be more frequently involved in children's education, providing them with high-quality learning experiences (Hill & Taylor, 2004; Izzo, Weissberg, Kasprow & Fendrich, 1999, Pavalache-Ilie & Țîrdia, 2015). Also, it is considered that the more parents are actively involved in their children's education, the more time students will devote to learning activities (Schober & Spiel, 2008). The pandemic has brought substantial changes in the parent-student-teacher relationship process, the effects of which need to be investigated through future studies. Previous studies have shown that many obstacles may arise that prevent parents from participating in school activities (multiple parental responsibilities, long distance between students' home and school, lack of time resources, etc.). In the context in which parents have become familiar with the use of online media, the effectiveness of parenting activities carried out in part or exclusively with the help of learning resources, could be tested to establish the efficacy of these activities on the quality of the school-family partnership. Also, the need arose for schools to be thoroughly prepared to deal with situations similar to the given one, by establishing coherent strategies and implementing health education programs (Trung, Hoang, Nguyen, & Dinh, 2020; Horesh & Brown, 2020).

2. Learning at the Distance at the Primary School Level (Theoretical Foundation)

Social distancing measures have influenced human behaviors and the way daily activities are carried out. Currently, teaching and learning takes place in the virtual environment, and educational systems from various countries around the world face extensive changes and challenges related to the organization of educational processes (Favale, Soro, Trevisan, Drago, & Mellia, 2020; Wa Viner, Russel, Croker, Packer & Booy, 2020). A stimulative work atmosphere and positive emotions of students facilitate the achievement of high-quality performance in the learning process and contribute to the development of intrinsic motivation (Heidig, Müller, & Reichelt, 2015). The epidemic has brought changes in the organization of employees in various fields, including education. The distance learning skills formed will influence the practices of interpersonal communication and relationships (Chiodini, 2020). During this period, the accent falls on the essentialization of information, on self-learning and self-assessment. The process of teaching, providing feedback, monitoring student performance, and individualizing training are more difficult to achieve in the absence of direct contact between students and teachers. The use of new technologies in the distance learning process can be achieved successfully if clear models and instructions are provided, the necessary framework for practising knowledge is created, feedback is given, and special attention is paid to the development of students' metacognitive skills (Surma & Kirschner, 2020). Botnariuc et al. (2020) conducted a study on the optimal conditions in which online learning can be done at the pre-university level, analyzing the opinions of teachers. During the study, a series of recommendations were formulated, both for practitioners and for decision-makers in the field of education. The opinions of all educational actors are important landmarks in optimizing distance learning practices. Recent research has shown that it is necessary to develop teachers' skills in conducting eLearning activities (Schleicher, 2020). In this context, teachers are forced to take creative steps, to improve themselves, and to make efforts to achieve high-quality teaching, even in the absence of all the resources and tools they need. At the level of primary and pre-school education, the role of the teacher is extremely important in order to achieve active and interactive training. In interactive training, the accent falls on collaboration and the learning process is facilitated by interactions between students (Bocoș, 2013). The type of feedback and the frequency with which it is provided influences the success of the teaching-learning processes (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Authentic parent-student-teacher communication is a decisive factor for the success of online training processes. The study conducted by Botnariuc et al. (2020) highlighted the fact that students with good and very good learning outcomes perform significantly better than students with bad or very bad learning outcomes, as a result of distance learning activities. Thus, students with bad or very bad learning outcomes have a much lower chance of completing the proposed content and achieving authentic learning. Botnariuc et. al (2020) showed that the background of students is an important factor that can influence the success of educational activities conducted online. Also, in order to get students accustomed to using new technologies, teachers should frequently provide students with work tasks that involve the use of digital resources and equipment. Adaptive e-learning facilitates the achievement of educational goals and has a high degree of attractiveness for primary school students (Hubalovsky, Hubalovska, & Musilek, 2019). In general, the judicious use of digital resources in primary education can ensure the success of learning situations.

In online learning sessions, it is difficult to provide personalized support to students, and differentiated training has suffered greatly. "The lack of opportunities for personalized support for students with special learning needs is signaled by teachers in all cycles of education, being a significantly bigger problem for primary school teachers" (Botnariuc et al., 2020). Also, monitoring the individual progress made by students in the learning process is an extremely difficult step to achieve (Botnariuc et al., 2020). Asynchronous communication methods have been used frequently by most primary school teachers. The study revealed that the phenomenon of bullying has been diminished in the absence of direct interactions between students, but there are situations in which it persists in the online environment.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

For this research, a questionnaire consisting of 12 questions was developed, through which we aimed at collecting data on various aspects of the distance learning processes occurring in primary education (see Appendix A). The questionnaire was completed online between March and May 2020 by 1456 parents (see Tables 1 and 2). Most respondents have children enrolled in the third grade (369 of them) (see figure 1). The average age of the participants is 37.9 years.

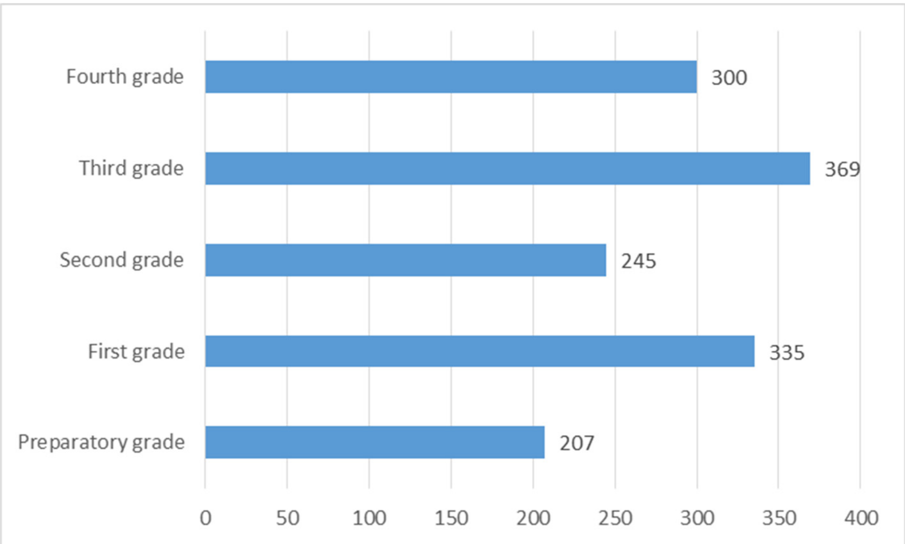

Figure 1. Distribution of the sample of participants, taking into account the age of the pupils

Table 1. Distribution of the sample of participants, depending on the gender variable

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Female	1270	87.22%
Male	186	12.77%

Table 2. Distribution of the sample of participants, taking into account the place of residence of the participants

Place of residence	Frequency	Percentage
Rural	215	14.77%
Urban	1241	85.23%

4. Results

Most respondents (both urban and rural) appreciated that in the context of online lessons, their children cannot manage on their own without asking for help from other family members (see Figure 2 and Table 3).

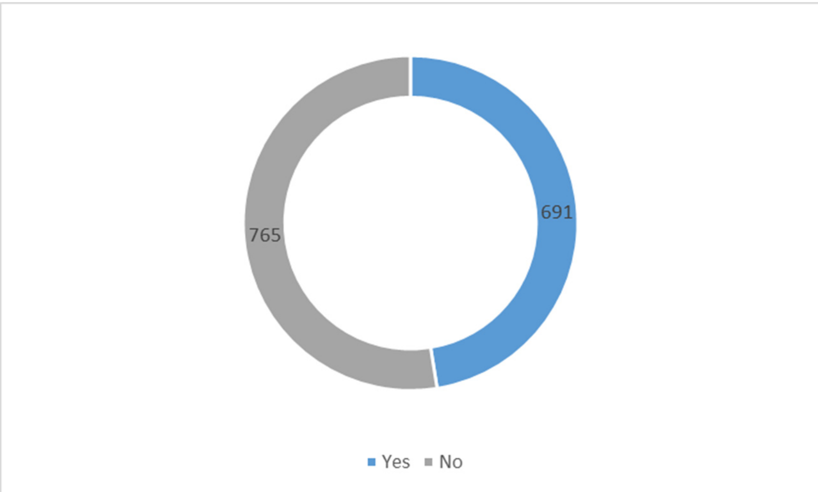

Figure 2. Aspects related to the degree of independence of students in the learning activity

Table 3. The degree of independence of students in the learning activity, taking into account the residence of the students

Answer variant	Place of residence			
	Rural		Urban	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	108	50.23%	657	52.94%
No	107	49.77%	584	47.06%

Most respondents believe that the purpose of student-teacher interactions should be to recapitulate and consolidate knowledge and maintain a close link with students and their families (see Figure 3 and Table 4).

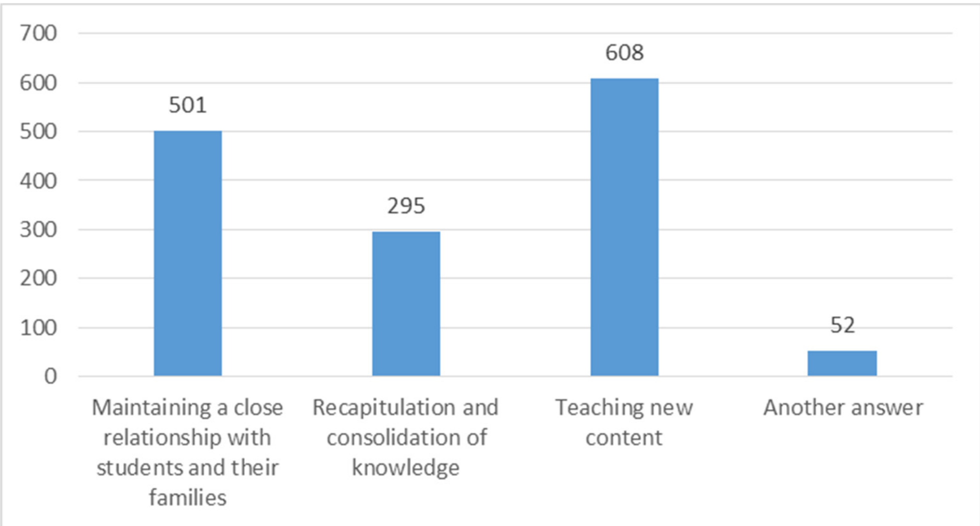

Figure 3. Aspects regarding the finality of the interactions between students and teachers

Table 4. Parents' opinions regarding the finality of the interactions between parents and students, taking into account the place of residence of the respondents

Answer variant	Place of residence			
	Rural		Urban	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Maintaining a close relationship with students and their families	99	46.04%	402	32.39%
Recapitulation and consolidation of knowledge	82	38.14%	213	17.16%
Teaching new content	31	14.42%	577	46.49%
Another answer	3	1.4%	49	3.95%

The respondents who chose another answer had different opinions regarding the organization of the instructive-educational process during this period. Some of them selected all the predefined answer options (27 respondents), while others chose various combinations of them (9 of the parents). Some respondents wanted the primary school teacher to make efforts to convey well-structured and understandable information to students, to create the conditions to increase their motivation to learn and to actively contribute to strengthening the emotional relationship between students and teachers. From the perspective of these parents, the lessons must be interactive and allow for feedback. Some respondents also specified that distance learning processes should be designed to help students to complete school activities frequently, to adapt more easily to the demands of school life after the resumption of classes. In the opinion of other respondents, these learning activities are not effective and should not be organized (4 respondents).

The modalities used to communicate with teachers are varied (see Figure 4). The most commonly used is the WhatsApp instant messaging network (786 respondents). Also, school-family communication is achieved through telephone calls (11 respondents) and e-mail (16 respondents).

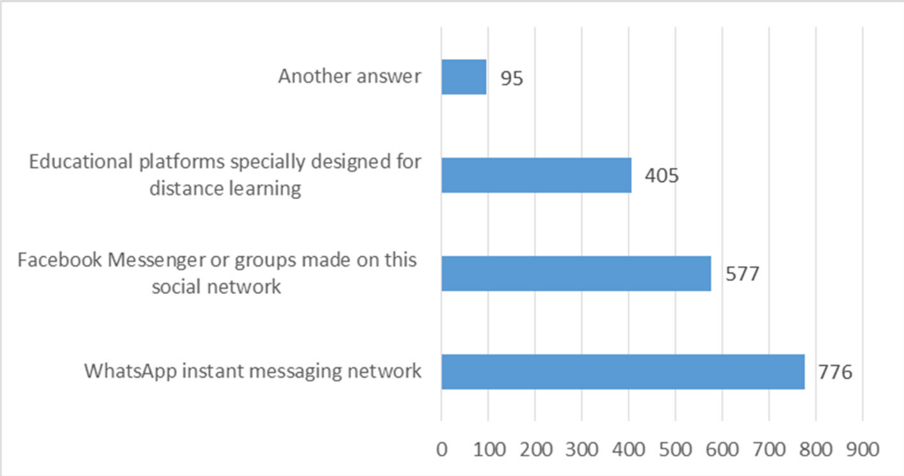

Figure 4. Ways of school-family communication, during the epidemic

From the perspective of most parents, the learning materials provided by teachers have a medium or low degree of difficulty (see Figure 5).

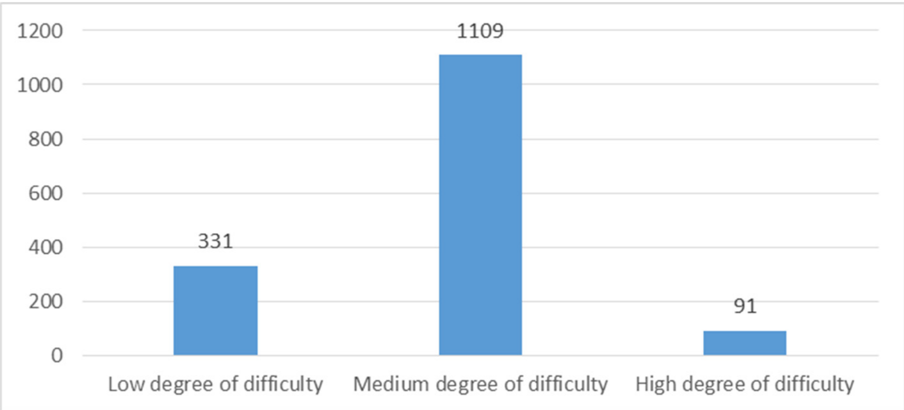

Figure 5. The degree of difficulty of learning tasks, from the perspective of students and parents

If some students received feedback several times a week, daily or several times a day, there are situations in which students did not receive or only rarely received feedback from teachers (see Figure 6).

Parents mentioned that effective feedback was provided especially during online meetings, through a video conferencing system.

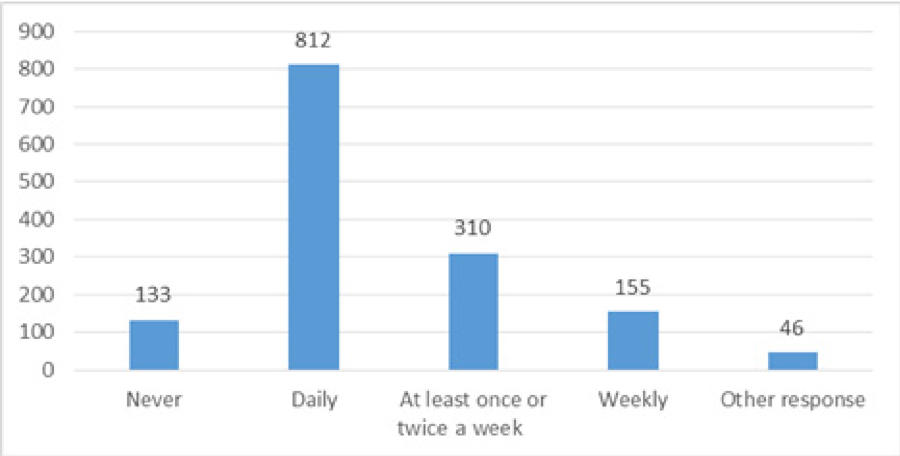

Figure 6. The frequency with which students receive feedback

Most students spend 1-2 hours in front of the computer, tablet, or other electronic devices with visual display, to carry out learning activities (see Figure 7 and Table 5).

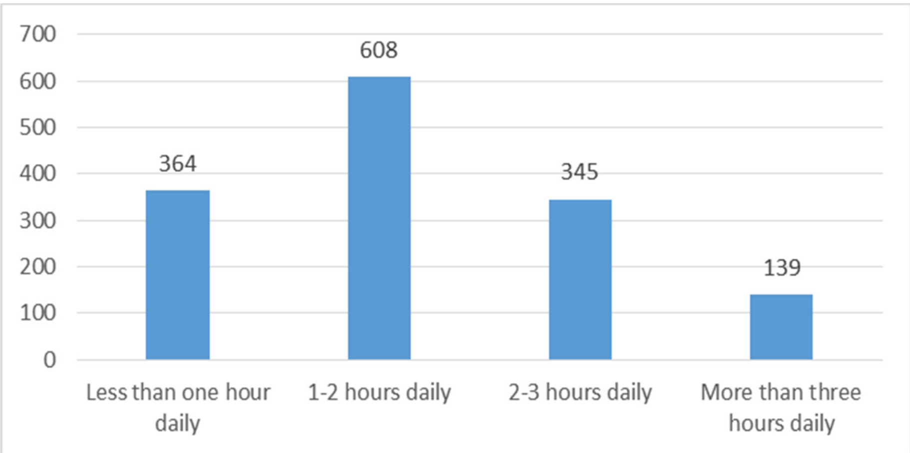

Figure 7. Duration of activities performed using electronic devices with visual display

Table 5. The amount of time allocated to the use of new technologies, taking into account the students' place of residence

Answer variant	Place of residence			
	Rural		Urban	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Less than an hour a day	48	22.33%	316	25.46%
1-2 hours a day	108	50.23%	500	40.29%
2-3 hours a day	46	21.4%	299	24.09%
More than 3 hours a day	13	6.05%	126	10.15%

The most common problems encountered by students in the learning process are an insufficient level of development of digital skills, lack of internet access or connection problems, lack of a computer, tablet or a high-performance phone, technical difficulties in connecting on certain platforms, as well as emotional problems, closely related to the sudden suspension of pre-university education courses or to the evolution of the current epidemiological context (see Figure 8 and Table 6).

Other problems encountered by students and parents are:

- the inefficiency of student-teacher communication, due to inadequate intervention of colleagues or parents;
- the absence of adults to guide them to access learning platforms or to solve work tasks;
- the absence of the learning environment in the classroom and the physical contact with the other colleagues and, in particular, with the teacher, to whom the students are very emotionally connected;
- the need to spend a long time in front of electronic devices or to solve the tasks assigned by teachers, which they find difficult to perform and are sometimes more numerous than before the suspension of classes;
- a large amount of information that needs to be transmitted;
- the long period of time needed to solve learning tasks;

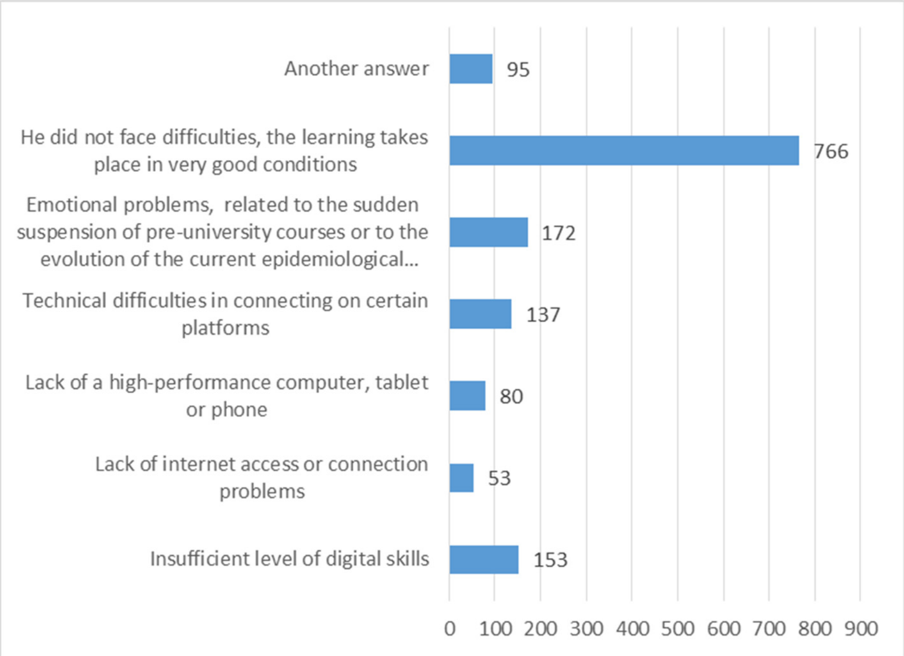

Figure 8. Factors that affect the quality of students' learning processes

- lack of motivation for learning and the need for immediate feedback provided by the teacher;
- insufficiently developed computer skills or use of the equipment and applications needed to undergo the learning process;
- low ability to adapt to the specifics of new learning situations in the online environment;
- lack of high-performance equipment for carrying out these activities;
- emotional problems, arising after the beginning of the epidemic;
- difficulties in understanding the information transmitted, if it is not explained by the teacher through online interactions;
- using the equipment for other types of activities, which are not related to the learning activity, among which we mention: computer games, conversations with colleagues, watching videos on the internet, etc.;

- the decrease in motivation for learning, by considering the period of suspension of courses as a holiday;
- the absence of parents' teaching skills, if their intervention is necessary;
- problems related to the organization of the time allocated to learning;
- children's belonging to large or single-parent families;
- the absence of interactive training, if learning platforms that involve systematic interactions between teachers and students are not used.

Table 6. Problems encountered by students, taking into account the place of residence

Answer variant	Place of residence			
	Rural		Urban	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Insufficient level of digital skills	18	8.37%	135	10.88%
Lack of internet access or connection problems	17	7.91%	36	2.9%
Lack of a high-performance computer, tablet or phone	15	6.98%	65	5.24%
Technical difficulties in connecting on certain platforms	23	10.7%	114	9.19%
Emotional problems, related to the sudden suspension of pre-university courses or to the evolution of the current epidemiological context	24	11.16%	148	11.93%

Parents mentioned that the need to accumulate too much information and the long time needed to complete homework can lead to emotional problems among children. Parents of students in the preparatory class pointed out that at this age it is difficult to adjust to distance learning situations, given that they have barely managed to adapt to school requirements. Some parents have shown that although they are making efforts to help their children with their work tasks, they do not have the necessary skills. Thus, some respondents pointed out that there is a decrease in the quality of teaching, and sometimes a decrease in the frequency of positive and high-quality learning experiences. Most of the respondents did not encounter any problems in their learning activity (789 students, of which 114 come from rural areas).

Regarding the level of motivation for students' learning, most parents appreciated that students' interest in learning activities decreased in the context of participating in distance learning (see Figure 9 and Table 7).

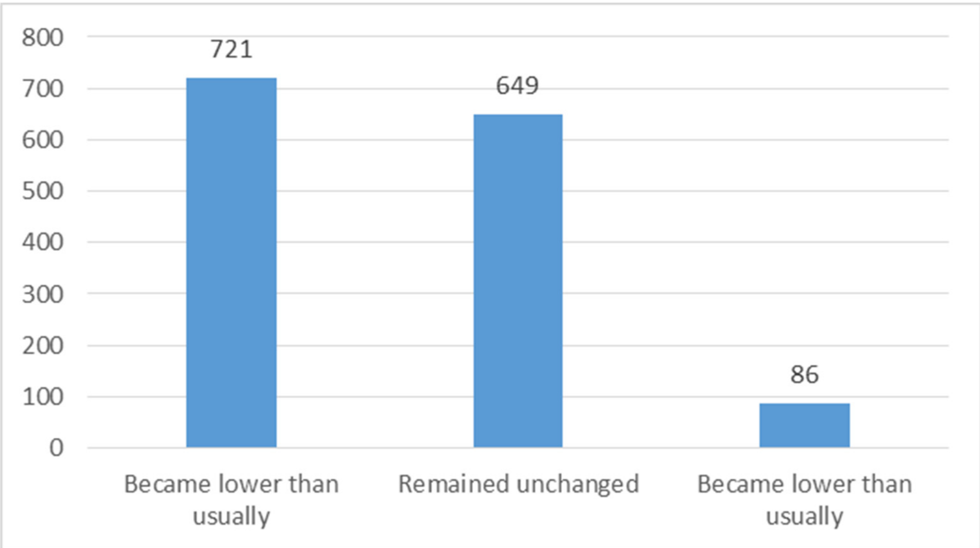

Figure 9. Level of students' motivation for learning

Table 7. Information on the level of motivation for learning, taking into account the place of residence of the students

Answer variant	Place of residence			
	Rural		Urban	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Became lower than usual	108	50.23%	613	49.4%
Remained unchanged	93	43.26%	556	44.8%
Became lower than usually	14	6.51%	72	5.8%

A large part of the students (38.8% of them) do not want the distance learning activities to take place even occasionally after starting school, although they like to participate on them at this moment. Most respondents are happy to participate in this type of activity, but there is a high percentage of students who do not like to carry out online activities (22.2% of them). Some of the parents who chose the option "Another answer" specified that their son/daughter had not participated in online learning situations until the date they submitted the answers, but consider it beneficial and want them to be organized in this period. Other parents mentioned that the family members have the responsibility of teaching, using the materials sent by the teacher, an approach that they consider extremely difficult. Many of the parents stated that the students prefer the lessons organized in the school space and that the teachers are the ones who have the necessary skills to transmit knowledge and to form skills. Also, students' attention, interest, and motivation for learning are maintained at a high level in the context of face-to-face learning activities. For emotional students, the novelty of these lessons and the new way of interacting with students is more difficult to achieve. Presence in the school environment and direct contact with students and teachers are factors that contribute significantly to the success of learning processes at this level of education. Parents believe that in online interactions, various factors may arise that disrupt the progress of lessons (including technical problems, difficulties in using educational platforms, the absence of an adult to supervise them, etc.). Other parents showed that the main advantage of organizing these lessons is the simultaneous and real-time interaction with other colleagues and the teacher, students feeling, both during this period and during the summer vacation, the absence of colleagues and teachers. Other respondents mentioned that in the absence of assessment and feedback, students are not aware of the need for learning and do not take this process seriously. Also, in the opinion of some parents, the homework offered to students during this period consists of a large number of exercises, which require the allocation of a long period of time. Thus, in the context in which parents currently assume a large number of family and professional responsibilities, it is difficult to effectively organize their time to carry out these learning activities. Also, some students spend a lot of time in front of electronic devices with visual display, which has a negative impact on their health. Some students did not have access to this type of learning, although they would have liked to, because they do not have the necessary equipment to carry out, in good conditions, distance learning activities (see Figure 10).

From the perspective of most parents, schools should implement health education programs, which include information and educational counseling activities for students, both during the suspension of classes and immediately after the end of the epidemic (see Figure 11 and Table 7). A low percentage of parents do not want these programs to take place in our country. Also, most parents who chose the option "Another answer" showed that these health programs should have been implemented long ago in schools in Romania. Thus, the respondents pointed out that in pre-university education, effectively implemented health education programs should be permanently organized and should include both activities with students and parents. Other respondents pointed out that health education activities are organized systematically or occasionally in schools, through the contents included in the compulsory or optional subjects, as well as in the extracurricular activities. Also, some parents pointed out that health education programs should not include content related to sex education.
Also, in the opinion of parents, it would be necessary that school counselors and medical staff to participate in activities.

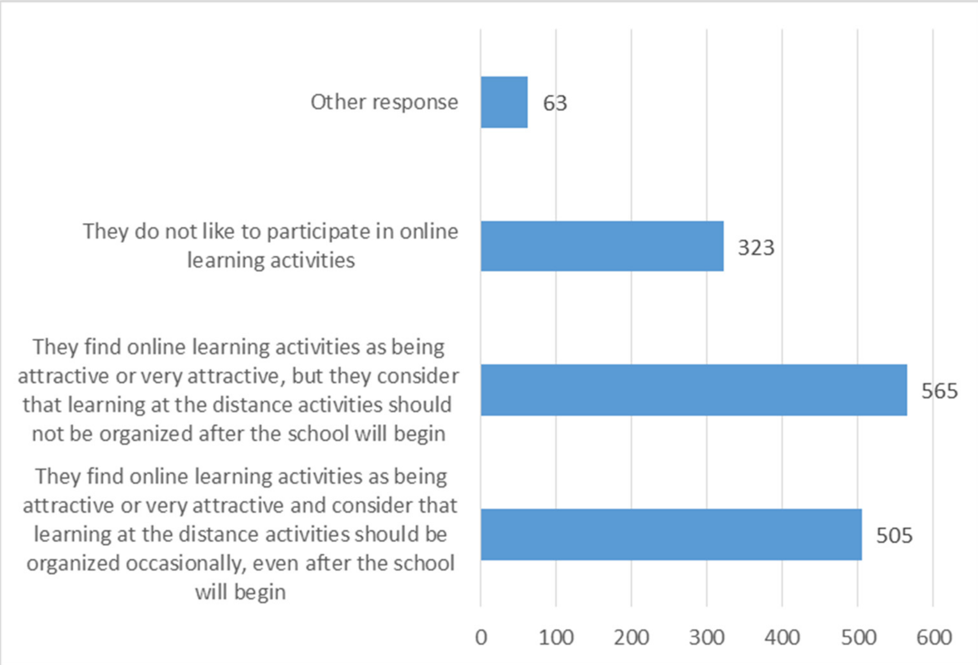

Figure 10. The degree of attractiveness of the activities carried out in the online environment and the frequency with which they should be organized

Regarding the frequency with which the activities included in the health education programs should be carried out, some of the parents indicated that it would be ideal for them to take place monthly or weekly, throughout schooling. Other respondents pointed out that health education programs should be carried out after school starts, given that during this period the media provide sufficient information for students and parents on how students should behave during this epidemic. Thus, the advice and guidance provided by parents are sufficient for students to adopt a preventive and healthy behavior during the epidemic.

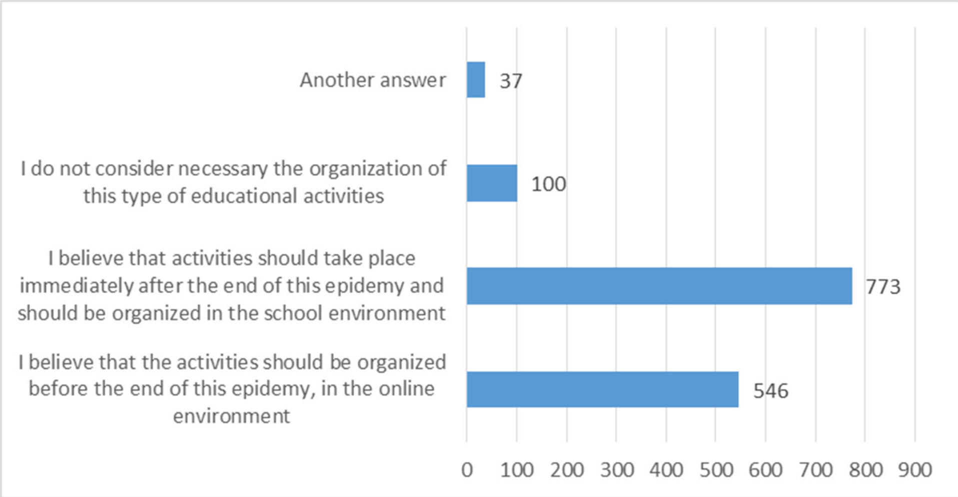

Figure 11. Respondents' opinion regarding the implementation of the health education programs

Table 8. Respondents' opinion regarding the implementation of the health education programs

Answer variant	Place of residence			
	Rural		Urban	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
I believe that the activities should be organized before the end of this epidemy, in the online environment	85	39.53%	461	37.15%
I believe that activities should take place immediately after the end of this epidemy and should be organized in the school environment	111	51.63%	662	53.34%
I do not consider necessary the organization of this type of educational activities	14	6.51%	86	6.93%

Most parents agreed that if there will be an extended period of suspension of courses, the recovery of untaught contents in this school year should be achieved either through online activities or in the next school year, within face-to-face learning activities.

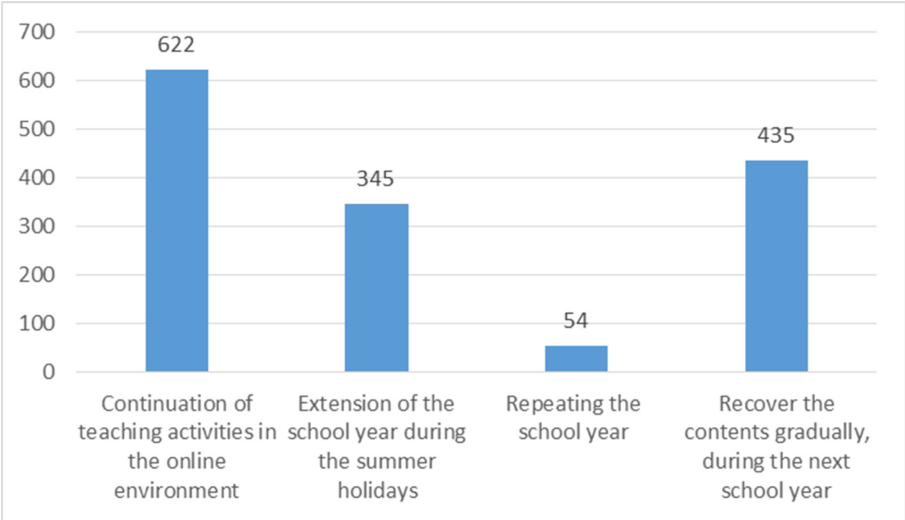

Figure 12. Solutions proposed by parents for the optimal recovery of untreated matter

Some parents consider that, in primary education, teaching is very difficult to be realized in the online environment and do not want students to participate in this type of activity. Some of them also pointed out that the level of motivation for learning has become lower during this period, and some learning tasks and contents have a high degree of difficulty. Some respondents mentioned that students are too young to participate in online lessons, that they do not have the necessary skills to participate in distance learning activities, and that the pressure on students and parents is high and unnecessary. The fact that teacher-student interactions take place in the virtual space negatively influences the quality of the teaching act. One of the parents mentioned that this period of suspension of courses could have been used by employees in the field of education to restructure and simplify the content of school curricula, as well as to create high-quality teaching materials, accessible for free to students and parents.

5. Discussions and Conclusions

Among the limitations of the current study, we can mention the small size of the sample of participants and the origin of most of them from a single county in Romania, which cannot ensure national representation. The study could also have focused on the opinions of educational managers and teachers, to help us form an overview of the educational realities investigated. Based on the results obtained, a series of recommendations can be formulated for primary school practitioners:

• clear formulation of work tasks, monitoring progress in learning and systematically providing positive and constructive feedback;
• designing high-quality and attractive teaching materials for students;
• achieving the didactic transposition at a high-quality level, when new notions are taught;
• maintaining a close connection with parents and students, with the purpose to strengthen the school-family partnership relationship and the student-teacher relationship.

Analyzing the opinions of the parents, the following recommendations can be formulated for the decision-makers in the educational field:

- creating educational resources, software and functional educational platforms, free and easy to use by teachers and students in primary education;
- restructuring the contents included in the school curricula, with the purpose of making them more accessible;
- significant investments in technological equipment and training programs for teachers;
- developing a long-term strategy, based on recommendations made by researchers, practitioners, and expert groups in the field of education.

It is important to note that this questionnaire was distributed online and was completed by parents who have access to the internet. The media revealed that there are a large number of students from disadvantaged backgrounds who do not have the opportunity to do online learning activities. For these students, a period of remedial education should be established in the next school year. Teachers who teach in primary education have had to find innovative solutions to support these students and ensure them equal opportunities and access to education. Investing in digital resources and equipment, obtaining sponsorships, and entering into partnerships with IT companies are some of the measures that should be taken. Research should be continued after the pandemic to correct possible dysfunctions of the teaching processes and to capitalize on the positive aspects that have occurred in the teaching activity.

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Appendix A

Questionnaire regarding the use of distance learning in primary education

Through this study, we aim to investigate the opinion of parents on the optimal solutions that can be applied to optimize the distance learning processes, currently carried out by primary school students. Completing this questionnaire takes a maximum of 5 minutes, and the answers will remain anonymous. Your opinions will be useful to decision-makers in the field of education and primary school teachers. The data collected will be statistically processed.

1. What grade does your child attend?

- ☐ Preparatory grade
- ☐ 1st grade
- ☐ 2nd grade
- ☐ 3rd grade
- ☐ 4th grade

2. In the context of online learning, can your child manage on his or her own without asking for help from other family members?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

3. What do you think should be the purpose of online interactions between students and teachers?

- ☐ Maintaining a close relationship with students and their families
- ☐ Teaching new content
- ☐ Recapitulation and consolidation of knowledge
- ☐ Another answer option, namely: ☐

4. What form of communication do you use to communicate during this time with your child's teacher? (more answers are possible)

- ☐ WhatsApp instant messaging network
- ☐ Facebook Messenger or different groups created on this social network
- ☐ Educational platforms specially designed for distance learning
- ☐ Another answer option such as: ☐

5. Which are the characteristics of learning materials provided by teachers? (more answers are possible)

- ☐ They have a low degree of difficulty
- ☐ They have a medium degree of difficulty
- ☐ They have a high degree of difficulty

6. How often do students receive feedback from teachers regarding how homework was done?

- ☐ Never
- ☐ Daily
- ☐ At least once or twice a week
- ☐ Weekly
- ☐ Another answer option such as: ☐

7. How much time does your child spend every day in front of a computer, tablet, or other electronic display device to engage in learning activities?

- ☐ Less than one hour daily
- ☐ 1-2 hours daily
- ☐ 2-3 hours daily
- ☐ More than three hours daily

8. What problems did your child encounter in the distance learning process?

- ☐ Insufficient level of digital skills
- ☐ Lack of internet access or connection problems
- ☐ Lack of a high-performance computer, tablet or phone
- ☐ Technical difficulties in connecting on certain platforms
- ☐ Emotional nature issues, closely related to the sudden suspension of pre-university courses or to the evolution of the current epidemiological context
- ☐ He did not face difficulties, the learning taking place in very good conditions
- ☐ Another answer option such as: ☐

9. What is the level of students' motivation for learning, in the context of the suspension of face-to-face teaching activities?

☐ It became lower than usual

☐ It remained unchanged

☐ It became higher than usual

10. What is pupils' opinion about online learning?

☐ They consider online learning activities attractive or very attractive and want to organize such activities occasionally, even after starting school.

☐ They find online learning activities attractive or very attractive, but they do not want this type of activity to take place after school starts.

☐ They do not like to carry out online learning activities

☐ Another answer option, namely: ☐

11. What do you think would be the best time for schools to implement health education programs, which include information and educational counseling activities for students?

☐ I believe that the activities should be carried out before the end of this epidemic, in the online environment

☐ I believe that activities should take place immediately after the outbreak and should be organized in schools.

☐ I do not consider necessary the organization of this type of educational activities

☐ Another answer, namely: ☐

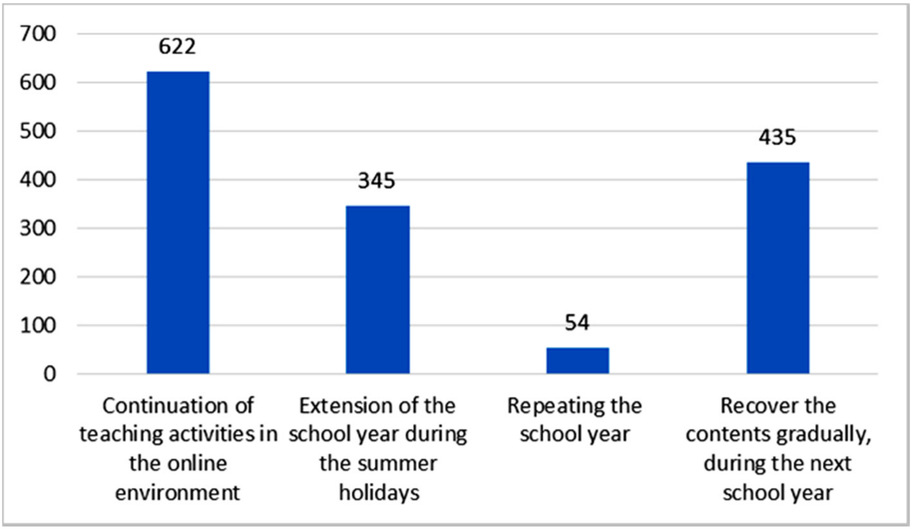
12. In the event that there will be an extended period of suspension of schooling, what do you think would be the right option for the recovery of the subject?

☐ Continuing the teaching activities carried out in the online environment

☐ Extension of the school year during the summer holidays

☐ Repetition of the school year

☐ Gradual recovery of the subject, including in the next school year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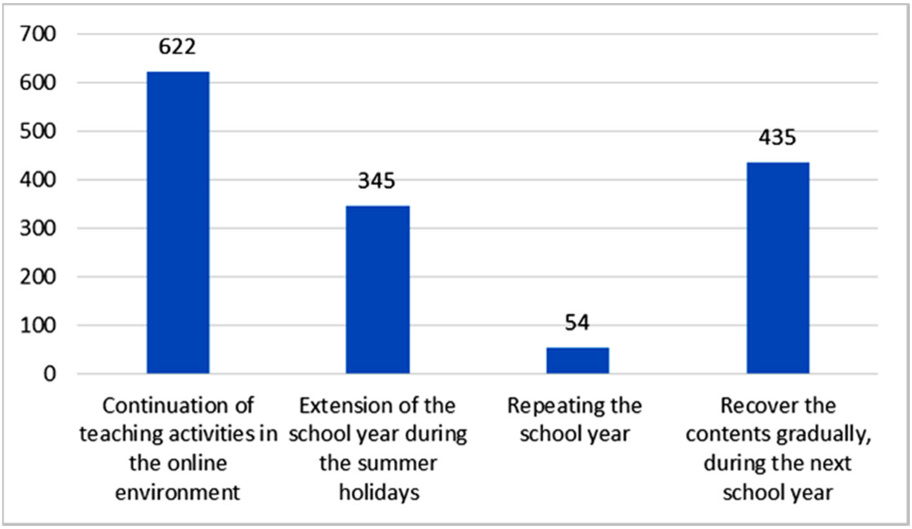
Continuation of teaching activities in the online environment
Extension of the school year during the summer holidays
Repeating the school year
Recover the contents gradually, during the next school year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Continuation of teaching activities in the online environment
Extension of the school year during the summer holidays
Repeating the school year
Recover the contents gradually, during the next school year

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THE USE OF A SITUATIONAL PRESENTATION IN TEACHING ENGLISH GRAMMAR

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ABSTRACT. The purpose of this paper is to highlight one of the lesson frameworks that can be used in an English language class in order to teach grammar, while also integrating into the lesson the practice of language skills. A situational presentation teaching method is used in English language teaching contexts and is also known as a Presentation-Practice-Production. The aim of such a lesson is to introduce to students a scenario that will enable them to discover the target language, which they will later on practise in the lesson. Thus, this teaching format will give the students the opportunity to acquire new grammar knowledge that will be further practised along the lesson in restricted and freer practice activities. In the freer practice the students will be able to integrate the new grammar into activities designed to stimulate the practice of productive skills, such as speaking, while interacting with their peers. The article will include self-made samples of tasks and resources used in an English language class focused on teaching grammar and a clear description of the lesson stages for the full comprehension of this lesson framework, while pointing out the benefits and some of the drawbacks of such a method in the realm of English language teaching.

Keywords: *English Language Teaching (ELT), English grammar, second conditional clause, situational presentation, Presentation-Practice-Production (PPP)*

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1. An Outline of a Situational Presentation

In English language teaching a Situational Presentation is also known as a Presentation-Practice-Production (PPP) lesson, where the teacher uses a situation, a context or a scenario to introduce the target language to be taught. Usually, such a lesson framework consists of multiple stages. At the beginning, the teacher makes use of various resources such as pictures or drawings as input in order to help students create the context themselves. As a matter of fact, by asking the students well-guided questions that elicit ideas or examples as a response, the teacher enables them to generate the context and leads the students to discover the target language by themselves. To formulate example sentences with the target language based on the situation is the aim of this stage. When this aim has been achieved, a few other stages in the lesson follow such as: the clarification of the meaning, form and pronunciation of the target language, then two more practical stages, where the students get the chance to use the target language in controlled and freer practice tasks.

In the literature this approach is also called Present-Practise. For instance, Jim Scrivener (2011, p. 159) describes what this lesson framework consists in as follows: "the teacher first presents/ introduces/ explains/ clarifies/ inputs the language point that the lesson is aiming to work on, and then, when it seems to be reasonably understood, moves on to give learners a chance to practise using the language themselves". Furthermore, the author explains that a production stage follows, this being made up of practical activities in which students use the language point in self-produced examples or contexts, thus creating an "authentic output [which] is also known as production or simply as speaking and writing skills work" (Scrivener, 2011, p. 159). As such, this is argument enough that a situational presentation can also integrate the practice of productive language skills.

Another view on this teaching method belongs to J. Harmer (2015, p. 65), who describes it in roughly similar terms: "the teacher introduces a situation which contextualizes the language to be taught. The language is then presented. The students practise the language, using accurate reproduction techniques such as choral repetition (…) and individual repetition. Later, in production phase, the students use the new language to make sentences of their own". Moreover, Harmer (2015, p. 66) argues that the production phase allows students to "use language to talk about themselves and how they feel and what they do, [which is called] *personalisation*".

2. A Situational Presentation: Lesson Stages

There is a certain sequence of stages or an "activity route map" (Scrivener, 2011, p. 40) that a Situational Presentation lesson framework has to follow, in this particular order.

1. Lead-in. In a language class every teacher's aim is to stir the students' interest in the topic and to motivate them to participate in the lesson. In order to get this result, the teacher designs a task to get them involved by providing prompts for discussion in the form of questions they have to answer, or by displaying pictures or images that stimulate discussion and stir their imagination or creativity, thus enabling the teacher to elicit vocabulary and grammar points to be dealt with during the lesson.

2. The situation. This stage is also referred to as the context or the scenario that the teacher has to design so as to create a smooth transition from the lead-in. Alternatively, these two stages can be designed as a single stage. Again, in creating the scenario, the teacher needs to resort to visual input, such as drawings or pictures, in order to enable students to infer the target language (TL) from the situation presented.

3. Clarification of meaning, form and pronunciation (MFP). Once the target language has been elicited from the students or introduced to them by the teacher in the second stage, then it has to be clarified in terms of meaning, form and pronunciation. The clarification stage itself follows a certain pattern, namely it starts with conveying and checking of the meaning of the TL and it continues with the clarification of form and pronunciation. It is advisable to make the clarification stage as student-centred as possible. Thus, teachers can use concept checking questions (CCQs), guided-discovery tasks (such as matching word with definition, fill-in the gaps, exercises with synonyms or antonyms, choose the correct answer, substitution tables etc.) or drilling in order to get students to understand the TL from all three perspectives (meaning, form, pronunciation).

4. Restricted practice. This is a practical stage, where students have the opportunity to practise the language point in restricted (controlled) activities, which are specially designed by the teacher to check if students can use the TL accurately in the given contexts.

5. Freer practice. In this stage the students get the chance to produce contexts of their own in either of the two productive skills, speaking or writing, in which they have to integrate the TL. Usually, when the aim of this stage is to practise speaking, the students are presented with a communicative activity and the focus is rather on fluency than on accuracy of the TL use.

3. Teaching Grammar via a Situational Presentation. A Second Conditional Lesson Sample.

1. Lead-in & Situation. The aim of this stage is to engage the adult students (aged 20 and above) in the context of the lesson and to introduce the target language (TL) in the context of work and holiday (The topic of the lesson was inspired from Dummett, Hughes & Stephenson, 2013, p. 93).

Fig. 1. Lead-in & Situation

On the board the students will be presented the situation by means of a collection of suggestive images: *A character called Lisa is at the office and she is very busy. She cannot concentrate on her work and she starts daydreaming* (Fig. 1). The students will be asked to predict what she might be thinking about based on the other pictures that are shown on the board to expand the situation and to elicit the TL from the students, using clues, if needed.

Fig. 2. Lead-in & Situation (continued)

(The images in Fig. 1 are used for educational purposes in order to create the situation and are retrieved from online sources: (Online image of young woman in an office, n.d.); (Online image of young woman on a beach, n.d.); (Online image of summer hot sun, n.d.); (Online image of group young hipster friends, n.d.); (Online image of woman swimming, n.d.); (Online image of the great sphinx, n.d.)).

If unsuccessful, the teacher will give them the beginning of a Second Conditional clause so that the students guess the other half of the sentences that can be associated with the pictures in the situation. If students are not able to produce any sentence with the TL, the teacher will provide it for them. The teacher will ask the students what grammar structure the marker sentences contain and announce that this is the topic of the lesson. The students discuss in pairs and the answers are checked in class feedback (Fig. 2).

2. Clarification. The purpose of this stage is to clarify meaning, form and pronunciation of the TL. In this lesson the following use of the Second Conditional is highlighted: We use the Second Conditional or "hypothetical" or "unreal conditional" to refer to or speculate about something that is (or we perceive to be) unlikely or impossible. At the moment of speaking we see the action or event as being impossible. The Second Conditional has a present time reference (Murphy, 2012, p. 76; Parrott, 2010, pp. 274-275; Scrivener, 2010, p. 237)

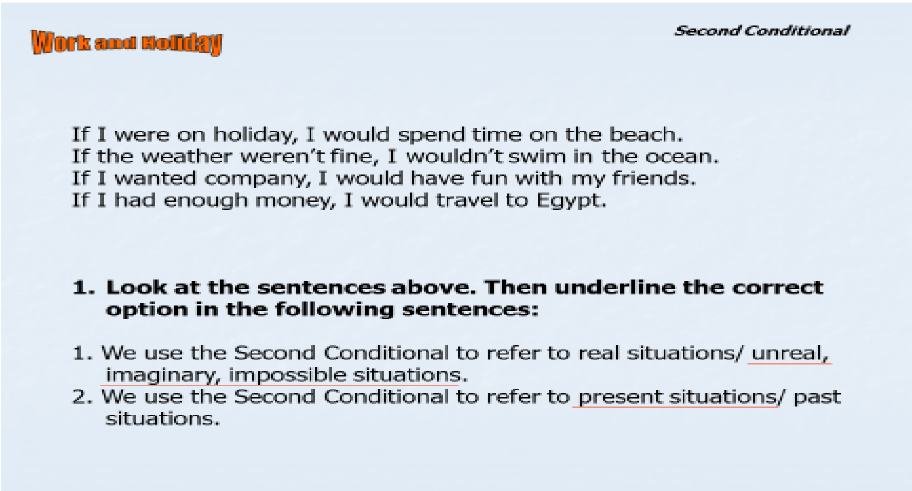


Fig. 3. Clarification of meaning

In order to convey meaning, when the grammatical structure has been identified, the teacher will ask the students to look at 4 marker sentences with the TL (that he/she elicits or provides for the students in the situation) and they will have to underline the correct option in two sentences in order to identify the meaning of the Second Conditional (Fig. 3).

In order to check the meaning of the TL, the students will have to circle the sentences that refer to an unreal, imaginary situation (Fig. 4). If there are still uncertainties after this task, the teacher will have to check the meaning further by asking concept checking questions (CCQs) for example sentences. Students work individually and then check their answers in peer and class feedback, when the teacher will project the answers on the board.

As mentioned before, among the problems the teacher may anticipate as being most likely to occur during the lesson is the students' confusion about the meaning of the Second Conditional, the solution of which consists in the teacher asking the following CCQs for an example sentence, such as: *"If I were on holiday, I would spend time on the beach."* (This is what Lisa is thinking right now).

CCQs: Is Lisa on holiday? (No)/ Is it possible that she will go on holiday? (No, probably not)/ Will she spend time on the beach? (No, probably not)/ Why not? (Because she is not on holiday)/ Which word tells us that it is impossible? (were)

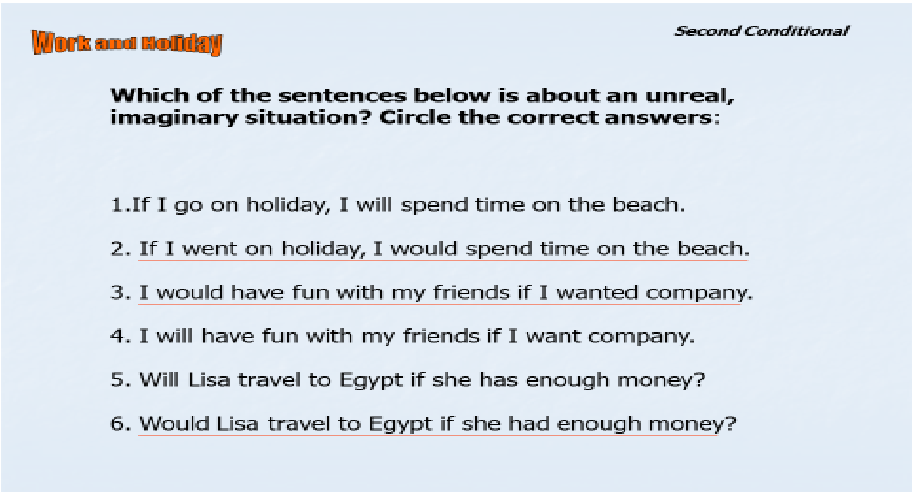


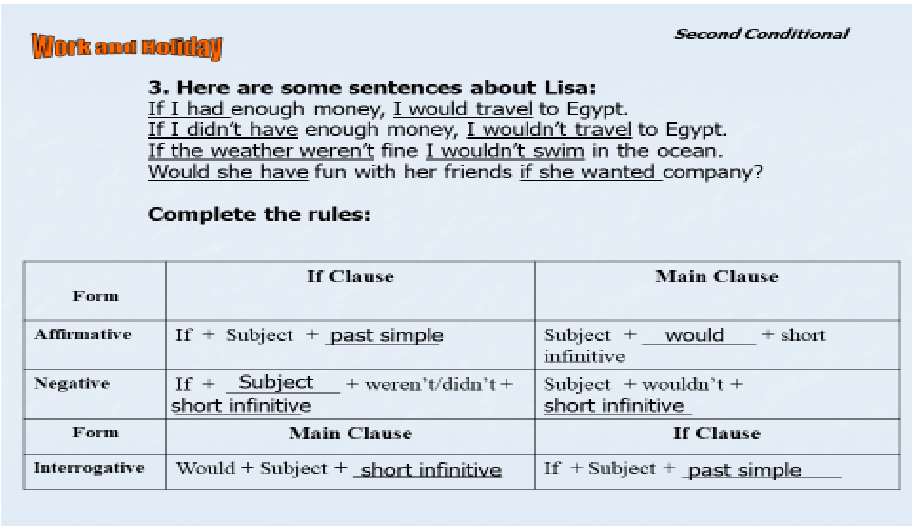
Fig. 4. Checking of meaning

While drafting her/his lesson plan the teacher may also anticipate another potential problem which refers to the students not being familiar with the meaning of the structure *"If I were you, I'd…"*. The solution for this problem can consist in the teacher drawing the students' attention in an example sentence that this structure means that the speaker is imagining what it would be like to be another person and what they would do in their place. Moreover, the teacher should also point out that the structure is often used to give advice, as in the example: *"If I were you, I would spend time on the beach."*

All through the lesson the students will have the opportunity to compile a written record as they will receive a handout containing the tasks that will be used for the illustration and checking of meaning, form, as well as the tasks designed for the restricted (dual choice, circle the correct answer, fill in the table, complete the sentences with the correct word) and free(r) practice stages of the lesson.

The stage of checking the form of the TL will consist in highlighting the Affirmative, Negative and Interrogative forms of the Second Conditional. The students will be asked to look at several example sentences from the situation and to complete the rules of forming the Second Conditional in a substitution table (Fig.5). To prevent any errors from being left unclarified, their answers will be checked in open class feedback.

As with the meaning of the TL, the students might encounter difficulties regarding the form of the Second Conditional. On the one hand, they may be confused about the use of the form "were" in the "If Clause" for all persons. A possible solution would be to draw the students' attention to the form of the "If X were…" and explain to them that the form "If X was…" is also possible, but that grammar books recommend "If X were…" as the correct form in order to express advice.



Work and Holiday

Second Conditional

3. Here are some sentences about Lisa:

If I had enough money, I would travel to Egypt.
If I didn't have enough money, I wouldn't travel to Egypt.
If the weather weren't fine I wouldn't swim in the ocean.
Would she have fun with her friends if she wanted company?

Complete the rules:

Form	If Clause	Main Clause
Affirmative	If + Subject + past simple	Subject + would + short infinitive
Negative	If + Subject + weren't/didn't + short infinitive	Subject + wouldn't + short infinitive
Form	Main Clause	If Clause
Interrogative	Would + Subject + short infinitive	If + Subject + past simple

Fig. 5. Checking of form

On the other hand, the students may be tempted to use "would" in both If clause and main clause. As a solution, in the stage for the clarification of form the teacher might point out that the auxiliary 'would' can be used only in the main clause and in the If clause we use past simple. An additional aid for further clarification and check of the TL is the task provided to the students, which requires them to fill in a substitution table and provide the grammatical rule for the formation of the Second Conditional.

Moreover, the students may not be aware that the "I'd" is the contracted form of "I would". As a solution, the teacher might draw the students' attention that the auxiliary 'would' can be contracted as "'d" in the main clause of the Second Conditional Clause.

In the next stage of the lesson, the teacher will engage students in an activity aimed at identifying pronunciation problems. He/she will ask students the pronunciation of the words in bold in two example sentences, trying to identify a pronunciation model. If such a model cannot be elicited, the teacher will provide it for them, then drill chorally and individually. The aim is to emphasize features of connected speech (such as contracted forms, pronunciation of weak forms – "were" and "would you") (Fig. 6), while boarding the phonemic transcript of the words discussed.

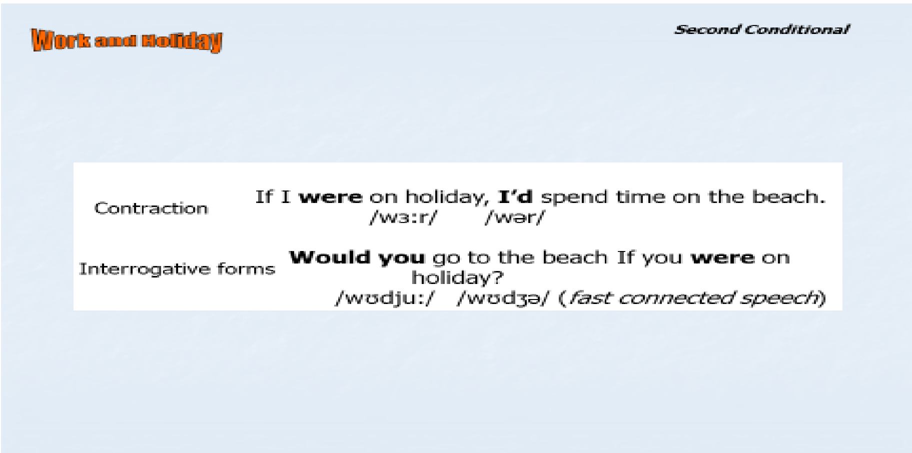
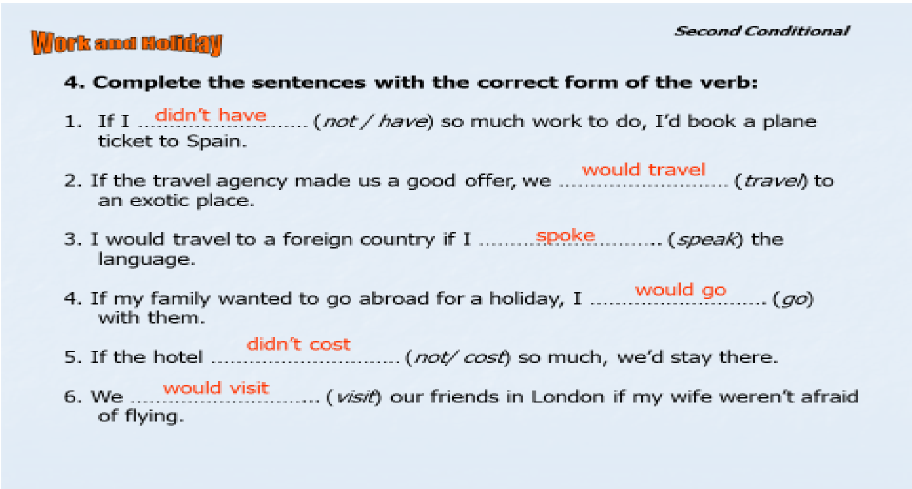


Fig. 6. Checking of pronunciation

When it comes to pronunciation, there are some problems that might occur during the lesson. One of them is that the students may not be familiar with the pronunciation of the weak form of - "were" from the structure "If I were ...". Another problem that might arise is that the students will not be familiar with the pronunciation of the weak form of "would you" in connected speech in interrogative sentences. The solution, which the teacher may find, is to elicit a model of correct pronunciation, or to provide a model if the elicitation is not working and then drill it, first chorally and then individually.

3. Restricted practice. This stage aims to practice accurate use of the TL in controlled exercises and to scaffold language practice in preparation for freer practice. In this stage the students will be asked to complete the sentences in a gapped exercise with the correct form of the verb in either the "main clause" or the "if clause" type 2 (Fig. 7). First the teacher will do a demo together with the students. Then they will work individually and check their answers in peer and class feedback, when they will be asked to justify their answers.


Work and Holiday

Second Conditional

4. Complete the sentences with the correct form of the verb:

1. If I ...didn't have..... (*not / have*) so much work to do, I'd book a plane ticket to Spain.
2. If the travel agency made us a good offer, we ...would travel... (*travel*) to an exotic place.
3. I would travel to a foreign country if I ....spoke.......... (*speak*) the language.
4. If my family wanted to go abroad for a holiday, I ...would go... (*go*) with them.
5. If the hotel ...didn't cost... (*not/ cost*) so much, we'd stay there.
6. We ...would visit... (*visit*) our friends in London if my wife weren't afraid of flying.

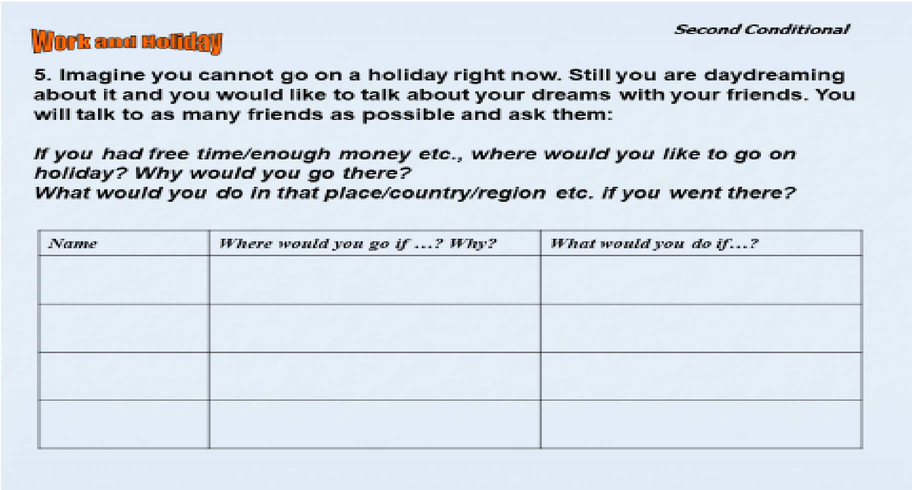
Fig. 7. Restricted practice

The teacher will monitor the activity to check if the students have difficulties in completing the task and to adjust the timing. Whenever appropriate, before distributing the handouts, the teacher will ask instruction checking questions (ICQs). In open class feedback, if any meaning-related anticipated problem occurs, the teacher will ask CCQs to clarify the meaning.

4. Freer Practice. The aim of this stage is to practice accurate use of the TL in a more personalised way and to allow students to integrate the TL into their everyday language use, while practising speaking fluency. According to Harmer (2015, p. 384), the benefits of practising speaking in class, apart from general fluency, consist in that our "students need to speak in a number of different contexts, and for a number of different purposes".

Thus, the students will be engaged in a mingling activity in order to speak to as many classmates as possible to practise the TL and have the opportunity to personalise it. Here is the task: "Imagine you cannot go on a holiday right now. Still you are daydreaming about it and you would like to talk about your dreams with your friends. Your classmates are your friends. You will talk to as many friends as possible and while talking you have to make notes in a table about what they tell you. Here is what you will ask them: *If you had free time/enough money etc., where would you like to go on holiday? Why would you go there?*; *What would you do in that place/country/region etc. if you went there?*" (Fig. 8). The teacher will first make a demo of the task or use ICQs to make sure every student has understood the task and while the students are at work, the teacher will monitor the activity in order to collect language samples to discuss in delayed feedback. Students share what they found out about their classmates in open class feedback.

5. Delayed Feedback. In this stage the aim is to help the students learn from their mistakes and to encourage them to use the new TL correctly. During the previous stage the teacher collects language samples for the delayed feedback session and writes them on the board while the students are engaged in the activity in the freer practice stage. The students usually pair check the language discussed for errors in order to become aware of their own mistakes and then in open class feedback.


Work and Holiday

Second Conditional

5. Imagine you cannot go on a holiday right now. Still you are daydreaming about it and you would like to talk about your dreams with your friends. You will talk to as many friends as possible and ask them:

If you had free time/enough money etc., where would you like to go on holiday? Why would you go there?
What would you do in that place/country/region etc. if you went there?

Name	*Where would you go if …? Why?*	*What would you do if…?*

Fig. 8. Freer practice

4. Conclusions

Although it has gained some critical views in the literature, the Situational Presentation or the Presentation-Practice-Production (PPP) is a teaching method that is still an effective lesson framework, which can be employed with both lexis and grammar lessons, while integrating the practice of productive skills.

However, it cannot be denied that the Situational Presentation has some drawbacks that Harmer (2015) also acknowledges. According to him the PPP lesson framework is "highly teacher-centred and seems to assume that students learn in 'straight lines'- that is, starting from no knowledge, through highly restricted sentence-based utterances and then going back to immediate production" (Harmer, 2015, p. 66). We cannot but agree that Harmer's views on the Presentation-Practice-Production as being teacher-centred are justified as long as the teacher is the one that makes the presentation of the situation by building up a context and by inquiries addressed to the students in the attempt to the target language. Still, the students can actively engage in the presentation of the situation as they are those called to build it up from the input the teacher provides by taking part in interactive activities, while being arranged in pairs or groups and allowed to discuss the clues received freely in order to create the situation themselves.

In addition, in the clarification stage, which may as well receive the reproach that it is teacher-focused, the teacher has the alternative of shifting the focus from the teacher to the students by designing guided-discovery tasks instead of making a presentation or using explanations, thus allowing the students to clarify the meaning, form, and pronunciation of the target language by themselves. Therefore, the teacher's role is limited to being a mere guide for his/ her students.

As mentioned above, this teaching method has some benefits as well, because it can bring along variety in the English language class, both in terms of the type of lesson it can be used for and the range of the students' learning styles in can cover. Thus, this lesson framework can be used for all types of lessons including those focused on teaching grammar or lexis and it can also give opportunity to the students to practise productive skills (speaking and writing).

Furthermore, the teacher has the ability to adjust the situation he/she creates to their students' interests, thus enabling them to personalise it and giving impetus to their active participation in the lesson. As a matter of fact, such a personalisation of the TL taught is not always possible with most English language textbooks as they contain topics or contexts that are not easily accessible to students or they cannot relate to.

To conclude, the Situational Presentation or the Presentation-Practice-Production method used for teaching grammar lessons requires a creative and resourceful teacher that is able to design a visually-appealing situation, which can be achieved by employing various formats, such as Power Point slides, printed images or even by drawing on the board. The situation designed should be able to trigger the students' imagination and their curiosity, as well as to motivate them to engage in building up the situation by discussing with their peers and, thus, coming closer to discovering and producing the target language.

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