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## The use of digital storytelling to address school-related burnout among 10-11 grade students

Anita Lanszki<sup>\*</sup>, Nóra Kunos<sup>\*</sup>

### Abstract

*The paper presents how digital storytelling was used as an empowerment tool among high school students diagnosed with school-related burnout ( $N = 13$ ) in Hungary. The aim of applying digital storytelling was to change students' time perspective, which was measured with Stanford Time Perspective Inventory before and after the digital storytelling intervention. The creative method allowed students to express their personal school experiences on verbal and visual levels while using digital technologies. The outcomes of the digital storytelling process were first-person video narratives, which presented the school career and self-reflections of students in a very expressive and touching way. Students' temporal profile changed after the digital storytelling intervention; they became future-oriented. In most cases, students reflected on their past and present experiences at school, and they found a solution and developed a perspective for their future educational career. Digital storytelling as a complex arts-based method had a positive effect on students. While working on the project, the change of students' time perspectives (Zimbardo & Boyd, 2008) from past-negative and present-fatalistic to future-oriented was measured, which helped all the participants find a way to be more determined and optimistic.*

**Keywords:** school-related burnout, digital storytelling, multimedia technology, time perspective, self-expression

### Introduction

The term burnout was created by Freudenberger (1974), who first described the phenomenon as the significant change of mood, attitude, motivation, and personality of volunteers in health care. Since then, researchers have examined burnout in almost all fields of human service professions (Byrne, 1999, Maslach, Schaufeli & Leiter 2001), such as among teachers too (Hock, 1988; Capel, 1991). Burnout's three main symptoms, exhaustion, cynicism towards one's work, and feeling of inefficacy at the job, have been at the centre of all research. The work-related burnout can be measured with a validated questionnaire Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) (Maslach, 1996). The inclination to burnout depends on either individual features (Malakh-Pines, Aronson & Kafry, 1981) or the workplace's organizational characteristics (Maslach et al., 2001). Burnout was also

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identified among university students (Neumann et al., 1990), especially medical students (IsHak et al., 2013). Salmela-Aro explored burnout among high school students (Salmela-Aro, Kiuru, Pietikainen, & Jokela, 2008), and the research group developed the School Burnout Inventory based on MBI and put it into practice all over the world to measure the status of students' burnout (Walburg, 2014). School-related burnout is an existing phenomenon among high school students in Hungary (Kunos, 2015, 2018). The burnout symptoms of Hungarian high school students ( $N=165$ ) were measured with the School Burnout Inventory and the content analysis of students' school career narratives. Students' school burnout symptoms showed little correlation with their performance: the vulnerability of excellent students is no less than that of the weaker performers, and – in accordance with international research findings (Kunos, 2015; Walburg, 2014) a good school environment, a sufficiently attentive parenting background, career guidance, and leisure are crucial factors to prevent burnout. In schools where students had an increased perception of their teachers' fatigue and cynical attitude towards students, the burnout level of students was higher than average (Kunos, 2018).

Walburg (2014) summarized the extended school-related burnout research in her literature review, and she emphasized the importance of burnout prevention with feelings, self-efficacy, and coping strategies. Digital storytelling (hereinafter referred to as DST) is an excellent creative method for articulating autobiographical narratives using digital tools. It supports self-expression and self-reflection, which helps individuals articulate feelings and explore the background and reasons for difficulties. The method improves individuals' problem-solving skills (Hung, Hwang, & Huang, 2012; Lambert, 2013; Lanszki, 2015) and self-efficacy (Heo, 2009; Xu et al., 2011; Liu et al., 2014; Kotluk & Kocakaya, 2017; Balaman, 2020).

### **Digital storytelling as an art-based narrative autobiographical method**

DST is a narrated filmmaking method developed by Lambert and Atchley in the mid-'90s in San Francisco. It combines self-reflectional story-writing with the newest digital technologies and multimedia tools. Individuals can tell their personal stories from different perspectives with the help of still or moving images, sound, and narrative voice. In the first phase of a DST workshop, members create an atmosphere of trust using icebreakers and storytelling games. Then the members individually formulate the text of their stories, which are discussed in the group. As a third step, the members record their texts with their smartphones – it is the voice-over narration of their digital stories. Then they search for images or make illustrations, and they edit their video with software (e.g., Movie Maker), aligning the text with the images. In the last step, the group members share and discuss the digital stories.

### **Digital stories as self-expression products**

Digital stories are audiovisual products supplemented with personal images and the filmmakers' voices, who participate in a very intense creative process. The method's most

significant advantage is that filmmakers can show their life stories, their unique situations, or perspectives to other individuals in a very effective way. The method allows everyday people to share aspects of their special situations using digital technology showing personal images or illustrations, using their narrative voices in an emotionally expressing and touching way (Lambert, 2013; Lanszki, 2016, 2017). Lundby (2008) calls digital stories mediatized stories made by amateur creators. These low-budget I-stories are self-representations in digital format and therefore can be shared on the Internet.

Several situations can be presented with the help of these first-person digital stories. Storytellers can give visualized reporting about their most relevant problem related to themselves or their situation in a social institution (e.g., a hospital, school, different state offices, etc.) in digital format. The individuals reflect on themselves and the institutional anomalies in these short, animated narratives. The storyteller unfolds the real feature of the organization and gives an exact characterization in addition to the usual statistics and diagrams. The project "Patient Voices" in the United Kingdom was one of the programmes that aimed to measure healthcare quality with the help of digital stories created by the patients (Stacey & Hardy, 2011). Since these first-hand stories pointed to the lack of healthcare, nurses and doctors could encounter the system's defects.

### ***The importance of the creative activities of digital storytelling***

In addition to the representative and documenting value of the digital stories, the importance of the creative process should also be emphasized. DST is an autobiographical narrative method whose phases include multiple storytelling stages. In the Story Circle phase, the participants try to find their most important autobiographical narratives within a topic. The individual stories are (re)formulated during stages of the story writing and the voiceover recording, along with the feedback of the facilitator and other participants. The benefits of storytelling are well known in psychotherapy and cognitive therapy (Gardner, 1971; De La Torre, 1972; Rosen, 1982; Friedberg, 1994; Rennie, 1994) because stories' narrative structure can help patients highlight and understand conflicts. Storytelling provides a cognitive schema to represent life events and explore logical connections between them which helps formulate conclusions (Compton, 2000; Bergner, 2007). Anderson and Wallace (2015) used DST as a trauma narrative intervention for children exposed to domestic violence. They stated that creating a digital story regarding significant experiences helps in recovering by transforming sufferings into solutions. In a DST process, students create their autobiographical stories in a linear narrative structure and put their experiences in chronological order.

Although DST is a self-expressive creative method, where the filmmaker explores and understands past experiences and reflects on present life situations, the collaborative interactions appearing during the production of digital stories are crucial. Erstad and Wertsch (2008) called DST a collaborative, co-productive, and participative process because the films are results of both individual and cooperative work. Whilst the co-

creation, the group participants help each other understand and interpret the stories and explore similar elements in the group members' narratives. This collective emotional experience gave the feeling of emotional safety and acceptance of one another and led to the definition of solutions. Szemán and Szabó's (2017) and Horváth et al.'s (2017) research projects confirmed that group members supported each other and felt active in creating, which contributed to develop and experience empowerment in personal problem-solving situations. Hung et al. (2012) measured the effect of DST as an instructional method on students' (n=117) problem-solving skills with Pan's problem-solving competence scale in a science course of an elementary school. The results showed that DST improved students' problem-solving skills by enhancing group cooperation and thinking capacity and by uniting efforts to solve problems in discussions. DST enhanced students' self-efficacy by discovering their abilities and capacities throughout the creative process. Szemán and Szabó (2017) underlined that DST's empowerment effect could also be traced back to the active and creative use of technology throughout the process.

To conclude it all, it can be stated that DST is a method, which allows self-expression on a verbal and visual level. Whilst formulating individual narratives, the filmmakers can understand and systematize the causes and solutions of their problems. Sharing stories leads to constructive discussions and collaborative support within the group. The whole process opens the door for creativity because the filmmakers create and collect images and sound and edit video - so DST, as other art-based projects enhance one's self-efficacy.

### **The aims and objectives of the research project**

Our present study aims to explore what effects DST has on high school students' burnout syndrome. The research was based on the fact that burnout syndrome has been diagnosed among high school students, and DST can be one possible solution for treating it. Hungarian high school students' (N=13) burnout stories were collected, and the effects of DST on students' time perspectives were measured.

We assumed that DST as a narrative art-based empowerment method could help students realize and identify their problems at school and find a solution to them with the teachers' and classmates' help.

*Hypothesis 1.:* DST as a narrative method helps students with burnout syndrome to create audiovisual texts using images and the terms of past, present, and future, and thereby explore the background and solution of their burnout syndrome.

*Hypothesis 2.:* DST as an empowerment tool helps students change their time perspectives from past-negative and present-fatalistic to future-oriented.

### **Methodology**

#### **Sample and method**

One teacher and thirteen 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup>-grade students were involved in the study. The students also participated in the preliminary research (N=239). One of the selection

criteria for the second research was that all of them were diagnosed with school-related burnout in the preliminary examination. The second selection criteria were that they had to go to the same high school. Thirteen 16-18-year-old students applied and participated in the research on a voluntary basis. The students did not go to the same class, but they knew each other.

The facilitating teacher taught history, and she could organize a DST training because she was already familiar with the method of DST. Due to the intense emotional effects of the process, a school psychologist was also involved. The teacher made a 3-days DST workshop for the students at the high school and also familiarized the participants with the technical and ethical aspects of DST. She used the curriculum developed by Lambert (2013). During the process, the students had to find their relevant school career stories in the so-called Story Circle, then they wrote narratives, recorded them, and then looked for and took photos regarding their stories. They used digital technologies, like digital cameras, voice recorders on smartphones, and video editing software. The results were short films, a mixture of personal stories, the narrative voice of authors, images, and background music. The stories were discussed in the classroom.

At first, in the Story Circle, students were asked the following catalyzing questions, which also helped them formulate their texts. The researcher observed that.

- Why did they choose this school? What were their expectations?
- To what extent do they feel these expectations were fulfilled?
- When were they first surprised by their expectations? Why?
- Which types of impulses felt they at school? From whom?
- How have they managed with frustration? Where can they draw strength from?
- Give a metaphor that they recall regarding school!

The texts and the pictures of students' digital stories were analysed by content, and to summarize our research, we had a focus group interview with the same students at the end of the intervention. They were asked the following questions:

- Has the creative action of filmmaking helped to experience the feeling of empowerment?
- Have the students reached a relevant solution to the problems?
- Do they believe the presentation of the films could influence the school atmosphere positively?

Students' time perspective was measured before and after the DST intervention with Zimbardo's Time Perspective Inventory (2008).

## Results

Preliminary research revealed the burnout characteristics of a wider group of students ( $N=239$ ) and their teachers. In the first part of the chapter, the results of this research are presented, followed by the results of the DST research with 13 students.

The background of the research: students' and their teachers' burnout symptoms

In the first step of our research, we asked 239 high school students from different parts of Hungary and various schools to fulfil Salmela-Aro's School Burnout Inventory (2009). Data was analyzed by using SPSS Statistics software. The preliminary study aimed to determine burnout symptoms (exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy) among students and the seriousness of the problem. 37 (15.5 %) of students were threatened by burnout in general, 85 (35.6 %) threatened in exhaustion from school demands, 75 (31.4 %) in cynical attitude to schoolwork, and 34 (14.2 %) in a feeling of inefficiency at school (Table 1).

*Table 1. Symptoms of burnout syndrome*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid	Cum. Percent
			Percent		
<b>Exhaustion</b>	Not threatened	154	64.4	64.4	64.4
	Threatened	85	35.6	35.6	100.0
<b>Cynicism</b>	Not threatened	164	68.6	68.6	68.6
	Threatened	75	31.4	31.4	100.0
<b>Inefficacy</b>	Not threatened	205	85.8	85.8	85.8
	Threatened	34	14.2	14.2	100.0
<b>Burnout</b>	Not threatened	202	84.5	84.5	84.5
	Threatened	37	15.5	15.5	100.0
	Total	239	100.0	100.0	

Table 2 provides a convincing argument that there was a significant connection between burnout syndrome in general and several of its symptoms.

*Table 2. Burnout and symptoms of burnout – One-Way ANOVA (0: Not threatened in burnout, 1: threatened in burnout)*

	N	Mean	Std.	Sig.	
				Deviation	
Exhaustion	0	202	3.1419	1.06955	0.000***
	1	37	4.5045	0.75204	
Cynicism	0	202	2.8795	1.09135	0.000***
	1	37	4.4955	0.76020	
Inefficacy	0	202	2.3663	0.81175	0.000***
	1	37	4.3964	0.71075	
Total	239	2.6806	1.08370		

We suspected a connection between burnout syndrome and several background factors such as gender and age, school life and a general feeling of well-being, satisfaction with school support, and achievement in schoolwork. Our assumptions were verified since these factors were strongly connected to burnout (Table 3).

*Table 3. Students' burnout and satisfaction with school results, programs at support*

		Satisfactio n with school results	Satisfaction with school programs	School support	Well-being at school	Well-being in general
Exhaustion	Pearson Corr	0.028	0.107	0.042	0.199*	<b>0.355**</b>
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.741	0.214	0.623	0.019	0.000
Cynicism	Pearson Corr	0.273**	0.221**	<b>0.389**</b>	<b>0.414**</b>	0.301**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.001	0.010	0.000	0.000	0.000
Inefficacy	Pearson Corr	0.177*	0.172*	0.249**	<b>0.416**</b>	<b>0.449**</b>
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.036	0.044	0.003	,000	0.000
Burnout	Pearson Corr	0.207*	0.213*	0.295**	<b>0.433**</b>	<b>0.454**</b>
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.014	0.012	0.000	0.000	0.000

To the School Burnout Inventory by Salmela-Aro, we attached three more statements about teachers' burnout. There was a strong relationship between students' burnout and the teachers' burnout. (Table 4.).

Table 4. Students' and teachers' burnout

		Teacher Exhaustion	Teacher Cynicism	Teacher Inefficacy	Teacher Burnout
Exhaustion	Pearson Corr	<b>0.451**</b>	0.181*	0.149	0.345**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.031	0.079	0.000
Cynicism	Pearson Corr	0.360**	0.335**	0.330**	<b>0.435**</b>
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Inefficacy	Pearson Corr	<b>0.549**</b>	<b>0.378**</b>	<b>0.418**</b>	<b>0.575**</b>
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Burnout	Pearson Corr	<b>0.558**</b>	<b>0.375**</b>	<b>0.377**</b>	<b>0.563**</b>
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000

It is consistent and significant, but a quite strong correlation between students' and their teachers' burnout as pupils can identify the latter. Students had to value the following statements: 1. *"I feel my teachers have got tired of their school demands"* - it refers to the dimension of exhaustion; 2. *"The teachers are not seriously interested in students' school life"* - feeling of teachers' cynicism; 3. *"My teachers are disappointed about the lack of success with their students"* - supposed problem of the inefficacy of teachers.

Due to the regular experience of negative impulses, students are emotionally fatigued. They show a cynical attitude towards school, and they go through a continuous feeling of incompetence when it comes to their tasks. This long-lasting phlegmatic attitude can have a negative effect on their motivation, on their future perspectives, and moreover, they can experience psychosomatic symptoms that could even lead to depression.

We could explore a consistent correlation between symptoms of burnout and satisfaction or well-being. The highest constellation was uncovered between the whole burnout syndrome and general and particular school well-being. However, the highest value of ( $p=-0.454$ ) between burnout and a general feeling of satisfaction points to a personal dimension worth examining deeper.

As we can see, the inefficient students feel the highest connection between their inefficacy and all three dimensions of teachers' burnout.

In this preliminary research, we realized the extremely important role of teachers concerning the students' difficulties. We considered that school life in general, school well-being, and teachers' support had a huge effect on students' perception and can prevent burnout. We supposed that students' viewpoints could be changed by giving tools to teachers to manage their students' burnout. A group of 13 voluntary students from the big sample of this research and their teacher undertook DST.

### The impact of DST on high school students with burnout syndrome

In the Story Circle, students were very open and honest, and they gave much verbal information. The conversation was serious about their feelings, school demands, parents' and teachers' expectations, school restrictions, and the lack of "own" spare time. They shared with the teacher their anxious feelings, e.g., fear of the future, choice of profession, and university demands. Students also explained the causes and symptoms of their burnout. They talked about their coping strategies as well, and it eased the tension in the group: they remembered sports events, going to nature, dancing, having parties, or doing nothing at home in a dark room. Of course, they mentioned alcohol and drugs as the opportunity to switch out, but they all refused to use them.

They named the following metaphors: school is a "*cave, a black hole, a circus, a whirlpool of water, a roller coaster, an orchestra, a team*" – these metaphors became the starting points of their stories.

Then the students, with the help of the teacher and their classmates, created their own stories. In the end, 13 students' digital stories were made in the length of 2-4 minutes. The digital stories were screened in a private silent environment. Then the students discussed the experiences of the workshop and the conclusions of the digital stories with the teacher and the psychologist. Students were happy to share their experiences and expectations about the school. They believed that problem solving is possible this way.

The students experienced the DST process very intensively. They compared one another's stories and discussed their situation, school life constructively. They could place themselves and their situation in context and could reveal the relations of their problems. This allowed recalling their past and re-framed it in a new and positive narrative. They started to choose more effective and positive perspectives as the present- and future-oriented ones in their conversations which also appeared in their final texts.

Students' time perspective profiles were measured by Zimbardo's Time Perspective Inventory (2008). According to Zimbardo, it is a crucial factor in the personal and social experiences of how the persons reflect on previous and present events and what goals and feelings they have about the future. The pre-testing results showed that nine students were past-negative, four highly present-fatalistic, and no one was future-oriented. Meanwhile, post-testing results showed that five students got a solid future orientation, five showed a past-positive attitude, and two became present-hedonistic.

This research result can also be underlined with the content analysis of the digital stories. Students pointed to the root of their burnout throughout the creative process in a structured narrative, identifying their present situation and foreseeing their future options. Examining the first part of each text, it was found that eleven students blamed the teachers' punitive verbal feedback, ten students named the inflexibility of the teachers, and eight students blamed the teachers' indifference for their negative school

feelings. The students described their present situations at school with metaphors such as "*prison, black hole, desert, trap, circus*". They also used adjectives like "*boring, monotonous, unexciting, flat, grey, closed, inflexible, empty, useless*". In the second part of their texts, the students listed the elements of their surviving strategies, such as "*parties, communication with classmates, setting individual goals, finding a hobby, making friends, art, and preparing for college*".

We can find a good example of how a student reached a future-oriented or a more past-positive approach instead of a past-negative and present-fatalist attitude in a sample digital story. The text of her digital story is:

*"Ten Years at School.*

*Where should I start the story? No, that is too early. (a picture of a newborn baby) Ah, that is it! My life did not begin in September of '99. It started when I walked into school. I wasn't fascinated. My opinion of the school as a 6-year-old child was: (pictures like a shouting teacher, 1+1=2, books, pens, pupils like zombies). It looks pretty morbid, but that was my opinion: an irritating, shouting teacher, frightening children, complicated tasks, useless books...and I'm left-handed, so I always had ink on my left arm. Thus I was soon very tired of it. The older children said: you sink or swim. The "swimming" did not happen, so I fell into this prison. It is a prison for the mind, for the imagination. That was how I experienced every second at school...and I have done it up to now. It was hard to listen to a person who talked about boring things for 45 minutes. However, I became accustomed to it. When she ordered, I stood up and sat down. But these ten years: just like a big grey spot. It has been monotonous, and it will be so in the future, too. I've never had challenges in learning. I have always learned what I have wanted to. A teacher in the secondary school said I was stupid. So I started to believe her.*

*I found a solution. I chose my favorite subjects: English and Literature. I wanted to be the best in these subjects. I was not interested in marks. I developed my skills. My parents expected me to get good marks, of course. However, I was obstinate. I disagreed. I had lots of conflicts with my teachers and classmates, too. I have not had enough challenges at school. I have grown lazy.*

*Nevertheless, a very important thing happened to me. I have reached emotional maturity. I do not know if it happened because my teachers or my classmates caused it. That is the best thing at school, just like an open window. I experience different points of view. I can develop my own opinion while I meet several personalities, different reflections.*

*Maybe the school was not so useless after all."*

The student's past-negative attitude can also be seen on images 1-4, which showed a shouting teacher, a prohibitive traffic sign, a child's drawing of a school, and an empty classroom. These images were visual reflections of a disappointed and scared student. In

contrast, in images 5-6., we can see children's hands show up at school and a book. These images present a more optimistic student; she realizes the benefits of being part of the education. Finally, in images 7-8. we can see a window and cheerful friends, which show a more positive point of view regarding the future perspective and the educational career. The student can accept her present situation and figure out a perspective of a better future at last. In the digital story, a more positive present and future time-perception can be found.

The focus group interview with the same students also showed interesting results. In the focus group interview, all the students participated very actively; they also made efforts in their answers to change their past-negative and present-fatalist perspectives. They reflected on the DST as a method, too. The students were of the opinion that the process helped them to explore their problems. They explored the complexity of their situation and figured out that they were not alone because others had similar mental conditions at school. They also mentioned that sharing stories and participating in the DST training was a creative and productive self-learning process, which positively impacted students' feelings and self-efficacy.

The students said that first, they were shocked by the feeling of incompetence in filmmaking and had some difficulties with the online video editing software. They spent a lot of time selecting the images and editing the digital story. However, in the end, all of them had a cathartic feeling to make a video and were satisfied with themselves. We could consider that they fully experienced the power of creativity and empowerment. Their opinion was that DST is a relevant and modern form of self-expression. They were proud of their multimedia products, and most of them wanted to share their videos with others on the Internet to show their current situation.

We did not receive a clear positive answer to the question if they have reached a relevant solution to the problems. DST did not show the solution, but the method may be the first step in mapping, realizing, and solving problems. The students stated that they could also learn about their classmates' problem-solving strategies during the presentation of the stories.

We also asked them if they believe the presentation of the videos could influence the school atmosphere positively. All of them were proud of their products, and they thought if the films were shown, they could experience empathy from their mates and the school community.

## Conclusion

The preliminary research results showed that school life in general, school well-being, and teachers' support had a huge effect on students' perception and can prevent burnout. We supposed that students' viewpoints could be changed by giving a tool, namely DST, to teachers to manage their students' burnout. In the second research, a group of 13 students from the big sample and their teacher used DST adequately to articulate their burnout stories.

The first hypothesis of the study was partially proven. DST as a narrative method helped students with burnout syndrome create audiovisual texts using images and the terms of past, present, and future. They could thereby explore the background of their burnout syndrome. Still, they could not find a final solution. The biggest benefit of DST was that students could tell others their stories, could verbally and visually present their problems. Aside from this opportunity for ventilation, the significances of the process were firstly, that the self-expression through DST helped students identify the correlations between their school experiences. Secondly, it helped them with finding the causes of their burnout. In summarising the narratives, the students drew the conclusion of their own stories. Unfortunately, it did not lead them to define a clear solution to their problems, and they only set out on the way out of burnout. However, it should be emphasized that the DST method helped them to identify and express emotions, which was a great help in exhausting the burnout emotion.

The second hypothesis was proven because the results of pre and post time-perspective measurements, the content analysis of students' digital stories and some of the interview answers showed that DST as technology and art-based method functioned as an empowerment tool and helped students to change their time perspectives from past-negative and present-fatalistic to future-oriented. Students diagnosed with burnout syndrome had higher scores in the categories of "past-negative" and "present-fatalistic" on the Zimbardo Time Perspective Inventory before the DST intervention. DST helped the students to relieve or end the burnout symptoms by developing a sense of other time perspectives, such as "past-positive", "present hedonistic" or/and "future-oriented".

The students showed us their aspects and opinions about their life situations and relationships in the digital stories. They tried to figure out the reason and solution to their problem while producing the digital stories. We can consider that digital stories represent students' burnout symptoms or even help them understand their issues. Digital stories made by students with burnout symptoms showed the process, how the symptoms have developed. The digital stories are audiovisual self-reflections that also give information about the school and teachers, and on a higher level, they are feedback about the whole public education system.

The most important outcome of the study is that students could restructure their time perspective (Zimbardo and Boyd, 2008) while thinking about their school career in the past, describing their actual situation, and maybe creating a more positive approach to their future. DST helped to relieve or identify the symptoms of burnout syndrome by developing a sense of other time perspectives, such as "past-positive", "present hedonistic," or/and "future-oriented". Throughout the creative process, students will point to the root of their burnout in a structured narrative, define their present situation, and foresee future options.

It can be stated that DST is a great tool to present the students' actual situation, and it can also develop students' problem-solving strategies and self-efficacy. Students' digital stories also provide feedback for the teacher on his or her function and behavior. Using

the technique, the parties on the path to burnout affect each other to handle the burnout syndrome in a school setting.

One of the research limitations is that the sample selection was not randomized. Not every member of the population of high school students with burnout syndrome could participate in the study, so the research results cannot be generalized for the whole population. The other limitation is that - although the students developed reflexivity and problem-solving strategies - it cannot be stated that DST has a therapeutic effect. Burnout is treated individually, depending on the severity, with the involvement of a psychologist or psychiatrist. In severe burnout, where major depression is the end state, the method's effectiveness is questionable. In further research, the same students' time perspective and school narratives should be measured and analyze using the same measurement tools to determine whether the DST workshop truly changed students' mindsets.

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## Raising intercultural awareness through short stories in EFL classes

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### Abstract

*Teaching culture is an indispensable part of language teaching as language and culture are intertwined. Awareness of one's own culture and the target culture is necessary to be able to communicate efficiently. To raise intercultural awareness among EFL learners, literary sources can be a great source as they are authentic and reflect cultural elements. The aim of this study was to investigate the effect of short stories on intercultural awareness. In this quasi-experimental study, an experimental and a control group were chosen among B1 level of EFL students. The research was carried out in the School of Foreign Languages at a university in the Western part of Turkey. In a six-week implementation period, the experimental group (18 students) read short stories with cultural themes from different cultures. On the other hand, the control group (19 students) read nonliterary texts again with cultural themes in them. In the study, quantitative data was collected through the Intercultural Awareness Questionnaire prepared by Zorba (2019), and the questionnaire was implemented as a pretest and posttest to gather data. The findings of the study showed that there was no meaningful change in the intercultural awareness of the study group before and after the implementation in terms of intercultural awareness. Furthermore, no significant difference was observed between the experimental and control groups. In the study, it was also concluded that gender and international experience did not lead to a difference in terms of intercultural awareness of participants. The overall conclusion that can be made from this study is that intercultural awareness focus in language teaching may ameliorate the language competence of learners, but it might take time to increase awareness among learners, so institutions should prioritize increasing awareness of EFL learners with various activities.*

**Keywords:** Intercultural, language learning, short story.

### Introduction

One of the defining words of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is globalization. As Osterhammel and Petersson stress, "the world is becoming noticeably smaller as distant lands are being linked ever more closely together" (2005, p. 3). Today, distance and time problems have been eliminated; however, communication problems have occurred as communication has gained importance. There are two significant questions related to communication in this era. The first question is which language to speak. The answer is English because it

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is the most spoken language in the world with 1.5 billion speakers including native and non-native speakers (Gordon & Grimes, 2019). Furthermore, native speakers of English are politically, economically, and militarily powerful. English is the language of science, education, technology, media etc. The second question is how to communicate effectively and appropriately, especially in a non-native language. With this question, the meanings of language learning have changed and intercultural awareness in language teaching has gained momentum. To be able to use a language competently, it is necessary to have linguistic competence, knowledge of language. However, linguistic competence is not enough because to be competent in grammar and vocabulary does not mean that the language is used appropriately. In this respect, as Lee (1997) states, the main goal of foreign language learning is genuine interaction with people from different cultures, and so cultural competence is an indispensable part of foreign language learning. Also, Byram et al. argue that foreign language learning/teaching should include "intercultural competence i.e. ability to ensure a shared understanding by people of different social identities, and ability to interact with people as complex human beings with multiple identities and their own individuality" (2002, p. 10). In this globalized world, to be able to understand foreigners and to transmit our ideas clearly, intercultural awareness as one component of intercultural competence is necessary. Not having intercultural awareness may hamper effective communication. For this reason, while teaching English, a curriculum without an intercultural awareness focus might be tenuous. Therefore, culture is very important in foreign language teaching. Since English belongs to all individuals and communities who use the language, individuals who learn English as a foreign language must be aware of not only English and American cultures but also many different cultures. The aim of this study is to examine the effect of using short stories to raise intercultural awareness. It is expected that students will be able to read short stories that tell about different cultures, and it will contribute to their intercultural awareness.

### **Language Competence**

A competence is "a bundle of cognitively controlled abilities or skills in some particular domain" (Lehmann, 2007, p. 224). Language competence has its own way from Chomsky's linguistic competence to communicative competence. For Chomsky, language competence is the knowledge of the language itself. It is the knowledge of phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics. Chomsky stresses the difference between competence and performance in *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*:

Linguistic theory is concerned primarily with an ideal speaker-listener, in a completely homogeneous speech-community, who knows it's (the speech community's) language perfectly and is unaffected by such grammatically irrelevant conditions as memory limitations, distractions, shifts of attention and interest, and errors (random or characteristic) in applying his knowledge of the language in actual performance. (1965, p. 3)

Chomsky was criticized with his narrow view of language learning as he did not give importance to communicative aspects of language. With Hymes, the concept of competence has been extended, and it included psycholinguistic perspectives. Hymes (1972) defined communicative competence with four dimensions, and he suggested that language learning requires the ability to use grammatical competence in a variety of communicative situations. These four dimensions are grammaticality, appropriateness, occurrence, and feasibility. Canale and Swain (1980) expanded communicative competence by including grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence into communicative competence. It has been understood that mastering the rules of language does not mean using the language; there are some other criteria. It is important to master the sociocultural and discourse rules. "The mastery of how to combine grammatical forms and meanings to achieve a unified spoken or written text in different genres" (Canale, 1983, p. 9) is necessary. Verbal and non-verbal communication strategies, which compensate for communication problems are an indispensable part of language learning.

### **Intercultural Awareness**

The new perspectives in language teaching have stressed the necessity of culture teaching. With communicative approach, teaching target cultures has been integrated into language teaching as language and culture are bound to each other. Without an awareness of the target culture, it is difficult to communicate effectively in that target language. However, communicative approach which promotes the awareness of native cultures has been criticized because in this globalized world, English has been denationalized and the cultural content of ELT cannot be "reduced to a single, limited, monolingual or monocultural concept" (Nunn, 2005, p. 65). Kachru (1992) also agrees with this idea, and he gives numerous reasons for integrating other cultures to language teaching. Firstly, English is spoken by 1.5 billion people, and only 360 million are native speakers. The rest are non-native speakers. Secondly, English is "not an exponent of Western-Judeo-Christian tradition anymore" (Kachru, 1992, pp. 67-68). There are other institutionalized local models in the outer circles. Lastly, the English of expanding, and outer circles is interlanguage which strives to achieve native-like characteristics. Thus, it can be concluded that cultural competence is not enough under these conditions. What is a must is intercultural competence, and it is "the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (Deardorff, 2004, p. 194). Intercultural competence is a complex structure, and there are many models and components (Barrett, 2012; Byram et al., 2002; Fantini, 2000). "Intercultural awareness" is one of the two components of intercultural competence along with intercultural sensitivity and it can be defined as "a conscious understanding of the role of culturally based forms, practices and frames of understanding can have in intercultural communication, and an ability to put these

conceptions into practice in a flexible and context specific manner in real time communication" (Baker, 2009, p. 88).

Intercultural awareness includes the cognitive perspectives of intercultural competence. Cognitive training includes "the change of thinking about the environment" (Triandis, 1977, p. 21), and intercultural awareness requires understanding and change in a person's ideas. Intercultural awareness has a significant role since it aims to prepare learners to cope with unexpected situations resulting from cultural differences (Rappel, 2011, p. 4). If a person has an intercultural awareness, it can be easier for them to "reduce the level of ambiguity and uncertainty" (Chen & Starosta, 1998, p. 30). Thus, it can be said that intercultural awareness is a requirement for communication, and as the main function of language learning is to be able to communicate, automatically; intercultural awareness becomes important in language teaching. The Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) also stresses the importance of intercultural awareness in language teaching: "it is a central objective of language education to promote the favorable development of the learner's whole personality and sense of identity in response to the enriching experience of otherness in language and culture" (2001, p. 1).

On the one hand, even if it is not aimed, it is inevitable to teach culture in language classrooms. Culture surrounds people. When people try to learn a language, whether they try to ignore it or not, they are exposed to culture. Zhou clearly expresses this:

Culture and communication are inseparable because culture not only dictates who talks to whom, about what, and how the communication proceeds, it also helps to determine how people encode messages, the meanings they have for messages, and the conditions and circumstances under which various messages may or may not be sent, noticed, or interpreted. Culture is the foundation of communication. (2011, p. 1)

Thus, while teaching English, intercultural awareness should be taken into account and several studies (Atay et al., 2009; Kawamura, 2011; Liu, 2016; Valdes, 1990; Yılmaz, 2016) also confirm that it should be integrated into language teaching.

### **Use of Literature in Language Classroom**

A large number of educationalists (Brumfit, 1985; Duff & Maley, Mckay, 1982; Van, 2009; Zyngier, 1994; 2007) put forward a number of reasons to include the use of literature in language classes. As authentic materials, they can be a great tool for personal involvement, language enrichment, and cultural/intercultural development, and several studies justify the effectiveness of literary texts in language teaching (Bahçe, 2008; Chen, 2013; Civelekoğlu, 2015). The use of short stories has also been investigated in several national and international studies (Andenoro et al., 2012; Baltes et al., 2014; Çandırli, 2018; Derado, 2015; Logioio, 2010; Savic, 2012;). They all conclude that story telling is beneficial for enhancing intercultural awareness.

## Methodology

In this study, the effect of using short stories on the intercultural awareness levels of the participants in teaching English is investigated. The present study primarily attempts to seek answers to these questions:

1. Does using short stories in EFL classes have an impact on raising intercultural awareness?
2. Is there a difference between the experimental and control groups in terms of intercultural awareness posttest levels?
3. Does the gender have an effect on the intercultural awareness level of the experimental group?
4. Does the gender have an effect on the intercultural awareness level of the control group?
5. Does international experience have an effect on the intercultural awareness level of the experimental group?
6. Does international experience have an effect on the intercultural awareness level of the control group?

In the study, it is hypothesized that

1. Using short stories in EFL classes will have a positive impact on raising intercultural awareness.
2. The gender may have an effect on the intercultural awareness levels of the study group.
3. International experience may have a positive effect on the intercultural awareness levels of the study group.

## Research Design

The aim of this study is mainly to examine the effect of using short stories to raise intercultural awareness of B1 level learners of English. To realize this aim, a quasi-experimental designed study was conducted at the School of Foreign Languages, at a university on the west side of the country. "Quasi-experimental designs do not include the use of random assignment" (Fraenkel et al., 2012, p. 275). At the School of Foreign Languages, classes are organized at the beginning of each semester, and they are assigned to instructors. For this reason, a quasi-experimental design was chosen in the study. The main idea behind all experimental studies is simple: "try something and systematically observe what happens" (Fraenkel et al., 2012, p. 262). The treatment is the use of short stories with intercultural themes, and its effect on intercultural awareness was measured through an intercultural awareness questionnaire. Also, the data were collected through quantitative research design. It can be defined as "explaining phenomena by collecting numerical data that are analyzed using mathematically based methods, in particular statistics" (Aliaga & Gunderson, 2000, p. 5). Quantitative research design was preferred

because it minimizes personal bias by eliminating subjectivity in judgment (Kealey & Protheroe, 1996) and as Winter (2000) stresses, quantitative research design is valid and it can be replicable.

### **Study Group**

The study was implemented at a university in the west part of the country in the School of Foreign Languages. The study group included 37 students. Before the implementation, consent forms were signed by the study group. The experimental group consisted of 18 students, and the control group consisted of 19 students. The study group was formed from already existing B1 classes. In the study, in choosing the experimental group, convenient sampling was used. The experimental group was the researcher's own class, and the control group has the closest medium to experimental group in terms of intercultural awareness. In this study, the participants were chosen among B1 students instead of A1 or A2 students because their English level is higher and as Ur (1996) states, literary texts might be demotivating for students whose English level is below intermediate.

### **Data Collection Tools**

The Intercultural Awareness Questionnaire was administered before and after the intervention. The questionnaire was developed by Mehmet Galip Zorba (2019) and taken from his PhD Thesis called "Raising Intercultural Awareness of the 7<sup>th</sup> Grade Students through Practical English Activities". The Cronbach's Alpha value of the questionnaire was .828 for the pretest and .806 for the posttest in his study. The validity of the questionnaire is based on expert opinion. In our study, The Cronbach's Alpha value was .912 as for the pretest and .855 as for the posttest.

### **Data Collection Procedure**

Before the implementation, permissions from the ethics committee and related institution were obtained, and consent forms were signed by the study group. The pretest was administered to the experimental and control groups who volunteered in the first week. In the following six weeks, both of the groups read texts with cultural themes. As for the treatment, six short stories were incorporated into the study. The stories were *The Relative Advantages of Relearning my Language* by Amy Choi, *Cat in the Rain* by Ernest Hemingway, *Eleven* by Sandra Cisneros, *Shame* by Dick Gregory, *The Beauty of Difference* (Anonymous), and *You Can't Choose Your Memories* by Paul Nguyen. The difference between the groups was that the experimental group read short stories while the control group read nonliterary texts. While choosing the texts, the level of the texts, their readability, and length of the texts were taken into account. More importantly, what we understand from intercultural awareness is that variety in terms of themes and cultures are important to raise awareness. All the stories reflect a different theme in a different culture. While preparing the lesson plans, the main focus was on similarities and differences between the native and target cultures. It is believed that through input about

different cultures and comparison, students' intercultural awareness might be developed. Lastly, in the eighth week, the posttest was given to the groups to see if their intercultural awareness levels differed.

### **Research ethics**

Dokuz Eylül University Research Ethics Committee approved the study on 27 Dec. 2019 (Document number is 16). Also, participants were informed about the details of the study. The participation was on a voluntary basis. Lastly, permission for using the instrument was obtained via e-mail.

### **Data analysis**

For data analysis, SPSS 23 (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) Software program was used. The means of different groups were assessed through an independent samples t-test. For comparing means from the same group at different times, a paired sample t-test was preferred. When analyzing the data,  $p < .05$  was used as significance level.

## **Findings and Discussion**

The aim of the study was to reveal whether using short stories could affect intercultural awareness levels of learners or not. In an attempt to investigate the relationship between using short stories and intercultural awareness, the participants' intercultural awareness levels were measured through Intercultural Awareness Questionnaire (Zorba, 2019). The pretest was administered to the experimental and control groups. After the pretests, the experimental group read short stories which included intercultural themes, and the control group read nonliterary texts with intercultural themes. After a six-week implementation, the posttest was given to both of the groups to find out if using short stories promoted the intercultural awareness levels of participants. The results obtained from this research are discussed below regarding the research questions and related studies in the field.

### ***Does using short stories in EFL classes have an impact on raising intercultural awareness?***

*Table 1. Paired samples t-test results of the pretest and posttest of the experimental group*

	Number	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig. (2-Tailed)
Pretest results	18	3.98	.29	.13
Posttest results	18	4.09	.39	

Although there is an increase in the levels of intercultural awareness of the participants by using short stories, the increase is not statistically significant ( $p=.13 > .05$ ). The pretest and posttest results of the research clearly showed that using short stories did not help the students to raise intercultural awareness because there was not a statistically significant difference between the pretest and posttest results of the experimental group ( $p=.13 > .05$ ). One similar study was conducted by Aşni and Çelik (2015).

They also used the story *Cat in the Rain*, and in this qualitative study, they concluded that the story was not adequate to raise intercultural awareness among participants. One reason why short stories were not effective in raising intercultural awareness might be that participants in our study and in the study of Aşni et al. might not have been interested in reading literary texts. in a limited amount of time. In addition to this study, there are quantitative studies (Civelekoğlu, 2015; Risner, 2011; Zorba & Çakır, 2019) with similar results. Moreover, there are other studies (Abida & Kuswardani, 2017; Civelekoğlu 2015; Moecharam & KartikaSari, 2014; Nie, 2017) which investigated the effects of literary texts on raising intercultural awareness. It might be suggested that it is difficult to change intercultural awareness of participants as Korzilius et al. (2007) suggested. Another study which supported this idea is an experimental study conducted by Risner (2011), and she found out that it was difficult to change the awareness levels of participants in a limited period of time.

On the other hand, there are many studies which claim that using short stories is beneficial to promoting intercultural competence (Burwitz-Melzer, 2001; Çandırlı, 2018; Derado, 2015; Zapata, 2005; Logioio, 2010; Andenoro et al., 2012; Moecharam & KartikaSari, 2014; Savic, 2012; Stevens 2014; Rezaei & Naghibian, 2018). In another study, Rodríguez (2012) showed that EFL learners could build cultural knowledge through literary materials and favored authentic materials to raise intercultural awareness. The study showed different results from our study. The reasons for this might be the differences in study group, duration of the study, method the researcher used, and the extra project the study group worked on. Her study group was university pre-service EFL teachers and their competency both in English and intercultural competence might be different from our study group who were preparatory school students. Furthermore, the implementation took more time than our study did. In addition to these, she used various approaches while presenting the short stories: inquiry-based approach, dialogic approach, transactional approach, and content based approach. One last difference was that the participants had worked on class projects to study cultural content of the U.S., the United Kingdom, Australia and Canada. For these reasons, the results of this study and our study might have differed.

Finally, when our study was compared with the studies where the components of intercultural competence increased, one last reason why intercultural awareness of our study group was not improved could be due to the effects of the coronavirus pandemic the world was undergoing. In some of the weeks of the implementation, people all around the world including our participants were afraid of the virus, and people distanced from each other physically. It might have led to a psychological distance as well, and our participants' feelings, thoughts, and tolerance might have been affected negatively, so it might have influenced posttest results.

***Is there a difference between the experimental and control groups in terms of intercultural awareness posttest levels?***

*Table 2. Independent samples t-test results of the posttests of the experimental and control groups*

	Number	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig. (2-Tailed)
Experimental group	18	4.09	.39	.90
Control group	19	4.10	.31	

It could be said that two groups are alike in terms of posttest intercultural awareness levels ( $p=.90 > .05$ ). It could be said that the experimental and control groups resembled each other in terms of intercultural awareness posttest levels ( $p=.90 > .05$ ). If the studies related to intercultural issues are reviewed, it can be concluded that in some studies there were control groups with different kinds of treatments, and in other studies control group was not exposed to any extra activities with intercultural themes. It is important to differentiate between them because when there is exposure to intercultural themes; it might lead to different results. In the present study, the experimental group studied literary texts. On the other hand, the control group studied nonliterary texts. In a similar vein, Bérešová (2014) conducted research on cultural awareness by comparing literary and nonliterary texts, and the researcher claimed that because there was a slight difference between the two groups, any texts with cultural themes, could enhance intercultural awareness. Besides, there are some other studies (Güneş, 2016; Korziliuz et al., 2007; Topaloğlu, 2016; Zorba & Çakır, 2019) where the experimental and control groups did not differ after the implementation.

On the other hand, there are studies (Bahçe, 2008; Çandırlı, 2018; Derado, 2015; Scott & Huntington, 2008; Zacharias, 2005) where experimental and control groups differed because of the choice of literary and nonliterary texts. Basically, in these studies, using literary texts worked better.

***Does the gender have an effect on intercultural awareness?***

*Table 3. Posttest scores of the experimental group by gender*

Gender	Number	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig. (2-Tailed)
Female	6	4.26	.22	.18
Male	12	4	.43	

In Table 3, it appears that although females ( $M=4.26$ ) have a higher level of intercultural awareness level than males ( $M=4$ ), there is no difference between the female and male participants in the experimental group ( $p=.18 > .05$ ).

In the experimental and control groups, the difference between the pretests and posttests was not significant ( $p=.18 > .05$  and  $p=.93 > .05$ ). In the literature, there are various studies which investigated how intercultural competence and its components are

related to various demographic factors (e.g. age, gender, level of education, etc.), and there are a number of studies (Altan, 2018; Baltes et al., 2015; Günçavdı & Polat, 2016; Hammer et al., 2003; Lei, 2016; Oksoon et al., 2017) with similar results to our study.

On the other hand, there are some other studies at which the researchers found out that gender had an effect on intercultural competence or its components. Topaloğlu (2016) focused on gender and intercultural awareness and he stated that both pretest and posttest results specified that the variable of gender caused a significant difference. It was observed that intercultural sensitivity of male participants increased more than that of females. Soltani and Rahimi (2016) also indicated that the mean difference between intercultural sensitivity of the males and females was statistically significant, and males performed better than females. While these two studies showed that males were better, other studies (Holm et al., 2009; Tompkins et al., 2017; Solhaug & Kristensen, 2019) suggested that females were better. However, in our study, gender was not an influential factor in intercultural awareness.

### ***Does international experience have an effect on intercultural awareness?***

*Table 4. Posttest scores of the experimental group by international experience*

International Experience	Number	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig. (2-Tailed)
Yes	6	4.15	.33	.64
No	12	4.06	.42	

International experience slightly affected intercultural awareness levels of the experimental group, but the significance is not meaningful ( $p=.64 >.05$ ) in the experimental group.

*Table 5. Posttest scores of the control group by international experience*

International Experience	Number	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig. (2-Tailed)
Yes	5	4.03	.22	.54
No	14	4.13	.33	

International experience slightly affected intercultural awareness levels of the experimental group, but the significance is not meaningful ( $p=.64 >.05$ ). Also, the results of the control group showed that there is not a statistically significant difference between the pretest and posttest results ( $p=.54 > .05$ ). From these statistics, it was concluded that international experience did not affect intercultural awareness of both the experimental and control groups. Similarly, Yurtseven and Altun (2015) carried out a study among pre-service English teachers to learn if there was a relationship between intercultural sensitivity levels of participants and the state of going abroad and concluded that the relationship was not significant. Another comparable study was conducted by Çandırılı (2018). Furthermore, there are various international studies (Fabregas et al., 2012;

Mcmurray, 2007; Richard & Doorenbos, 2016; Safipour et al., 2017) which studied and found no relationship between international experience and the components of intercultural competence.

On the other hand, there are many other studies (Balkaya, 2017; Bosuwon, 2016; Boštjančić & Johnson, 2019; Gage, 2001; Jurgens & McAuliffe, 2004; Karras, 2017; Penbek, Yurdakul, & Cerit, 2012) which coincided with our study. They concluded that international experience and various components of intercultural competence were related and international experience increased intercultural competence. However, in our study, international experience did not affect intercultural awareness of the participants.

## Conclusion

This study examined whether using short stories could promote intercultural awareness of EFL students. Also, the effects of gender and international experience on intercultural awareness were investigated. For these purposes, two groups of B1 level EFL students took part in a six-week experiment in the spring term of 2019-2020. The study was conducted in the School of Foreign Languages in the west part of the country. Before the treatment, Intercultural Awareness Questionnaire (Zorba, 2019) was used as a pretest, and it was administered to the experimental and control groups. One group (experimental) read six short stories whereas the other group read six nonliterary texts. Both types of the texts included intercultural themes for different cultures in them. After a six-week implementation, the same questionnaire prepared by Zorba (2019) was given to both groups. The results which were reached by using the independent samples t-tests and the paired sample t-tests showed that:

1. Short stories did not raise intercultural awareness of the study group.
2. Using literary texts and nonliterary texts did not make a difference in terms of intercultural awareness.
3. Intercultural awareness of the participants was not affected by gender.
4. Intercultural awareness of the participants was not affected by international experience.

Finally, it should be noted that intercultural awareness should be integrated into language teaching. Curriculum developers, policy makers, and other stakeholders should equally prioritize increasing intercultural awareness. Also, language learners may benefit from different materials including literary and nonliterary texts to raise intercultural awareness. Lastly, it might be necessary to have a long term plan as changing awareness of students is not easy in short time.

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## The role of critical motivation in the development of altruistic behaviour in youth

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### Abstract

*The main objective of this study is to investigate the relationship between critical motivation, altruism and peer caring as the moral foundation of social life. Although the direct relationship between critical consciousness and prosocial involvement has for some time entered the realm of educational research, the mechanisms by which the components of critical consciousness influence behaviour are not clearly defined. Therefore, we investigated the mediating role of the tendency to protect others as a moral foundation in the relationship between critical motivation and altruistic behaviour. The study involved 308 young people aged 18–24. Participants were recruited from various urban high schools and universities, and invited to complete a set of questionnaires. The results emphasise the importance of critical motivation as a predictor of altruistic behaviour. Moreover, the data indicate that the tendency to protect others mediated the effects of critical motivation regarding altruistic behaviour. These results provide a clearer perspective on the process by which critical motivation can influence the behaviour and involvement of young people in different social contexts. The results emphasise especially the importance of developing and stimulating critical motivation in schools in order to increase the active involvement of young people in the current social context.*

**Keywords:** critical consciousness; critical motivation; youth; altruistic behaviour; moral foundation

### Introduction

The views and beliefs of youth provide a unique standpoint from which social change processes can be observed. The provided perspective facilitates the examination of various social theories and provides insight over the social order (Shildrick, Blackman & MacDonald, 2009; Furlong & Cartmel, 2007). These aspects must receive significant consideration as they reflect the future behaviour of young adults specific to the investigated social context. Young people represent a group of active citizens that should be playing a role in all areas of the community. They are important resources in any social

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environment whose development must be encouraged in any continuously developing society (Finn & Checkoway, 1998).

As capable citizens, youth can participate in the decision-making process that impacts their everyday reality. Therefore, developing the responsibility to participate in community life is required to promote civic engagement behaviours of community members. Young people can act as primary actors in addressing the social inequity issues and other social predicaments present in their social realities by cultivating critical inquiry and leadership skills and applying them in their communities (Hancock, 1994).

Based on Freire's conceptualisation, critical consciousness points to the following fundamental components: critical reflection, critical motivation and critical action. Critical consciousness refers to how individuals critically reflect on their social reality and are actively involved in the decision-making process, which can generate positive changes in various social contexts. Although critical consciousness includes various components, such as critical reflection, critical motivation and critical action, the latter was shown to impact the involvement of the individual in social life, especially in promoting equality and equity as civic values (Ginwright & James, 2002). The onset of critical consciousness is strongly determined by the development of young people's ability to reflect on various aspects of social life and to develop their motivation to change unfavourable social conditions in the various contexts that family, school, and society offer young people (Freire, 1973; Giroux, 1983; Flanagan et al, 2007). In addition, how teachers relate to the issue of social life through an honest, open and flexible approach that values multiple perspectives and critical thinking to encourage the formation of their own opinions through democratic dialogue, plays a decisive role in developing students' critical awareness and motivation to become involved in the process of positive social change (Youniss & Yates, 1997; Kirshner, 2009).

In Critical Consciousness Theory anchored in freirean thought (Freire, 2005), all three core elements hold a specific role because critical consciousness represents a process during which the individual learns to identify social, political and economic disparities, and takes action upon those social reality elements that require change. During critical reflection, individuals learn to examine the specific circumstances and social structures that lead to unjust situations for different people. Specifically, it implies a social analysis process and moral dismissal of societal inequities that act as constraints of the individual agency and well-being. Being critically reflective helps build a systemic frame through which people start observing social problems and inequalities. Further, the perceived capability and engagement to address unfairness is attributed to critical motivation. Critical motivation points to the recognised capability to influence social change employing an individual or collective action. The likelihood for people to actively engage in this process is substantially higher if they have the impression that they can determine change (Diemer, Rapa, Voight & McWhirter, 2016). In turn, critical action relates to people's engagement to change observed injustices. Specifically, this applies to

the individual or collective action taken against those social aspects, such as institutional policies and practices, considered unjust.

However, at times, critical action may not meet its intentions, which can determine feelings of frustration rather than raise awareness of social predicaments (Watts, Diemer & Voight, 2011). The central elements of Critical Consciousness Theory (Freire, 2005) are focused on increasing knowledge over social circumstances, promoting critical questioning and cultivating collective identity (Watts & Hipolito-Delgado, 2015). In general, critical consciousness theories and approaches ordinarily report a blend of critical social analysis, political self-efficacy, collective social identity and actions meant to advance social equity (Watts, Diemer & Voight, 2011). Therefore, critical consciousness was often regarded as an "antidote" to injustice because it promotes awareness, motivation and action in order to recognise, challenge and improve social and structural restraints (Diemer, Rapa, Voight & McWhirter, 2016).

There is increasing interest in studying individuals' pro-social behaviour as well as the determinants of altruistic behaviour because it can provide valuable insight into the behaviour of future generations (Marcu & Bucuță, 2016). Rushton (1982) stated that altruism is a universal value in every human society and concluded that an altruistic type of personality does exist. Later on, however, research surprisingly changed the perspective: altruism is not regarded as a general factor of personality (Rushton, 2008); rather, personality traits are adding to altruist behaviour. This relation differs according to the nature of the relationship between the people involved (Oda et al., 2014). Furthermore, moral values and foundations are connected to commitment to various types of prosocial and altruistic behaviour. Because this type of behaviour increases during adolescence, its development is mainly associated with the development of moral foundations (Lai, Siu & Shek, 2015). As previously mentioned, critical consciousness aims to raise awareness concerning issues of social equity; however, critical consciousness makes acknowledging equity-related situations easier especially when those biases contrast with youth's moral foundations (Diemer, Rapa, Voight & McWhirter, 2016; Tyler, 2020). For challenging biases, critical consciousness is also linked to matters of moral reasoning being related to several aspects of the individual's, such as their emotional, moral and spiritual life (Mustakova-Possardt, 2004).

Evidence suggests that critical consciousness in youth is associated with positive outcomes in different areas, such as academic achievement (Godfrey et al., 2019; Seider, Clark & Graves, 2020) and altruistic and civic behaviour (Hope, 2016; Diemer & Li, 2011; Diemer & Rapa, 2016; Diemer & Blustein, 2006) without fully clarifying the nature of this process. Although previous research on critical consciousness has focused mainly on individuals from marginalised groups (Diemer & Li, 2011; Chronister & McWhirter, 2006), recently, the value of investigating critical consciousness for privileged groups while acknowledging the reciprocal relationship between privileged and marginalised has been signalled (Patterson et al., 2021; Godfrey & Burson, 2018). To acquire social transformation, privileged individuals need to learn to identify social disparities (Jemal,

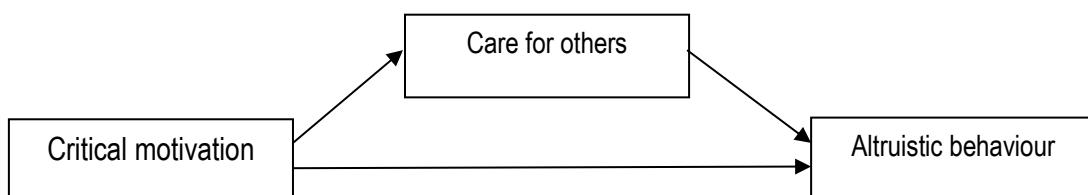
2017). This provides a mechanism whereby privileged individuals develop critical consciousness regarding bias against others and later recall the mechanism through which their privilege is preserved through the marginalisation of others (Diemer, Rapa, Voight & McWhirter, 2016). Although recent studies show that critical consciousness developed by individuals in school may be valuable for supporting social behaviours (Patterson et al., 2021), the question remains as to the relationship between critical consciousness components and social behaviours, such as altruistic behaviour, in privileged individuals. The present study aims to fill this knowledge gap by regarding the relationship between critical consciousness and social action. Acknowledging the importance of moral values in the development of youth social behaviour and critical consciousness, this research also considers the role of caring for others as moral foundation when investigating the relationship between critical consciousness and altruistic behaviour.

### The present study

Recent studies have emphasised the connection between critical consciousness and social behaviour (Patterson et al., 2021; Ajaps & Obiagu, 2020). Moreover, moral reasoning and moral foundations have been shown to influence social behaviour (Lai, Siu & Shek, 2015). Nonetheless, the extent of the relationship between critical consciousness components, social behaviour and moral foundations is far from being fully explained. Hence, the main purpose of the present research is to identify the extent of the relationship between critical consciousness components, caring for others and altruistic behaviour in privileged groups of young people. Critical motivation was hypothesised to be good predictor of social behaviour and this relation we believe is mediated by the level of caring for others.

Whereas previous research investigated critical consciousness development in young people while primarily focused on marginalised individuals, the study of these aspects of critical consciousness development on privileged groups might be more informative on how privileged individuals come to recognise social inequalities, which is crucial for acquiring social change (Jemal, 2017).

The hypothesised mediation model is depicted in Fig. 1.



*Figure 1. The hypothesized mediational model*

## Method

### **Procedure**

The participants included in the research were recruited from high schools and universities located in the northeast region of Romania. They have enrolled either in the last year of high school or the first year of their Bachelor's studies. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary although some students received extra credit for their participation. In the case of the high-school students, the minimum age limit was set at 18-years-old. The researcher informed participants about privacy issues such as anonymity, data confidentiality, storage, publication, voluntary participation and about the possibility to withdraw from the study at any time. Every participant signed an informed consent form after receiving the information regarding the study. Due to restrictions caused by the current health crisis, data were collected via self-report questionnaires administered online at the end of the participants' online school sessions. There was no missing information on the measured variables: critical consciousness components, altruistic behaviour and care for others moral foundation. Completing the questionnaire took approximately 20 minutes. The Ethics Committee of Alexandru Ioan Cuza University approved the study and the data were gathered during the first two months of the current year.

### **Participants**

The study sample consists of 308 participants (mean age = 19.20; SD = 1.08). The participants enrolled in the last year of high-school (19.81%) included 48 female and 13 male participants. Participants enrolled in the first year at university (80.19%), included 200 female and 47 male participants. An age criterion was included for the selection of high-school students (minimum of 18-years-old). In the case of University participants, they had to be enrolled in their first year of Bachelor's studies (see Table 1).

*Table 1. Demographic and professional characteristics of participants; N=308*

Participants characteristics	n	%	M	SD
Age			19.20	1.08
Gender				
Female	248	80.5%		
Male	60	19.5%		
School attended				
High-school	61	19.8%		
University	247	80.2%		

## Instruments

The Critical Consciousness Scale - Short Form (CCS-S) (Rapa, Bolding & Jamil, 2020) was translated from English into Romanian using the forward-backward translation design (Hambleton, Yu & Slater 1999). Minor corrections to the translations were made based on the back-translation process. For the care for others moral foundation, the forward-backward translated version of the measure is available on Moral Foundations Questionnaire official Internet page (<https://moralfoundations.org/questionnaires/>). For measuring altruistic behaviour, the self-report altruism scale distinguished by the recipient (SRAS-DR-RO) validated on Romanian sample was used (Marcu & Bucuță, 2016).

The short form of the Critical Consciousness Scale (CCS-S) (Rapa, Bolding & Jamil, 2020) was used to evaluate critical motivation. The sub-scale *critical motivation*, composed of four items, was extracted. Participants were requested to evaluate their answers on a six-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 6 = strongly agree. The range selected for this scale allows a more nuanced understanding of the pathways of critical consciousness development and highlights the interrelationships between critical consciousness dimensions (Heberle et al., 2020; Rapa, Bolding & Jamil, 2020). For the three sub-scales, Cronbach's alpha coefficient is .63.

To assess altruistic behaviour, the validated version of the self-report altruism scale distinguished by the recipient (SRAS-DR-RO) was used (Marcu & Bucuță, 2016). This scale was formulated on evolutionary grounds and evaluates altruism in terms of the frequency of altruistic behaviours towards various receivers such as family members, friends and strangers in everyday life (Oda et al., 2013). It consists of 21 items rated on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (never) to 5 (very often). Cronbach's alpha value of this measure is .83.

Care for others moral foundation was measured using the designated sub-scale from the Moral Foundations Questionnaire (MFQ-S) (Graham et al., 2011). This instrument was translated into Romanian by a researcher and back-translated into English by a professional translator (available at [www.moralfoundations.org](http://www.moralfoundations.org)). This measure has been used extensively in cross-cultural research and demonstrates good validity and reliability properties (Iurino & Saucier, 2018). The harm/care moral foundation measure includes three items assessing the perceived relevance of moral concerns and three items assessing agreement with moral judgments. Participants rated the relevance items on a Likert-type scale ranging from 0 (not at all relevant) to 5 (extremely relevant) and the judgment items on the same six-point Likert-type scale ranging from 0 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). After eliminating the last two items referring to moral judgement, Cronbach's alpha for the care foundation was .54, which is considered acceptable considering the low number of items (Hinton et al., 2004).

## Results

### ***Descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation analyses***

In Table 1, the information regarding the means, standard deviations, Cronbach's alpha reliability index and correlations between all the variables examined in the present research is displayed. Critical motivation showed significant correlations with altruistic behaviour and care for others in the investigated directions. Specifically, critical motivation is positively associated with altruistic behaviour ( $r = .18, p < .001$ ) and care for others ( $r = .30, p < .001$ ).

*Table 2. Descriptive statistics, Pearson correlations and reliability estimates between the studied variables*

Variables	1	2	3
1. Altruistic behaviour	<b>.89</b>		
2. Critical motivation	.188**	<b>.63</b>	307**
3. Care for others	.183**	.188**	<b>.54</b>
Mean	86.95	18.86	18.90
SD	12.26	3.19	2.94

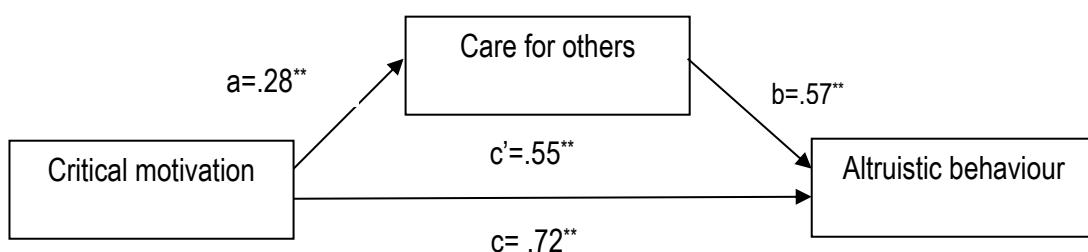
Note: \*\* $p \leq .01$ . Alpha Cronbach's coefficients are shown on the diagonal

### ***Care for others moral foundation as mediator in the relationship between critical motivation and altruistic behaviour***

The PROCESS 3.5 macro for IBM SPSS version 24 for Windows was used to test the hypothesised simple mediation model (Hayes, 2013). This method allows testing mediators and provides bootstrap confidence intervals (CIs) for the indirect effects (Hayes, 2013) by building bootstrap-based confidence intervals to test the statistical significance of mediation effects in a nonparametric and reduced biased manner (Preacher & Hayes, 2004). In the present study, a mediation analysis was conducted using regression and 5,000 resamples (to estimate 95% confidence intervals) in order to investigate whether the effect of critical motivation on altruistic behaviour was mediated by the care for other moral foundation.

The analysis confirmed a significant total effect of critical motivation on altruistic behaviour (c) and this relationship remained significant when the effects of care for others were taken into account (c'). This analysis confirmed a significant total effect of

critical motivation (c) and this relationship is significant when the effect of care for others is considered ( $c'$ ). This analysis revealed that critical motivation was significantly positively related to care for others (a) and care for others was significantly positively related to altruistic behaviour when controlling for critical motivation (b). Results showed that care for others mediated the effect of critical motivation on altruistic behaviour as indicated by a significant indirect effect ( $B = .16$ ,  $SE = .07$ , 95% BCa CI: .028, .333), such that the high levels of critical motivation predicted altruistic behaviour; this was directly emphasised by higher levels of care for others. The 95% confidence interval did not include the value zero, indicating the significance of the mediating effects. Figure 2 illustrates the mediating effects.



*Figure 2. Mediation model depicting the mediating effect of care for others on the relation between critical motivation and altruistic behaviour. Unstandardized coefficients are presented. Note: \* $p \leq .05$ ; \*\* $p \leq .01$*

## Conclusions

Investigating youths' beliefs, attitudes and behaviour presents a unique perspective over social development processes that will reflect their future behaviour (Shildrick, Blackman & MacDonald, 2009). Young individuals must be seen as valuable community resources that can influence through their participation several social domains. Developing certain skills in youth such as critical consciousness, critical analysis and leadership can help them develop an active role in the community (Hancock, 1994). Critical consciousness was associated with prosocial actions and civic engagement (Flanagan & Christens, 2011; Diemer & Li, 2011). Recent research has not yet examined which specific component of critical consciousness impacts social action. Therefore, acknowledging the association between critical consciousness and social action, this research study tested a simple mediation model of the relationships between critical motivation, care for others and altruistic behaviour. The mediating role of care for others in the relationship between critical motivation and altruistic behaviour was studied.

Our results showed that care for others moral foundation mediates the relationship between critical motivation and altruistic behaviour. This suggests that when young people display critical motivation, they are likely to provide care and protection towards others; consequently, this has a positive impact on altruistic behaviour. Our conclusions

are consistent with former assumptions from the social area showing that critical consciousness, given critical motivation, leads to social action (Freire, 1973).

The present study shows some limitations that should be mentioned. The research did not focus on a wide spectrum of social actions and was solely limited to altruistic behaviour. Hence, future studies should examine the mediating role of caring for others having, as a result, a wide range of social behaviours. Further, personality trait variables should be taken into account to fully understand the process through which critical consciousness predicts social action. Another limitation relates to the structure of the research sample, which consists mainly of women participants. This reduces considerably the degree of generalisation that can be made from the present results. Thus, future inquiries should examine larger and more gender-balanced samples. Nonetheless, our results are in line with previous assumptions that focus on the path from critical consciousness to social action and add to the existing literature by providing some information concerning the link between critical motivation and altruistic behaviour in youth.

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## Impact of the mentoring relationship on the development of talented students – a narrative review

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### Abstract

*In order to provide quality instruction for students, to cultivate free and entrepreneurial spirits, the educational system needs teachers capable of acting as mentors for their students; inspiring them, teaching them about moral values and helping them develop their cognitive and career-orientation skills. Through the impact that it has on the development of students in general and on the talented students in particular, mentoring is one of the most appropriate strategies for achieving this goal.*

*This article is a narrative review of the studies identified in the literature that describe a series of mentoring programs especially designed for talented students, which have contributed to their development on the psychosocial and cognitive level, as well as on career orientation. Complete research articles related to mentoring programs for talented students were gathered from online database searches and needed to meet several criteria: (1) the program evaluated needed to involve mentoring as the practice has been defined like an "ideal type" of mentoring in the literature (Grassinger, Porath, & Ziegler, 2010); (2) the study had to examine the impact of involvement in a mentoring program on the development of talented students on several levels: psychosocial, cognitive, career support; and (3) the sample used in the evaluation of the program needed to include the talented students that are more predisposed to benefit from a mentoring program: talented primary, gymnasium and high school students and twice-exceptional students (Goff & Torrance, 1999; Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius, Khalid, & Finster, 2021).*

*The results of this review underline the impact of the talented students' involvement in a mentoring relationship on their development and the necessity for this type of programs to be sustained in an educational context, not only at an informal level but also through formal programs specifically designed and implemented for this purpose.*

*The paper concludes by presenting a series of recommendations on how such programs can be effectively implemented at the educational institutions level.*

**Keywords:** mentoring, development, talented students

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## Introduction

Since the talented students have a series of special characteristics and specific needs that require specialized educational interventions, it is absolutely necessary that they will "be able to benefit from appropriate educational conditions that would allow them to develop fully their abilities, for their own benefit and for the benefit of society as a whole. No country can indeed afford to waste talents and it would be a waste of human resources not to identify in good time any intellectual or other potentialities. Adequate tools are needed for this purpose." (Council of Europe, Recommendation 1248, 1994). At the same time, the gap between the cognitive development and the affective development of talented students determines certain difficulties that this category of learners faces, as follows: situations of school underachievement and isolation, as well as blockages that they can manifest in the communication with those around them, intellectual inhibitions, and depressive states.

In general, regarding talented students, there are certain expectations that they are able to solve tasks they receive in the school context without designing these tasks according to their specific learning rhythm and special learning needs. Although in most cases this is the only option considered for teaching talented students, several alternatives are being used more and more often in order to maximize their potential. One of these is definitely mentoring.

The idea that talented students do not need support or minimal assistance in developing their talents is one of the most common misconceptions in the field of gifted education, many people believing that they learn anything easily, due to their high level of intelligence (Ambrose, Allen & Huntley, 1994). Moreover, many studies also demonstrate that most talented students get bored during classes, because of the lack of challenges received in educational contexts. Based on these results, mentoring is considered to be a good approach to providing talented students with the challenges and academic rigor that they need. By becoming involved in a mentoring relationship they also have the opportunity to explore their potential and inclination towards certain careers, to apply the knowledge gained during classes, to mature and to have a human/professional model to follow (Berger, 1990 as cited in Bisland, 2001).

According to Kay and Hinds, mentoring "is a relationship between two people, amongst which there is no managerial relationship (of the chief-subaltern type), in which one person (the mentor) guides the other (the mentee) in a period of change, taking into account a number of previously established objectives" (Kay & Hinds, 2002, p. 28).

The purpose of mentoring, in the didactic context, is to help students to assimilate a series of contents and information, to which they don't have access in the traditional education system, as well as to guide students in the process of identifying the diversity of career opportunities which they have. At the same time, the most common use of the concept of mentoring involves a "teaching-learning" relationship, during which an experienced person can help a mentee - a posture in which the student is usually placed

- to achieve major professional goals or to properly develop his or her learning potential (Manning, 2005).

In the last decade, mentoring programs have received considerable attention as educational interventions for students with different academic, behavioral and social needs. Therefore mentoring is recognized as a strategy of providing guidance to all categories of students, including talented students; being a proper way to train, support and counsel them in order to satisfy their specific learning and development needs (Clasen & Clasen, 2003).

### **The Benefits of Mentoring in Working with Talented Students**

In the gifted education literature, it is mentioned that mentoring programs are useful especially for talented students who have exhausted all sources and learning resources available in the school educational context, as well as for talented students that are facing school underachievement or for talented students from disadvantaged backgrounds, who are unaware of their own potential and are incapable of using it without specific interventions (Goff & Torrance, 1999). Therefore, mentoring has a considerable influence on the academic achievement of talented students, in the development of their specialized knowledge, as well as in the process of transforming them into specialists and remarkable exponents of their fields of interest.

At the same time, mentoring activities can play a significant role in supporting talented students in meeting their emotional and social interaction needs. Research in the field (Casey, 1997) suggests that talented students have a variety of affective characteristics and, on many occasions, face feelings of social isolation and dissatisfaction due to their poor interpersonal relationships. Also, increased sensitivity and perfectionism are other defining features regularly experienced by talented students. In this regard, mentors can serve as a model for the talented students, supporting them in managing the problems they face because of their special characteristics and providing the emotional support that they need.

In the organizational context, there are two types of support that mentors give to those they guide: *psychosocial support* and *career support*. Psychosocial support consists in sharing experiences, transfer of values, moral support and the establishment of a friendly relationship with the mentor. Career support refers to activities such as coaching, as well as to identifying opportunities for career development and setting up the pathways for accessing these opportunities, scholarships and sponsorships in the field of career development, and the challenges that mentees are likely to face in the field (Kram, 1985).

Relevant literature in the field of gifted education suggests that mentoring programs that target talented students in educational context offer both psychosocial support and career support (Lunsford, 2011). Mentoring programs for talented students may be formal or informal.

One of the most common mentoring relationships is set at an informal level between teacher and students. The model provided daily by the teacher, in terms of valorizing education and learning activities, has the role of encouraging students for learning throughout their life. Also, students often ask their teachers for advice, guidance, and learning support (Bisland, 2001).

Formal mentoring programs for talented students in primary school, secondary school and high school are organized according to a well-established plan and are aimed at objectives that imply: accelerated learning and providing additional information to talented students about their areas of interest; career orientation; developing and training the social skills of talented young people (Wright - Romjue, 1991).

According to these considerations, we can say that there are a number of reasons why talented students can be considered the ideal subjects for participation in mentoring programs. First of all, it is necessary to mention that the intervention of an adult is essential in the process of developing the learning potential of a talented student. Therefore, mentors who are experts in a particular field of activity can inspire, challenge and encourage talented students to maximize their potential.

Also, according to a study conducted by Carmen Cretu and Nicoleta Rogoz (2016), talented students feel the need to participate in mentoring activities and consider that these are extremely important for their academic and professional career.

Other research in the field also demonstrates that both formal and informal mentoring activities and experiences can represent opportunities for talented students to explore their options regarding the career that they want to choose or follow (Bloom, 1985 as cited in Casey, 1997, p. 14, Lunsford, 2011). In this kind of activities, mentors have the opportunity to inform talented students about the lifestyle and the educational needs associated with a particular career path, in order to help them figure out if they have the skills and the abilities needed to follow it.

Many of the papers in the field of gifted education also mention that talented students interact more successfully with adults due to their superior cognitive and affective capacity (Casey, 1997). A study conducted by Buescher in 1991 stated that usually talented students have an increased capacity to establish relationships with adults, as well as the ability to learn from them. According to Reis and Follo (1993), talented students are good candidates for acceptance in mentoring programs also because of their ability to work independently, as well as because of their high level of engagement and motivation for learning activities, which they show at the highest levels (Reis&Follo, 1993 as cited in Casey, 1997). Also, they prefer independent study; during classroom courses they choose individual learning activities rather than teamwork, pairing or grouping. Therefore, mentoring activities meet the needs of talented students; the mentor spends many hours with the "mentee" on a working day just to satisfy the desire to acquire knowledge in his or her area of interest, as well as to satisfy his or her wish to invest time and cognitive resources to develop the talent and potential he or she has.

In the following, we will present a series of studies from the literature on the impact of the mentoring relationship on the development of talented students/ students with high abilities.

### **Mentoring Relationship and Development of Talented Students**

In the scientific literature in the field of gifted education there is ambiguity in the distinction between the concepts of *giftedness* and *talent* and there is no consensus on what these terms mean. In general usage, and also in dictionary usage and scientific articles, no definite distinction is made between the ideas of *giftedness* and *talent* (Gagné, 1985). This ambiguity is supported by the various and sometimes divergent definitions of the concepts (McBee, & Makel, 2019) and by randomly using one or the other term in the same paragraph, thus suggesting that they are synonyms (Gagné, 1985). The same problem is also noted in terms of identifying these students and including them in special gifted education programs, like mentoring programs. These programs address, depending on their typology, more categories of students in the field of gifted education: talented students, high achieving students and identified gifted students. Because of the various definitions of these concepts, students who are likely to benefit from gifted services are not always identified using this approach (Ritchotte, Suhr, Alfurayh, & Graefe, 2016). This is why, as you will see, the mentoring programs that we included in our analysis are designed for all these three categories of students, depending on the criteria that are used for their inclusion in the group of beneficiaries.

Unfortunately, the concept of mentoring also does not have a unanimously accepted definition in the literature and "tends to be one of those notorious "toothbrush" concepts: every researcher has their own definition, a definition that is practically never used by colleagues. Consequently, the current research landscape is characterized more by separate paths than any fruitful, common efforts." (Grassinger, Porath, & Ziegler, 2010, p. 27). As well, there is a considerable diversity that has characterized intervention efforts in the mentoring area and an impressive number of different mentoring programs, which vary by: their basic goals, their philosophy, the procedures used for recruiting prospective mentors and the levels of training and supervision that are provided to mentors once selected (DuBois, Holloway, Valentine, & Cooper, 2002). This is why we cannot provide a uniform definition for the mentoring programs addressing talented students but only a definition of what should be the "ideal type" of mentoring: *Mentoring of gifted individuals is a relatively chronologically stable dyadic relationship between an experienced mentor and a less experienced gifted mentee, characterized by mutual trust and benevolence, with the purpose of promoting learning, development, and, ultimately, progress in the mentee* (Grassinger, Porath, & Ziegler, 2010, p. 30).

Mentoring programs for talented students, described in the literature, are also quite diverse; in terms of organization and from the point of view of the objectives they aim to support talented students in their own process of development. In this regard, we made a synthesis of the research that focuses on highlighting the impact of involvement in a

mentoring program on the development of talented students on several levels: *academic, cognitive (intellectual) & creative, psychosocial, socioemotional or affective, career or vocational support* (DuBois, Holloway, Valentine, & Cooper, 2002; Burton, 2012).

## Method

Although mentoring is considered among the most effective pedagogical measures, it is rarely used in gifted education (Grassinger, Porath, & Ziegler, 2010). This is why there is no systematic approach to mentoring activities in the field of gifted education. Mentoring programs for talented students are also very different depending on: the age of the students that benefit from them; their school level/developmental level; thematic areas, goals and the philosophy of the mentoring program (Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius, Khalid, & Finster, 2021). However, a large amount of research in the field of mentoring suggests its positive effects in the lives of successful people and have shown that most of them have participated in mentoring programs in adolescence and youth, fact that helped them to achieve exceptional results in different areas (Bloom, 1985; Kaufman, Harrel, Milam, Woolverton & Miller, 1986; Roche, 1979; Torrance, 1984; Vaillant, 1977; Mammadov & Topōu, 2014). Based on this, we formulate our research question: *How has the relationship between mentoring programs and their impact on the development of talented students been addressed in the literature?*

We conducted the literature searches in the Google Scholar and in the following electronic databases: Web of Science, Dissertation Abstracts reference database ProQuest and ERIH PLUS. Search terms related to gifted education (gifted students, talented students, students with high potential) were combined with search terms related to mentoring (mentor, mentee relationship, protégée) to identify relevant articles and dissertations. Keywords and their variants were used as appropriate for each database. The reference lists of relevant studies were screened to identify additional articles. Articles were considered for inclusion if they were published in English, in a scientific journal, between 1990 when, as far as we know, research on the outcomes of mentoring programs in gifted education began to appear, to 2020. To be included in the present narrative review studies needed to meet several criteria. First, the program evaluated needed to involve mentoring as the practice has been defined like an "ideal type" of mentoring in the literature (Grassinger, Porath, & Ziegler, 2010). Second, the study had to examine the impact of involvement in a mentoring program on the development of talented students on several levels: *psychosocial, cognitive, career support*. Finally, the sample used in the evaluation of the program needed to include the talented students that are more predisposed to benefit from a mentoring program: talented primary, gymnasium and high school students and twice-exceptional students (Goff & Torrance, 1999; Subotnik, Olszewski-Kubilius, Khalid, & Finster, 2021). After deduplicating the search results from different databases, articles underwent two rounds of screening based on their (1) title and abstract and (2) full text. For the papers that met our inclusion criteria (19), we extracted the following data: authors, year of publication, method used

to measure the impact of mentoring programs on the development of talented students, the results obtained. The extracted data were then analyzed, and the findings were organized into a table that presents different *Mentoring Programs for Talented Students* and their impact on the development of talented students on several levels: *academic, cognitive (intellectual) & creative, psychosocial, socioemotional or affective, career or vocational support* (Table 1).

The impact of the Mentoring Program on the development of talented students  Academic, Cognitive (Intellectual) & Creative		Study & year	Title and Location of the Mentoring Programs	Method & Number of subjects	Results
	DeBuse, M. A. L. 1990	William Gray's 'Four-Phase Mentoring Model', Oregon, USA	Questionnaire-based survey  1. Mentors (N=90) 2. Mentees (N=52) 3. Parents of Mentees (N=37) 4. Able Learner Advocates (N=7) 5. School Administrators (N=7) 6. Regular Classroom Teachers of Mentees (N=26)	The study results were extremely positive. Mentors mentioned that they experienced an improvement in their ability to facilitate independent study and students mentioned that they improved their research/investigation skills. Both groups, mentors and mentees, showed a positive attitude towards most aspects of the mentoring program in which they were involved.  The results indicate that this type of mentoring program is a promising approach both for meeting the development/learning needs of students who are preparing to become teachers, as well as those of middle school talented students.	
	Templin, M. A., Doran, R. L., & Engemann, J. F. 1999	A University-Based Summer Science Mentorship Program Buffalo, New York, USA	Interview-based survey  Mentees (N=8)	The results of the study indicated that mentors played a crucial role in framing the participants experience and influencing their affect and that careful selection and timing of research projects was critical to participants' attitude of learning and accomplishment.	
	Shevitz, B., Weinfeld, R., Jeweler, S., & Barnes-Robinson, L. 2003	Wings Mentor Program Division of Accelerated and Enriched Instruction of Maryland's Montgomery County Public Schools USA	Evaluations based on Questionnaire-survey and testimonies  Mentors, Students, Parents of Students and Teachers involved in the program	The evaluations of the program have indicated an improvement of students' self-concept, positively changes other's perceptions of them and promotes their overall motivation in the classroom. Also, according to parents of talented students who have been involved in the mentoring program <i>Wings Mentor Program</i> , no other educational strategy has contributed to their children's progress as the mentoring relationships established in this program.	
	Manning, S. 2005	Cross-Age Tutoring and Mentoring Program	Informal Observations and Phonics Skills Assessments, Method of Ongoing Assessment  Mentors, Students	The informal evidence gathered using the cross-age mentoring strategy revealed the development of dispositions important to strong leadership. Information and informal "evidence" about the implementation of the proposed strategy for the mentoring program have demonstrated the development of the most important leadership dispositions among the talented students involved in the program, such as: improving learning and teaching skills, improving decision-making capacity, increasing sensitivity to the needs of others, improvement of the ability to solve problems, as well as the	

<i>Academic, Cognitive (Intellectual) &amp; Creative</i>	Castro, R. M.-F. 2008	Peer and Mentoring Network for Gifted Underachieving Latino Students  Alexander Dumas High School Los Angeles Unified School District USA	Quantitative and Qualitative measures Questionnaire-based survey Interview-based survey Reflections and Journals  Mentees (N=23) (Gifted Underachieving Latino high school students)	organizational and planning skills in approaching a project. The program implementation limit was, however, the age of participants; the author suggests that implementing the program with older pupils would be helpful in achieving more visible/good results.
	Mammadov, S., & TopÇu, A. 2014	E-mentoring Project in Mathematics  Private Middle School, Istanbul, Turkey	Interview-based survey  Mentees (N=5)	The results of the study indicated that the students' grades, their academic work practices and their cooperation skills, as described by their teachers, revealed little statistically significant change following the participation in the intervention and mentoring program. Moreover, the participants have demonstrated a precarious knowledge of their own skills/talents, fact that has contributed to their low self-expectations in terms of their personal success. However, the students included in the program mentioned that they had made changes in their intellectual/learning behaviors in order to improve their academic performance, which proved to be statistically significant. In most cases, the results have shown that the students and the mentors involved in the program want to work together again.
	Şahin, F. 2014	Mentoring Program for developing creative potential  Two different private schools Thrace Region, Turkey	Experimental design with pre-test/post-test control group Questionnaire-based survey  Mentees (N=91students, 43 of whom are gifted and 48 are non-gifted)	The study reported in this article investigated the role of e-mentoring in gifted students' academic life. The study results indicated that talented students who benefited from e-mentoring project in mathematics showed a high motivation, as well as the desire to maintain their perseverance in fulfilling the individual and group tasks that were assigned to them. The study also revealed that the five talented students formed an effective and interactive group and collaborated, finding a way to work as a community. The results also showed that the fact that talented students worked like professionals / in a professional way helped them to think and act like real mathematicians.

	<i>Academic, Cognitive (Intellectual) &amp; Creative</i>	Besnoy, K. D., & McDaniel, S. C. 2016	Crimson G.U.I.D.E. (Going Up In Dreams and Esteem) Program (the cross-age mentoring model) USA	Questionnaire-based survey  Mentors (N=6) Mentees (N=11)	The results of the program implementation revealed that: coordinators of the mentoring program mentioned that they have a better knowledge of the talented students special needs after this project; the mentoring program brought benefits for the development of leadership skills among talented students, and the fact that the Crimson GUIDE mentoring program can be a very good starting point for future attempts to implement similar mentoring programs that place the talented student in the mentor role, not just in the mentee role.
		Zorman, R., Rachmel, S., & Bashan, Z. 2016	National Mentoring Program Division for Gifted and Outstanding Students in the Ministry of Education of Israel, Szold Institute	Formative Evaluation Interview-based survey  Mentees (N=50)	The goal of the program was to cultivate future leaders in various talent areas. A total of 50 out of 53 young scholars, constituting 94% of the young scholars, completed the program. Each of the 50 students who completed the first three cohorts of the program produced high quality university level work. Nearly half (42%) of the young scholars engaged in activities and/or completed projects which received significant recognition of their work from the professional community in their field of interest, as well as the publication of their works at various conferences.
		Alhanaya, M. 2020	University-Based Gifted Mentorship Program Future Researcher Program (FRP)  Five Governmental Universities Kingdom of Saudi Arabia	Mixed-Method Approach Questionnaire-based survey Interview-based survey Reflections and Journals  Mentors (N=60) Mentees (N=100)	Students involved in the program perceived improvement in their cognitive and research skills, as a result of their participation in the mentoring program; through its challenging independent studies curricula, which were based on student interests and conducted in an academic setting under the supervision of experts. Interview responses indicated that perhaps the most important component of an enrichment program may be the university mentors themselves, which provide students valuable direct guidance and serve as a model for professional achievement.
	<i>Psychosocial, Socioemotional or Affective</i>	Cooper, D. L. 1991	Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science (MSMS), Columbus, USA.	Multiple-case study (Structured interviews)  Mentees (N=6) (Six high school students)	The study analyzed the mentoring relationship between talented students and their mentors, with the aim that teachers and educational counselors who play the role of mentor for these students to meet their specific needs in a better / efficient way. All subjects who participated in the research mentioned that the initial attraction towards their potential mentors was based on perceiving them being open to mentoring and guidance, as well as having a good capacity to establish effective inter-human connections. All mentoring relationships have been

<i>Psychosocial, Socioemotional or Affective</i>					<p>established in the context in which subjects faced the feeling of social isolation. This indicates that the mentoring relationship offered to students a sense of acceptance and support in their need to establish relationships with adults who have the same interests as them. Also, the subjects declare that the mentoring relationship provide them support, encouragement, trust and the feeling they were being related to.</p>
	Hébert, T. P., & Olenchak, F. R. 2000	USA	<p>A comparative case study research design (A combination of semi-structured interviews and document review) Mentees (N=3)</p>	<p>The study analyzed the mentorship experiences of three males students who demonstrated various features of giftedness and underachievement. The results of the study indicate that for this category of talented students (underachievers) the influence of a significant adult on a young person is very important; because their mentors were open-minded and nonjudgmental, provide them consistent and personalized social/emotional support and advocacy; and applied strength and interest based strategies for intervention to reverse their underachievement.</p>	
	Irving, S. E., Moore, D. W., & Hamilton, R. J. 2003	Pohutukawa Mentoring Program Pohutukawa College, Auckland, New Zealand	<p>Questionnaire-based survey Interview-based survey Mentees (N=62)</p>	<p>The results of a study carried out following the implementation of the mentoring program <i>Pohutukawa</i> showed that it had positive effects on affective development of talented students but did not have a significant impact on their academic performance. The positive effects of this mentoring program on talented students include increasing confidence and improving their ability to approach an exam/an academic examination. The students included in this mentoring program have been guided by honorable members of the high school teaching staff at a time in their lives when many teenagers are deprived of contact with an adult that can guide them. This fact has added a human dimension to their development as young talented students with great potential, also giving them the opportunity to take control over their own learning process. However, the program failed to provide a mechanism for improving the academic performance of the students who have been mentored/guided; it remains to be seen if any changes to the program itself or to its objectives will lead to this desired purpose.</p>	

	<i>Psychosocial, Socioemotional or Affective</i>	Demirhan, E. 2018	Nature Education Program Based on a Mentoring Approach Turkey	Qualitative measures Case Study Pattern Open-ended Questions and Diaries  Mentors (N=16) Mentees (N=16)	The study results indicated the importance of social gains of the mentoring program participants. Both, teachers and students involved in the program reported positive feelings (happy, lucky, proud, fun, beneficial for both parties, realizing weaknesses, learning new information) regarding the project. These findings also indicate that the prospective teachers feel positive about taking part in the project together with gifted students.
		Chan, L. K., Chan, D. W., & Sun, X. 2020	Gifted Peer Mentoring Scheme Chinese University of Hong Kong	Quantitative and Qualitative measures Questionnaire-based survey Personal Reflective Diaries Reflection Journals Semi-structured Focus Group Interviews	Findings of program evaluation, for 2016, revealed the concurrently positive development in both the mentors and the mentees of the Gifted Peer Mentoring Scheme and confirmed the positive impacts on psychological well-being among gifted and talented students. The results indicated, also, that the learning needs of gifted mentees were well addressed through their active participation, self-reflection, and interaction with peers and the serving group. The Scheme provided gifted mentors and mentees with multiple opportunities for psychosocial and personal skills development, including higher level of self-understanding, self-confidence, willingness to connect and share with gifted peers, tolerance and appreciation of others, acceptance to new challenges and better communication and interpersonal skills.
<i>Academic, Cognitive (Intellectual) &amp; Creative, Psychosocial, Socioemotional or Affective, Career or Vocational support</i>	Ambrose, D., Allen, J., & Huntley, S. 1994		Georgia, USA	Retrospective case study (based on a questionnaire and an interview)  Mentors (N=2) Mentees (N=1)	In the research, the influence of the two mentors on John's cognitive and affective development was analyzed. The results obtained have shown that the mentoring relationship helped John, a young talented artist,, to consolidate his thinking style, to develop his metacognitive skills and to develop and fortify his career options, providing him, at the same time, emotional support when he most needed it.
	Davalos, R. A., & Haensly, P. A. 1997		Independent Study/Mentorship course (ISM) USA	Questionnaire-based survey  Mentees (N=90)	The study analyzed the possible benefits of mentoring for gifted students. Subjects who participated in the research mentioned the following benefits of the mentoring relationship, related to how they perceived the experience of independent study/mentorship during their school years: an improvement in their self-esteem or self-concept (47%); the personal significance of the mentor to the student - eg. as guide, as friend, as role model (45%); the value of career exploration (33%); the growth of their work skills - improvements in organization, time management, and responsibility (24%); the mentors as

	<i>Academic, Cognitive (Intellectual) &amp; Creative, Psychosocial, Socioemotional or Affective, Career or Vocational support</i>				sources for "real life" learning (24%); the help offered for college preparation - improved thinking skills/problem solving abilities (19%).
	Little, C. A., Kearney, K. L, & Britner, P. A. 2010	Summer Mentoring Program USA	Questionnaire-based survey & Journal Questions Mentees (N=72)	The research results revealed a difference in the way participants perceive their own research skills and their own competence for getting a job, in the sense that they mentioned an improvement after participating in the mentoring program. At the same time, the talented students said that they had positive and constructive relationships with their mentors, especially when they felt that their mentors were reserving their time to guide them, being friendly and approachable.	
	Ibáñez García, et. all 2020	GuíaMe-AC-UMA Programme Amentúrate programme Málaga, Cantabria, Spain	Questionnaire-based survey Mentors (N=39; N=25) Mentees (N=130; N=41) Technical-Research Team (N=9; N=11)	The results of the study indicated a high level of satisfaction with the development of the workshops offered by both mentoring programmes, on the part of all participants. Furthermore, both universities the workshops aim to satisfy the needs of the mentees at a cognitive level. The workshops try to take students out of their comfort zone, allowing them to fully develop their potential, performing tasks that pose a challenge, and creating an environment that supports their efforts and acknowledges their successes.	

**Table 1** *Mentoring Programs for Talented Students*

## Results

A total of 19 papers (articles and dissertations), that met our inclusion criteria, were investigated in the review. Ten of these focused on the relationship between mentoring programs and their impact on the development of talented students at academic, cognitive (intellectual) & creative level, five of these focused on the relationship between mentoring programs and their impact on the development of talented students at the psychosocial, socioemotional or affective level and four of these focused on the relationship between mentoring programs and their impact on the development of talented students at all three levels: academic, cognitive (intellectual) & creative, psychosocial, socioemotional or affective and career or vocational support. The number of participants in these studies varied between a total of 221 participants (mentors, mentees, parents of mentees, able learner advocates, school administrators and regular classroom teachers of mentees) to 3 participants (mentors and mentees). The mentoring programs for talented students that we identified are quite diverse, in terms of organization and from the point of view of the objectives they aim to support talented students in their own process of development; but the results of the review indicated that all of them are perceived as very useful by the participants. In the literature, the mentoring relationship is presented as an educational alternative for talented students/ students with high abilities, in order to maximize their potential. Therefore, mentoring is considered to be an educational alternative that gets a lot of benefits for talented students/ students with high abilities, especially in the context of the dissatisfaction and monotony which they experience during classes, in the traditional education system. The mentoring relationship offers talented students the opportunity to deeply explore their passion and preoccupation for a specific area of interest, also giving them more control over their own learning process. In order that schools and high schools to be able to implement as many mentoring programs as possible, their involvement in the research of mentoring and its benefits for talented students/ students with high abilities is absolutely necessary (Bisland, 2001).

Burton (2012), also, conducted a comprehensive systematic review of the relevant literature, in which he analyzed the mentoring relationship as a way of ensuring appropriate intellectual and socio-emotional development for talented students/students with high abilities, in relation to their formation/education in alternative learning environments. Research in the field has also demonstrated that care and emotional/affective support between children and adults who are not members of their family are vital for the proper development of the children; as well as the fact that mentoring relationship can be a major benefit for any child (Lunsford, 2011). Moreover, related to talented students, research has shown that involvement in a mentoring relationship is extremely important, the benefits of mentoring on their development being unique because of their special characteristics (DuBois, Holloway, Valentine, & Cooper, 2002). That is why it is very important that experts and researchers in the field of education take action for promoting mentoring as a proper manner of supporting

talented students in their cognitive and socio-emotional development. They can do this by supporting the implementation, extension and consolidation of formal mentoring programs for talented students and students with high abilities, and also by removing barriers (both implicit and explicit) in the natural formation of mentoring relationships between talented students and adults who are already important figures in their lives.

Several studies have already demonstrated that mentoring is very important and can help talented students become specialists and remarkable exponents of their fields of interest (Lunsford, 2011). The students' participating in mentoring programs success in identifying career options and choosing a vocation depends on the quality of their relationship with the mentor. At the same time, it has become clear that the mentoring relationship can be an extremely useful experience for the training and development of talented students. It is important to realize, however, that this relationship is reciprocal. While the mentor offers development opportunities and experience, as well as access to professional networks, the mentee must be motivated, curious and interested in his or her field of study, in order for the mentoring relationship to develop into a high quality relationship. Focusing on the real psychological needs of talented students within the mentoring relationship could help improve mentoring opportunities (Lunsford, 2011).

Based on the study results conducted by Cooper (1991), a series of recommendations have been made for specialized staff (teachers, school counselors, psychologists) who work with talented students, for improving their activity as mentors for this category of school population, as follows:

1. Talented students want to establish relationships with adults who share their interests /passions outside the school/academic context. Teachers and school counselors who are working with them should be available for this kind of activities.
2. In the professional relationship with talented students, teachers and school counselors should be sincere and really interested in mentoring them, in order to make their work really successful.
3. Teachers and school counselors who work with talented students should have knowledge about the special characteristics of these students, like perfectionism and fear of failure, in order to help them accept both, success and failure.
4. Teachers and school counselors should have the ability to manage frustration, anger and revolt frequently manifested by talented students. They are not perfect.
5. Teachers and school counselors who work with talented students should have specific skills, such as providing guidance to their mentee in time management. Talented students who get high grades without learning will never know how to effectively manage their working time.

## **Conclusions and discussions**

The present paper was based on the premise that talented students represent a special category of pupils with specific psycho-behavioral characteristics and needs that require specialized educational interventions in order to fully develop their abilities and to

maximize their potential. In the school context, one of the most appropriate interventions for this is mentoring, fact that was also demonstrated by a series of studies that underline its positive effects on the development of this special category of students, on the psychosocial and cognitive level, as well as on career orientation (Casey, 1997, Clasen&Clasen, 2003).

In the field of gifted education mentoring is still rarely used and there is no systematic approach to this kind of activity (Grassinger, Porath, & Ziegler, 2010). The mentoring programs analyzed by us are quite diverse and have been implemented in various geographical areas, therefore we believe that the impact of their implementation on the development of talented students may be relevant to underline the importance of such initiatives, in general, in national educational systems. This is why, the studies selected and presented by us in this regard describe a series of mentoring programs especially designed for talented students, which have contributed to their development, fact that proves the benefits and the impact of the involvement of these students in a mentoring relationship and the necessity for this type of programs to be sustained in an educational context, not only at an informal level but also through formal programs specifically designed and implemented for this purpose. The mentoring programs presented can represent examples of good practice for educational policy makers, in order to think of a coherent strategy to support talented students, at national level; but, also, can be implemented by school principals, at the local level, depending on the specific needs of the talented students they work with, in their institutions, and the resources available.

Therefore, based on the results of the studies included in our narrative review, we can conclude that: 1. It is recommended to introduce special mentoring programs for talented students in schools in order to offer them the moral and emotional support that they need, but also for cognitive stimulation; 2. In the field of gifted education there is not an "extensive" mentoring program which should be considered suitable for each child or school, not even one that has been implemented at the level of several institutions; but a series of alternatives that can be chosen, depending on the particular needs of the talented students you work with and the cultural specificity; 3. The mentoring programs can take the form of research projects in which talented students can work with their teachers on researching topics of common interest and then present their works as part of an event/strategy of promoting talents; 4. The mentoring programs for talented students can include various activities, such as: additional training sessions for improving academic performance; exploring the student's areas of interest, in order to choose the right career path; informal discussions regarding appropriate strategies for managing different social and emotional difficulties; 5. Although the involvement of talented students in a mentoring program does not always lead to a considerable improvement of their academic results, participants note the positive impact of mentoring on their social and emotional development. This fact can be very important and useful especially in the educational systems where talented students are trained in the public or general educational system and do not benefit from other educational interventions, to provide

them the support they need to integrate and to maximize their potential; 6. For twice-exceptional students, that are facing school underachievement or come from disadvantaged backgrounds and are unaware of their own potential and incapable of using it without specific interventions, mentoring is one of the best strategies to make them less vulnerable to sacrificing their potential and their talents before graduating; 7. Within a mentoring program talented students can also play the role of the mentor in order to develop their leadership skills and also to help their younger colleagues.

As for the limitations of our research, it is necessary to report the difficulty of accessing some of the international databases. In most of the cases, access was only possible in the institutions themselves, or by paying for the article. Thereby, the difficulty of retrieving relevant journal articles is a limitation of our search for data. The studies presented here are more related to the researchers' possibilities of access to studies than a quantity existing in the search period. It is also important to consider the fact that mentoring programs for talented students, described in the literature, are also quite diverse; in terms of organization and from the point of view of the objectives they aim to support talented students in their own process of development – focusing on *the academic, cognitive (intellectual) area; or on the creative, psychosocial, socioemotional and affective one, or on the career and vocational support*. Therefore, the fact that only electronic databases have been consulted needs to be considered, and also the fact that mentoring programs for talented students are not, so far, systematically approached in the literature. In this perspective, a suggestion for future studies is to conduct a specific, comprehensive and detailed research about how this topic - the subject of mentoring programs (for students) - has been approached in general education, compared with gifted education.

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## A counselling model of career guidance for youth

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### Abstract

The dynamics of the labour market are characterized by several important aspects such as: the emergence of new trades and the disappearance of others, the emergence of the phenomenon of technology, of the tendency to replace the human activity with the computerized activity in many fields, the replacement of office work with telework, the replacement of the physical space of professional activity with the virtual space. According to these considerations, the school should provide support to adolescents by applying counselling strategies in their choosing of a career. The novelty compared to the previous studies is that the present research provides a dynamic perspective in counselling adolescents on the approach of a career, which is based on a quadric-dimensional model, founded on four determining vectors for the career decision-making: identification of the problem, analysis of the individual profile, analysis of the socio-economic environment and projection of the career plan (involving the completion of some activities), which can be achieved over time whenever indecision or any other change occurs. The counselling model sets out an applicable approach whenever the adolescent faces fluctuating occupational interests against the background of social and economic uncertainties plus the prospect of a poor self-knowledge of their own resources but also an insufficient analysis provided by the school in relation to the labour market. This research is advancing the hypothesis that counselling and guidance services are supposed to be valued as important by most educational factors. From this perspective, in the descriptive study undertaken, we engaged the methodology of the questionnaire and observation and the results obtained reinforce the idea that school is the main factor that can determine the career success of the adolescent. The quadri-dimensional model of counselling the adolescents in choosing a career can be an effective tool in terms of the ratio of the results obtained from the application to the effort involved.

**Keywords:** model, career, decision, adolescents, guidance

### Introduction

The career involves a dynamic process over time, both at the individual, subjective level and at the organizational, objective one. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has defined the term "career guidance" as "services and activities intended to assist the individual, at any age and at any point throughout his or her life, to

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make educational, training and occupational choices and to develop his or her own career." (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2009)

In the literature (Luca, 2002) we talk about career guidance, career counselling and career education, concepts that are not synonymous. Career guidance is a very broad "umbrella" concept that encompasses both information, counselling, education and career evaluation. (Zunker, 2016) Career counselling is a psychological intervention, aiming to solve a specific career problem such as indecision, anxiety or academic dissatisfaction at some point. (Zunker, 2016) Career counselling is performed by the school counsellor teacher. The activity of a form tutor is rather an educational intervention, namely career education, which is meant to develop in advance certain skills and abilities of adolescents for the development and management of their own career.

In the Romanian education system, psycho-pedagogical assistance and school and vocational guidance services are provided through county centres and school psycho-pedagogical assistance offices (CREAC, Ministry of Education, Research and Youth (MERY), 2011) In the psycho-pedagogical support offices operating in schools, school counsellor teachers work with at least 800 students or 400 preschool children or in groups of schools/kindergartens. (MERY, 2011) Counselling and career guidance activities are also carried out by the form tutor who has a very important role, in addition to the organisational and administrative one, to inform the adolescents about their careers. We can intuit here certain limits in the actions of career counselling and guidance that a form tutor can have from the perspective of a summary training or even specializations held in this field. Through the optional subjects included in the curricular area "Counselling and guidance", activities can be provided by a teacher who may or may not have psychological training. In view of the above, we believe that the school should have the primary role in performing career counselling and guidance for adolescents, through specialised individuals, with a number of students enabling the effectiveness of educational and psychological intervention. ([www.edu.ro](http://www.edu.ro), 2019)

In this paper, we will address a model of counselling for facilitating the decision-making of the adolescents in the process of choosing a career by suggesting as a starting point an analysis of the needs of the adolescent age in relation to certain educational levers which would ultimately lead to a synthetic picture of the individual profile and its anchoring in socio-economic reality. The novelty in comparison to the previous studies resides in that the present research provides a dynamic perspective on the adolescents' counselling on the approach of a career, which is based on a quadri-dimensional model, promoted by four determining vectors for the career decision-making: problem identification, analysis of the individual profile, analysis of the socio-economic environment and projection of the career plan (a temporal dimension that gives dynamics to the counselling program).

### Theoretical foundation

Adolescence is a broad topic of discussion and reason for a great volume of research, especially for pedagogues and psychologists, but is often marked by conflicting opinions. In literature (Sampson, Peterson, 2004), the concept of career is presented as dynamic and complex, defined as a set of personal roles of the individual, throughout his/her active life, successive roles, following different trajectories over time. The career is not only about the individual's skills and abilities, but also about the opportunities he/she has, the choices he/she makes, the goals he/she sets for him/herself. (Lemeni, Tarau, 2004) The career decision refers to a process in which the adolescent is put in the position to select a career alternative from a series of variants available at a given time. (Bubany, Krieshok, 2017) In order to prevent all dysfunctionalities regarding a wrong decision on a career, we consider that the process of career counselling and guidance of the adolescents has a special role. The concept of career counselling and guidance of the adolescents encompasses all services and activities for the purpose of assisting an individual of any age and at any point throughout his or her life in order to be able to decide in terms of education, training and occupations, for the development of his or her own career. (Beach, Connolly, 2005) Over the past 30 years, in Romania, throughout the string of reforms in the field of education, counselling and guidance have occupied an important place so that they have been introduced as a curricular area. Within the School Curriculum for Counselling and Guidance for the Higher Secondary Education Level (Ministry of National Education (MNE), 2001) five general competences are provided for, three of which are aimed at specific professional guidance skills on the analysis of personal resources in drawing up a career plan, identifying and integrating communication and interrelationship skills in personal and professional development, building a school and professional career development plan. Even before 1998 there were concerns about the introduction into the national curriculum of objectives related to the school orientation of students. At that time, the school and professional guidance activity was taken over by the County Centres for Psychological-Pedagogical Assistance (CCPPA) (MNE, Order No. 5286/09.10.2006 for the approval of the Counselling and Guidance Programme, 2006) These centres began their activity with the beginning of the 1991-1992 academic year. Before 1991 there were School and Vocational Guidance Laboratories. These institutions were subordinated to the County School Inspectorates, under the guidance of the Institute of Education Sciences, and were based in the Teaching-Staff Resource Centre. By Order of Minister No. 3064/18.01.2000 (MNE, Order No. 3064/18.01.2000 on Guidance, 2000) details are brought regarding the two distinct directions through which the school and vocational guidance is achieved in the Romanian education system: through curricular activities (in counselling and guidance activities) and through extracurricular activities (especially in Psychological-Pedagogical Assistance Centres/Cabinets). Since 2005 "County Centres for Psychological-Pedagogical Assistance" appear (CCPPA) (OM no. 5418/2005). The main objective of the CCPPA activity is to create all the prerequisites for the harmonious development of the

personality of students/young people with a view to their integration into school, social and professional life. With this objective, CCPPA provides psycho-pedagogical counselling and school and professional guidance services through county centres and psycho-pedagogical support offices ([www.edu.ro](http://www.edu.ro), June 2019).

School and vocational guidance becomes a necessary component of contemporary education based on the free economy, being a complex pedagogical action which ensures the training of the workforce and future specialists.

In Romania, school and professional orientation is carried out according to the national curriculum, in school or other educational institutions, through offices and laboratories of counselling, school and professional guidance. Outside the school, part of the complex process of school and professional guidance is carried out through the media (radio, television, internet), in the family but also through children's and youth organizations, etc. (MNE, Order No. 3638/11.04.2001 on the implementation of the framework plan for education in the school year 2001-2002, 2001)

The decisions that the adolescents make today have a different pace, the trajectory changes in career occur against the background of continuous adaptations to new working environments. (Birle, Perte, 2009) Decisions are related to school dropout, to today's reality, the adolescents are perceiving as increasingly difficult the usefulness of the school in their personal success. Therefore, there are changes in the perspective of the adolescents in relation to the trajectory of their own educational and professional career. In a more recent study by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Institute (FES, 2019) on a sample of around 10,000 adolescents and young people aged 14 to 29 in Europe, the main issues underlying the choice of a career by adolescents are analysed. The decision of the adolescents to proceed to a particular career depends very much on the socio-economic situation in the European area and is certainly particularly affected by the economic recession and the financial crisis in Europe. It has been found from analyses and research undertaken that the impact of the economic and social crisis in Europe is greater on adolescents than on adults, in particular in terms of their employment opportunities. (Betz, Taylor, 2001) The study also reveals that the nature of career choices in adolescents is greatly influenced by the country's education system, the way in which the difficult or easy transition from school to work is carried out, the vocational training system, the type of institutions on the labour market (fixed-term employment contracts, minimum wage, etc.).

Analysing the results of a study carried out in 2014 at national level by "D&D Research," "eJobs," and "Samsung Electronics Romania," which had as a main objective the identification of the fields and professions preferred by the Romanian adolescents, we noticed that, regardless of the field to which Romanian adolescents were oriented, there are significant differences in terms of their preferred professions and the real possibilities of the Romanian labour market. (D&D Research, 2014) There is even a saturation in certain areas, and as a result the adolescents are forced to engage in areas other than those for which they have trained in school, case in which they need expert

counselling in this regard. The survey was carried out on a sample of 8000 adolescents aged between 16 and 18 years from the following cities: Arad, Baia Mare, Bistrița Năsăud, Timișoara, Brăila, Buzău, Iași, Piatra Neamț, Roman and Suceava. (Samsung Study, under the name "Trends of Tomorrow" and the study performed in 2014, by D&D Research, eJobs and Samsung Electronics România, named "Tendințele viitorului" (Trends of the Future).

Following the social experiences within the family, school, community and cultural context, the adolescents acquire their work values and naturally begin to become curious and wonder what occupations might allow them to implement their work values. The adolescents are beginning to be interested in that type of occupation which would cause people to look at them with admiration, what job would help them earn a lot of money, or what kind of job would optimize their opportunities to develop as a person. The process of translating the knowledge about work, preferences and values that someone has about work involves making good decisions about the occupational directions that someone follows. A recent study (FES, 2019) analyses the educational and professional career situation of adolescents and young people in Romania from the perspective of the factors influencing their career choice. The study, funded and conducted by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Foundation (FES) in 2018 and completed in 2019, shows that there is a significant correlation between the social status of the adolescents, the socio-economic indicators, the educational level of their parents and the place of residence (urban or rural). (FES, 2019) Therefore, the independent variables resulting from studies that investigated their influence in terms of reasons and career choices – the high school's chain/profile, the high school's background, the family environment, are considered to be important in finding a job. In addition, the adolescents also list: educational level, luck, knowledge and relationships. All these results from the research undertaken, as well as many other socio-economic and psychological considerations, lead us to consider that a program of counselling adolescents in order to choose a career is necessary and mandatory for the current conditions. In today's socio-economic conditions, the most common paradigm regarding the counselling of the adolescents in choosing a career is the one based on the constructivist perspective in education, which puts the individual at the centre, as an active part of his/her own construction. The approach of the learning process thus becomes a construction in itself, through the direct participation of the individual, through research, search, interpretations, structuring, reflections, correlations, its own meanings, having an "educational purpose of a formative nature." (Baban, 2009) Along with the development of newer theories in counselling, centred on individual differences, there are also theories that propose alternative ways of working which consider the contextual aspects and offer different perspectives. (Amundson, 1995) The counsellors become co-authors of the career counselling and guidance process, they support the development by helping the adolescents to acquire the skills needed for a new phase of their lives. Another approach is that of theorist B. Law, who proposes the method of biography in career counselling. The link between learning and

career decision-making was analysed by Law and Watts in the development of the New-DOTS model, which focuses on learning about Self, Opportunities, Decision and Transition. (Watts, 2000) The authors suggest that the most important factors in the occupational choice are the interpersonal exchanges that take place in social contexts. Maree and Morgan (2012) underline the idea that the professional life of the individual is the result of the developments in the world economy, and the activity of career counselling must consider quantitative and qualitative approaches, the development of a theoretical basis, evaluation tools that allow the individuals to become responsible for their actions, to adapt to new requirements, make decisions in new contexts. (Esbroeck, 2001) From this perspective, the counselling process carries out the activity of structuring for understanding the problem, of using metaphors for discovering different meanings, asking constructive questions, creating a plan to achieve the goal, using narrative techniques, activities of composing a chapter of a person's life, creating personal projects. M. Coleman (2000) proposes the application of a socio-dynamic counselling strategy, based on three stages: cooperation in the working relationship built; counselling activity seen as a teamwork of two persons; the use of dialogue in finding solutions to problems. The coordinates of the organisation of a counselling programme are: the time allocated to the programme, the objectives pursued, the contents, the working strategies, the way in which the counselling activities are organised and performed, the assessment of the results obtained and the feedback received from the beneficiary. According to the latest models of counselling, an effective program for advising the individual in choosing a career travels through the following steps: analysis of the need for counselling (identification and assessment of needs) resulting in an agenda of the counselling program (objectives, activities, working methods, resources involved, ways of motivating the individual), the design of the counselling program, the development of the counselling program, its implementation, assessment of the programme. (Ali McWhirter, 2005). In a study conducted by Multon, Heppner and Lapan (1995) the stability of goals in relation to the preparation for decision-making in 196 high school students, aged 14 to 18 years, was investigated. The aim of the study was to explore the factors that will influence the decision-making process, namely the career indecision and planning the professional future. These factors are: the students' background, group of friends, gender difference and the specifics of the school profile followed.

In his research Erdei (2001) lists several factors influencing the choice of a professional career: school, family, economic units, media and specialized institutions.

The model of counselling approached by us in this paper aims to facilitate the decision-making act of the adolescents in the process of choosing a career by suggesting as a starting point an analysis of the needs of the adolescent age in relation to certain educational levers which would ultimately lead to a synthetic image on the individual profile and its anchoring in the socio-economic reality. In this research we considered as variables the factors influencing the career decision: intrinsic – motivational factors in

career choice and extrinsic factors in career choice – gender difference, family environment of origin, higher secondary education chain/profile, higher secondary education background (rural, urban).

The model is based on the constructivist approach in career counselling and has as a novelty element compared to previous studies the dynamic perspective in the act of counselling, allowing reconsiderations of each stage within the proposed quadri-dimensional model. The model is based on four determinants for the career decision-making: problem identification, analysis of the individual profile, analysis of the socio-economic environment and projection of the career plan (a temporal dimension that gives dynamics to the counselling program).

## Methodology

In the context presented above, the general objective of the research is to describe and validate a model of counselling for the selection of a career by the adolescents, to evaluate the implementation of this model of counselling in order to become replicable, transferable, and to guide future practices. This model is based on the identification of the intrinsic-motivational factors of the career choice but also of the extrinsic factors of the career choice – family, higher secondary education chain/profile, higher secondary education background (rural, urban). Therefore, we intend to investigate the motivational sphere of the career choice for students in the final grades of urban and rural high schools, the theoretical and technological chain/profile of training. In particular, we aim to identify the professions to which these teenagers are oriented. This research is a descriptive study, undertaken between October 2018 and June 2019 in state education institutions in both urban and rural areas.

The variables of the research are structured as follows: independent variables (environment of origin and the profile of the high school; the gender of the participants; class) and dependent variables (reasons in choosing a profession and type of profession chosen (professional field); profession/ field of activity of the parents).

The central hypothesis of the research consists in the assumption that the application of a quadri-dimensional counselling model based on the identification of the problem, the analysis of the individual profile, the analysis of the socio-economic environment and the projection of the career plan leads the adolescent to make a career decision in accordance with his/her occupational interests. This research takes into account the following working hypotheses:

1. We assume that the system of needs and interests expressed by the adolescents greatly influences the decision-making process in choosing a professional career;
2. There are differences in career choice according to the school's background environment.
3. There are differences in career choice according to the family environment
4. We assume that the profession of the parents influences the choices that the adolescents make in relation to their professional career.

5. We assume that there are differences between the reasons for choosing the career in function of the high school profile followed.
6. We assume that there are gender differences in the motivational factors of a career choice.

### **Participants**

The research was attended by 279 teenagers from Romania, enrolled in the rural mass education system (Dâmbovița), urban environment (Bucharest): "Aurel Vlaicu" National College in Bucharest and Cojasca Technological High School in Dâmbovița County, Tărtășești Technological High School in Dâmbovița County, and Nucet Technological High School in Dâmbovița County.

As a sampling procedure, the (pseudo-random) convenience sampling was used, by selecting the subjects from the students of the higher secondary classes from two rural and urban areas in the south-east region. The sample of the subjects is characterized by a balanced weight in the environment of the origin of the adolescents (rural environment - 136 respondents and urban environment - 143 respondents), the gender of the participants and their age (15 - 18 years). From the point of view of the age variable, the calculated average is 16.7 and the calculated standard deviation is 1.3. In terms of variables, the following aspects will be taken into account: the distribution of the students by high school/school class; gender membership; age; the student's residence environment: urban/rural; the level of culture/education of the parents; the parents' profession. The sample structure is shown in the table below:

*Table 1. Descriptive statistics for adolescents' sample (independent variables)*

	<b>N</b>	<b>Percent</b>
<b>School Supply Chain</b>		
Theoretical	143	51,25%
Technological	136	48,75%
<b>School Profile</b>		
Real	64	23,27%
Humanist	79	28,72%
Natural Resources and Environmental Protection		
Technical	68	24,37%
<b>Specialization</b>		
Mathematical-Informatics	64	23,27%
Philology	79	28,31%
Agriculture	38	13,62%
Textile and Leather Industry	31	11,11%
Mechanics	37	13,26%
Food Industry	30	10,75%

**The Geographical  
Environment of Origin**

Urban	143	51,25%
Rural	136	48,74%
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	145	51,97%
Female	134	48,02%
<b>Age</b>		
15-16 years old	104	37,27%
16-17 years old	93	33,33%
17-18 years old	82	29,39

***Research methods/instruments***

The collection of the data necessary for the research was carried out with the help of two tools: "Questionnaire for school and professional options in adolescents" (Tomşa, 1999) and "Holland's Interest Inventory" (Holland, 2009). "Questionnaire for school and professional options in adolescents" (Tomşa, 1999) is structured into 15 questions with answers of choice or of the open-question type which aimed at highlighting certain aspects of the process of choosing a career path (studies and professional fields) by adolescents in grades IX-XII. The first part of the questionnaire is dedicated to demographic questions. This segment is followed by questions about the choice regarding an educational path, the nomination of the higher education institution the courses of which he/she would attend, the argumentation regarding the choice of a field of study. Subsequently, information was requested regarding the choice of a future profession, the reasons for the decision or the indecision to choose a profession. The results obtained following the application of the test will guide us in approaching a program of counselling of the adolescents in their choosing of a career. The last part of the questionnaire refers to the way in which the adolescent perceives the influence of the family on the decision to choose an educational and professional path. The adolescent expresses his/her agreement or disagreement with the parents' choices regarding his/her possible career, motivated by certain aspects which the subject should formulate.

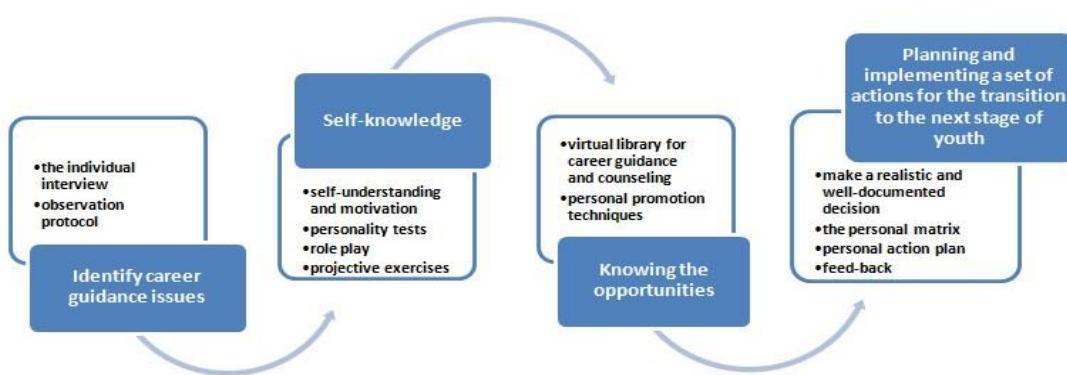
The second instrument, J. Holland's Inventory of Interests, is based on the fact that interests represent preferences for certain types of tasks of the activities performed by an individual. (Holland, 2009) The six dimensions of the model are: realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising and conventional.

***Procedure***

In the second part of the research, depending on the results of the application of the two instruments (questionnaires), as a result of the conclusions drawn, we proposed and applied a formative counselling programme for 30 adolescents from both rural and urban areas, randomly designated from the large sample of 279 adolescents, who were given

the two research instruments. The career counselling program applied by us ran over 38 hours, distributed over a 10-week period. The program was applied by the school counsellor teachers, with the support of the form tutors.

The career counselling program meets the needs of self-knowledge and self-motivation of the adolescents in the process of understanding and raising awareness of the importance of one's own potential in trying to build relationships with others and a successful professional career. The counselling model applied is based on the objective of supporting the adolescents in the decision-making process on an educational and professional career, to prevent the phenomenon of indecision, being correlated with the hypothesis according to which we assume that the application of a quadri-dimensional counselling model based on the identification of the problem, the analysis of the individual profile, the analysis of the socio-economic environment and the projection of the career plan (time dimension), determines the best career decision reached by the adolescent at some point in life. Please observe in the following the stages of the quadri-dimensional model for the counselling of the adolescents in choosing a career applied in the research.



*Figure 1. The four-dimensional model of career guidance for youth*

The proposed counselling model has the following stages:

1. Identification of the career guidance problems faced by the adolescent. The tool used was the individual career guidance interview and the school counsellor captured the information in an observation protocol. (Rotaru, 2002)
2. Self-knowledge - self-understanding and motivation. The working tools used were: "Star of my messages;" "Questionnaire on aspects regarding somebody's own person (Self-concept questionnaire);" "Map of the heart;" "The Tree of Personal Achievement;" "The Story of Childhood;" "The story of my roles (a projective exercise);" "Myers-Briggs Type Indicator" personality inventory (Prem, 2006); a

Career test that measures the adolescent's proximity to certain areas of activity (<https://www.careerexplorer.com/career-test/>)

3. Knowledge on opportunities: understanding the labour market and the opportunities offered by the legislation in force. In this stage the "Virtual Library of Career Guidance and Counselling" was established with the help of the counsellor teacher. An interactive workshop was supported by a recruitment specialist in which personal promotional tools and techniques were presented and used (letter of intent, CV, business card, personal portfolio).
4. Planning and implementing a set of actions for the transition of the adolescent to the next stage. In this stage, the "Personal Matrix" was structured, which led to the realistic and well-documented decision. This stage was a feedback provided following the application of the previous stages. The adolescents in the sample developed the action plan for their career. This tool constituted the way to assess the effectiveness and effectiveness of the.

## Results

The processing of data was performed in SPSS Statistics 17.0 for Windows.

Depending on the nature of the hypotheses, we calculated different statistical indices. In order to be verified, in the case of correlational hypotheses (hypothesis 1 which states that "the system of needs and interests expressed by the adolescents greatly influences the decision-making process in choosing a professional career" and hypothesis 4 which states that "the profession of their parents influences the choices that adolescents make in relation to their professional career."), we calculated the Pearson correlation coefficient (r). This indicated that there is a correlation between the variables included within the hypotheses. The value  $r[0.6]$  indicates a good, statistically significant correlation ( $p<0.001$ ). Therefore, the system of needs and interests expressed by the adolescents greatly influences the decision-making process in choosing a career.

*Table 2. Averages, standard deviations and t test for Holland interest indicators (N=279)*

Measured		variable	s.s.c.	a	s.d	t	d
Realistic	Congruence			17,30	9,67	0,873	0,14
Investigative	Consistency			16,80	8,42	2,786	0,21
	Differentiation			7,42	3,78	0,732	0,78
	Identity			7,89	4,97	0,378	0,83
	Congruence			20,62	8,86	2,321	0,43
Artistic	Consistency			20,12	8,53	0,456	0,48
	Differentiation			17,57	7,18	0,921	0,35
	Identity			15,89	4,33	0,357	0,28
	Congruence			20,40	9,90	4,038	0,42
	Consistency			15,76	4,78	4,731	0,38

	Differentiation	17,23	6,98	3,082	0,27
	Identity	18,23	5,43	2,782	0,48
Social	Congruence	26,74	10,39	0,711	0,59
	Consistency	22,14	7,89	0,782	0,62
	Differentiation	24,08	9,97	0,832	0,81
	Identity	23,14	8,45	0,473	0,85
Enterprising	Congruence	24,25	9,39	0,276	0,54
	Consistency	23,78	8,69	0,653	0,78
	Differentiation	20,46	7,78	2,823	0,42
	Identity	20,78	7,91	3,016	0,567
Conventional	Congruence	21,42	9,97	4,342	0,657
	Consistency	21,39	9,83	4,089	0,765
	Differentiation	20,67	9,03	3,789	0,549
	Identity	19,48	8,54	2,456	0,643

A first analysis of the data collected following the application of the "School and Vocational Options Questionnaire" resides in the correlation of the adolescents' choices with the interests expressed and the professions of their parents, grouped by categories, according to the European classifications established by Classification of European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO). These data are correlated to verify the hypotheses 1, 3 and 4, respectively, "the system of needs and interests expressed by the adolescents greatly influences the decision-making process in choosing a professional career;" "there are differences in career choice depending on the family environment" and "the profession of their parents influences the choices that adolescents make in relation to their professional career."

We have chosen seven categories according to the current professions, which can be included in each category, as follows: the category in which the use of the word predominates as a form of expression, named *Words* category; another category in which search and experimentation activities predominate, called the *Experimenting* category; the category of the professions involving organization, meticulousness, structuring, called the *Organizational* category; a category that includes activities oriented on achieving the objectives and on the efficiency of the resources, called the *Business* category; another category in which the professions rely on interrelationship, communication skills, called the *Social* category; the penultimate category of professions based on physical activity, called the *Physical* category, and the last category, represented by the arts, the *Art* category. (European Commission, 2017) The table below shows the degree of consistency between the professions of the parents and the choices made by the adolescents according to the interests expressed. In order to clarify the direction of the correlation (the existence of statistically significant differences) between the two nominal variables (hypothesis 4) we resorted to the cross-tabulation table and the calculation of the Chi-Square coefficient ( $\chi^2$ ).

*Table 3. Cross-tabulation - Correlation among the dependent variable: the profession chosen by the adolescent / the profession of the parent*

Parents	Words	Physical	Experimenting	Organizational	Business	Social	Art	Total
<b>Adolescents</b>								
Words	4	6	0	1	2	3	2	18
Art	5	39	3	7	8	9	0	71
Physical	2	3	2	2	0	1	4	14
Experimental	4	12	5	2	3	2	3	31
Organizational	6	15	6	15	10	9	7	68
Business	6	14	9	12	4	3	4	52
Social	2	2	3	4	2	10	2	25
Total	29	91	28	43	29	37	22	279

The conclusions in Table 3 indicate the fact that there is not a constant of the adolescents' options regarding the orientation in their professional career, the subjects following, more or less, the parental model.

Table 4. Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-Sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	5,303 <sup>a</sup>	2	0,71
Likelihood Ratio	5,352	2	0,69
Linear-by-Linear Association	5,211	1	0,22
N of Valid Cases	279		

a. 0 cells (0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 24,00.

The results may be correlated with the profiles of the educational institutions where the teenagers being part of the sample of our research study. From this perspective, we can conclude that the most appreciated categories of professions are in descending order: Art, Organizational, Business, Experimental, Social, Words, Physical. In other words, urban and rural adolescents choose crafts such as: cartoonist, painter, designer, visual arts specialists, architect, singer, director, musician, composer, dancer, choreographer, TV producer or professions such as: accountant, statistician, administrator, financial auditor, bank clerk, assistant manager, treasurer/cashier.

At the other pole, of the low preferences, there are trades such as: agricultural worker, car mechanic, repairer, driver, farmer, plumber, electrician, technician, forest ranger, guard, carpenter, locksmith, merchant, mine worker, ship captain,

policeman/woman, tapestry worker, veterinary assistant. It is a reality Romania has been facing in recent times, that in most cases the form of higher secondary education followed by the adolescents does not correspond as a preference for a future career with the profession they choose.

In order to verify the hypotheses 2,3 and 5 on the influence of the profile of the high school and the environment of origin of the adolescents, on the system of reasons existing in the process of choosing a profession, we used the Student's t-Test for independent samples. We took into account the two categories of subjects determined by the profile of the high school and their background (urban/rural), to highlight the importance given by the adolescents to each of the 8 reasons in choosing a professional career.

*Table 5. Averages, standard deviations and t test for motivation in choosing a career for rural and urban youth*

Measured variable	N	e.o	a	s.d	t	d
I think I know better in this profession		urban	20	23,47	8,34	4,032 0,47
	29	rural	9	20,91	2,34	3,819 0,45
It is a better paid profession		urban	41	25,94	22,79	3,791 0,53
	87	rural	46	29,92	22,81	5,534 0,57
I am concerned about this profession		urban	17	38,43	23,21	3,082 0,43
	38	rural	21	45,78	24,81	2,782 0,48
I follow my parents' advice		urban	15	38,14	2,17	0,711 0,35
	23	rural	8	27,29	3,18	0,782 0,28
I follow the advice of my teachers		urban	8	33,42	2,71	0,832 0,42
	12	rural	4	21,17	2,84	0,473 0,38
I follow the advice of the teacher counsellor		urban	12	32,14	2,97	0,276 0,27
	18	rural	6	22,14	3,85	0,653 0,48
This profession is practiced in the city		urban	2	17,29	4,89	2,823 0,59
	3	rural	1	13,45	3,21	3,016 0,62
I will achieve better in life		urban	28	29,45	43,52	3,051 0,81
	69	rural	41	24,72	44,16	3,958 0,79

It is noted that in an overwhelming proportion the adolescents are motivated in choosing a career by the gains obtained from practicing a profession. This reason is followed by the possibility of higher achievements in life and the interest in a particular career. On the opposite pole there are reasons such as the place where a trade can be practiced and the advice of the teachers or of the counsellors. According to the data obtained, it was found that there are certain significant differences in relation to three of the eight reasons, namely: gain -  $t(279) = 3.89$ , in this case  $p < 0.01$ ; achievement in life -

$t(279) = 3.95$ , and  $p < 0.01$ ; prestige, concern/obtaining a status -  $t(279) = 5.53$ , and  $p < 0.01$ ; skill -  $t(279) = 4.03$ , in this case  $p < 0.01$ .

To verify the hypothesis in which we assume that there are differences in the configuration of reasons according to the chosen profession, we present in the following the table in which we recorded the options of the adolescents for motivating the choice of profession (career area):

*Table 6. Descriptive statistics for the dependent variable - the reasons for choosing a profession*

Reason	N
I think I know better in this profession	29
It is a better paid profession	87
I am concerned about this profession	38
I follow my parents' advice	23
I follow the advice of my teachers	12
I follow the advice of the teacher counsellor	18
This profession is practiced in the city	3
I will achieve better in life	69
Total	279

In the case of the assumption that the high school profile influences the reasons supporting the choice of the profession, the results of the research indicate that in most cases, the higher secondary education chain/profile followed by adolescents does not correspond as a preference for a future career with the profession they choose. There is thus a considerable gap between the work environment chosen by the adolescent and the educational environment that influences him/her to a small extent in his/her career choice. There are trades that will find it increasingly difficult to attract occupants because of the migration of the population from the countryside to the major cities.

*Table 7. Averages, standard deviations for school supply chain and career decision making*

	N	Percent	a	a.s.	F	f
<b>School Supply Chain</b>						
Theoretical	143	51,25%	58,27	7,81	3,693*	0,91
Technological	136	48,75%	56,43	7,70		

\*p<0,5

The analysis carried out highlights the fact that the subjects belonging to theoretical high schools considered all eight reasons for which there were notable differences as being more important than those belonging to high schools with a technological or industrial profile. These multiple differences indicate a higher motivation present among students in theoretical high schools for choosing a profession by exploring more possible alternatives than among the students from a technological or industrial profile. The students in theoretical high schools are more orientated towards pursuing a career as a result of an exploratory activity. The students from the high schools with a technological/industrial profile are already to a greater extent oriented towards a certain career, indicated by the industrial – technical profile of the class to which they belong, and the range of professional options accessible to them is smaller.

For the analysis of the interaction between the high school profile and the decision/indecision on an area to which each of the 8 motivational factors relates, we used the Univariate Anova analysis.

A single interaction effect was shown to be significant, on the dimension of the status/concern towards the field, career: F(3,322) = 4,79, p = 0,02 < 0,05.

In order to verify hypothesis number 6, concerning the highlighting of the influence of the gender of the subjects being the objective of this analysis on the reasons for choosing a profession, we proceeded to compare the importance given to each motivational factor by the female gender subjects with that granted by the male subjects. Following the analysis, we found that there are significant differences in three of the eight reasons, namely: "pleasure to perform a profession" - t(279) = 2.27, p=0.02 < 0.04; "material advantages, remuneration" - t(279) = -2.44, p=0.01 < 0.05; "the status conferred by a particular profession" - t(279) = 4,28, p < 0,01;

The degree of influence depending on the gender of the extrinsic motivation is shown in Table 8. The average values are higher for women, which indicates a higher perception of the degree of influence of extrinsic motivation on the choice of a profession. For the analysis of gender differences regarding the influence of the extrinsic motivation on the career choice we calculated the contingency coefficient X<sup>2</sup>, which shows that the gender differences are statistically significant for most factors.

*Table 8. The degree of influence of extrinsic motivation depending on gender and the contingency table with estimated frequencies for  $\chi^2$*

					Material		
	Salary	Achievement	Prestige	Statute	advantages	Competences	$\chi^2$
Male	4,34	4,24	3,70	3,01	3,48	3,73	3,8
Female	4,50	4,32	4,02	3,31	3,58	3,96	4,2

As regards the implementation of the feedback phase provided following the implementation of the counselling programme, the 30 participating adolescents developed the career action plan. This tool was the means of assessing the effectiveness and the efficiency of the counselling programme implemented. The assessment followed quantitative indicators, which provided accurate and measurable comparisons, as well as qualitative indicators, which highlighted a description of the characteristics of the counselling programme. We have defined the efficiency of the counselling programme as the ratio between the resources (material, human, financial) involved and the results obtained from the implementation. In the following we present the results in percentage obtained by the 30 teenagers. 95% of the teens developed the career action plan.

*Table 9. Evaluating the efficiency of the proposed  
counselling model*

Indicators	Percent
The ability of short self-characterization with a clear definition of personal interests and motivations	93,3%
Clarity of defining objectives	90%
Clear definition of existing alternatives in the decision-making process	100%
Staging the action plan and determining completion times	96,6%

The effectiveness was defined in terms of the opinions of the beneficiaries (the 30 adolescents) regarding the effects of the implementation of the counselling programme. We measured by means of a questionnaire the level of satisfaction of the 30 adolescents with the counselling program followed. The measurement of the adolescent satisfaction refers to the reactions, opinions expressed by them in response to the involvement in the counselling programme in order to make a decision on their own career. The five categories of questions were structured as follows:

1. Administrative aspects: problem solving, quality of the proposed tools, quality and accuracy of the information provided (on the web, brochures, leaflets, virtual

- library, etc.), quality of the tests applied online (accessibility, availability of information, design, accuracy, novelty);
2. Learning resources and spaces: educational spaces (equipment, access, timetable, technique used, resources);
  3. Learning contents: the topic addressed in courses, the relevance and usefulness of information, the development of the ability to work in a team, the development of the communication skills, the development of the ability to learn and understand new things, the development of the skills to work with a specialized software, the development of problem solving skills, critical spirit, creativity;
  4. The didactic process: clear and appropriate communication of concepts, topicality and usefulness of the concepts, interactive methods, adaptation of the contents to the students' learning needs and possibilities, efficient use of new technologies (e-mail, electronic content support, use of video projector, etc.).
  5. Evaluation methods used (feedback provided)

In the following we present the table with the results collected from the application of the satisfaction questionnaire.

*Table 10. Evaluating the efficiency and effectiveness of the proposed counselling model*

Measured variable	very satisfied	satisfied	relatively satisfied	little satisfied	dissatisfied
<b>Administrative issues</b>					
issues	96,6%	3,3%	0	0	0
Resources and learning spaces	93,3%	3,3%	3,3%	0	0
Curricula	100%	0	0	0	0
<b>The teaching process</b>					
process	96,6%	3,3%	0	0	0
Assessment	100%	0	0	0	0

The results showed that on average 97% of the adolescents participating in the career counselling programme expressed positive reactions to the usefulness of the programme.

## Discussions and conclusions

Following the application of the research tools, certain important conclusions emerge for the application of a model of counselling of adolescents regarding the option on a career.

The system of needs and interests expressed by the adolescents greatly influences the decision-making process in choosing a career. The need for self-knowledge of one's

own areas of interest and skills for a particular activity was greater. In a correlation of the categories of professions chosen by the adolescents with the results of the interest inventory, we see a 36.8% consistency between desire, interests and motivation for a particular profession involving certain activities.

In the course of our research we have noted the phenomenon of indecision as a consequence of a state of personal inadequacy (interests, skills, values, motivations) to the social requirements. This aspect indicates that the professions of the future will be preferred by the adolescents insofar as they coincide with the individual's talent and skills, with the pleasure and motivation to approach a particular field. Other researches confirm that career choice indecision tends to be a characteristic of the adolescents exhibiting a high level of emotional instability, who are externalists, tend to see life as being determined by chance and less by their own actions and efforts and who are often less motivated to engage in decision-making that concerns their own development opportunities. (Starica, 2013)

The adolescents determined towards a career attach a significantly greater importance to the status offered in the choice of the profession than those who are undecided. In the case of the students belonging to theoretical high schools, the status conferred by a particular profession is added to the other two motivational dimensions that separated the determined from the undecided, namely the safety and certainty of the future and the comfort of a big gain. The results of other researches indicate that the adolescent chooses the referential adult (who may or may not belong to the same family) conditioned by the two variables (social valorisation and the level of the revenues obtained). (Oprișor, 2016)

It is noted that in an overwhelming proportion the adolescents are motivated in choosing a career by the gains obtained from practicing a profession. This reason is followed by the possibility of higher achievements in life and the interest in a particular career. At the opposite pole there are reasons such as the place where a trade can be practiced and the advice of the teachers or of the counsellor.

The average values are higher for women, which indicates a higher perception of the degree of influence of the extrinsic motivation on the choice of a profession.

Regarding the parental model, it is not a constant of the adolescents' option regarding the orientation in their professional career, the subjects following, more or less, the parental model. There is research that admits the same conclusion, that the professional orientation of the young individuals does not follow the parental model (Oprișor, 2016)

The higher secondary education chain/profile followed by adolescents does not correspond as a preference for a future career with the profession they choose. There is thus a considerable gap between the work environment chosen by the adolescent and the educational environment that influences him/her to a small extent in his/her career choice. There are trades that will find it increasingly difficult to attract occupants because of the migration of the population from the countryside to the major cities or outside the country.

It is a reality Romania has been facing in recent times, one in which, in most cases, the form of higher secondary education followed by adolescents does not correspond as a preference for a future career with the profession they choose.

Following the application of the questionnaires, there was a growing need to understand the problems the adolescents face in the process of choosing a career, because this process is not only important from the perspective of employability but especially from the perspective of investing time and effort in what it means a wise decision which could influence the whole life of the individual. A study undertaken under the Comenius Sectoral Lifelong Learning Programme indicates that the students perceive that the need for self-knowledge is the most important, followed by the need for support in making a career decision, then the need for information on school offers and the world of work and the need to develop personal promotion skills. (Education and Career Guidance, 2014) Therefore, an information system regarding the dynamics of the labour market to guide the adolescents and create for them a vision on the globalisation of the labour market leads to the shaping of viable career options and finally to the documented decision-making. A counselling programme can lead to better academic results by understanding the role of knowledge circulated within various fields of study, increases the motivation for learning, thereby increasing the possibility of achieving high scores on national knowledge tests. The implementation of a career counselling programme builds a positive school climate by amplifying the vision of the role of the school in the becoming of the individual, contributes to broadening the students' horizon in relation to the labour market and career-related notions, builds a better relationship between students and between students and teachers (as part of the counselling team), the latter being valued as "advisers." The programme of counselling among adolescents regarding the choosing of a career applied in the second part of the present research proves to be useful and replicable due to the following aspects:

- It is facile to apply and contains computerized samples with immediate interpretation;
- It is accessible and can be extended to the lower secondary school cycle;
- It has a projective and temporal component, can be reconsidered whenever the adolescent requests;
- It is a tool within the reach of the school counsellor, who can create a portfolio for each teenager;
- It entails minimum application costs;
- It builds a better relationship between students and between students and teachers, the latter being more valorised.
- It is based on the valorisation and activation of the individual counselled, as part of the process of building his/her own career.
- It is carried out by specialized individuals, with a number of students which enables the effectiveness of the educational and psychological intervention;

- It can be accessed through online interaction modalities, both synchronously and asynchronously.

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## Inclusive education and stereotypes among teachers from mainstream schools

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### Abstract:

*Despite the constant efforts to implement an inclusive education system at the level of educational policies and practices, there are nevertheless a number of factors influencing the effectiveness of inclusive education. Teachers, as key actors of education through the lens of their work, are a determining factor in the success of the implementation of inclusive education and the quality of education. The way they relate to students with disabilities has a significant impact on the quality of inclusive education. Beliefs about the importance of inclusion, expectations of inclusive education outcomes and inclusive classroom practices have a higher level of occurrence for teachers with fewer stereotypes. Questioning 90 teachers, it has also been shown that the level of stereotypes is lower for teachers who have experience working with children with disabilities. These results demonstrate that the efficiency and quality of an inclusive approach depend on these psychological constructs of teachers and a good inclusive education starts from the beliefs of each teacher. Also, those teachers who have experience working with students with disabilities tend to have a low level of stereotyping, compared to teachers who do not have this type of experience, so coming into contact and the experience, predominantly positive, with students with disabilities leads to knowledge of the specifics of this area, finding resources in diversity and, ultimately, lowering the level of stereotypes that can lead to exclusion and segregation.*

**Keywords:** inclusive education; stereotypes; disabilities; mainstream school.

### Introduction

In a rapidly evolving society, changes and differences are increasingly evident in all areas of life and the field of education is one of the areas that constantly faces these changes and challenges. This development brings to the fore the need to accept human diversity, tolerance and the use of resources from what seems to be different and unknown. It is precisely for this reason that the field of education has had to adapt to these differences and gradually learn to ensure equal opportunities for all people, thus managing to respond to their diverse characteristics and needs in terms of education and training.

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Starting from the right to education and belonging of each individual, the need to develop an education for all has become increasingly pronounced, both in national and international contexts, thus shaping inclusive education (Gherguț, 2013). Since past times, a variety of stereotypes and labels have been associated with people with disabilities. In itself, the language used has changed over time, highlighting certain changes in attitudes and beliefs towards differences and disability. It is precisely the terminology used in this field that brings with it a number of implications in shaping beliefs, attitudes, practices and policies (Winter & O'Raw, 2010).

## Inclusive education

Building on the fact that the right to education was defined by the 1948 - Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a fundamental right, inclusive education is a result of this basic right of all people to have access to an appropriate form of education and not to be excluded. Inclusion in mainstream education is a philosophy of acceptance and community membership that leads to the structuring of the educational process in such a way that it meets the needs of all students (Gal, Schreur, & Engel-Yeger, 2010). By referring to special education, inclusive education has been defined as the optimal and complete participation of students in mainstream school educational activities, regardless of the nature of their needs, without the element of segregation in their services (Connor, Gabel, Gallagher, & Morton, 2008).

In addition to the conceptual definition of inclusive education, we note that this refers to a wide range of strategies, activities and procedures designed to lead to respect for the fundamental right to a qualitative and relevant education. Inclusive education reinforces the idea that education begins from the moment of birth and continues throughout life, encompassing both learning in the family environment, in the community, in formal, non-formal and informal contexts; also seeks to strengthen communities, systems and structures in all cultures and contexts precisely to combat discrimination, celebrate diversity, promote participation and overcome barriers in learning for all people. It is also part of a broader strategy to promote the development of inclusion, with the aim of creating a world governed by peace, tolerance, resource sustainability, social justice and where the needs and rights of every man are met (Stubbs, 2008).

When we talk about the quality of inclusive education, we need to refer both to the physical aspects, both academic, behavioral and social (Wilckzenski, 1992). The success of the implementation of inclusive education depends on the quality and quantity of educational policies, as well as on the change of the educational process, the school as an institution and the school as a system.

Teachers, as key actors in education through the lens of their work, are a determinant of the success of the implementation of inclusive education and the quality of education overall (Ratkovic & Hebib, 2018). Research shows that there is no standard pattern of inclusive education, which is a dynamic, organic, cultural process that depends on the

context of implementation. However, in achieving inclusive education it is necessary to understand three basic aspects: fundamental human rights together with the documents and tools developed, the elements behind the development of inclusive education, the origins and influences and concepts, models, strategies and what differentiates inclusive education from other educational paradigms (Ainscow, Booth, & Dyson, 2006).

## Stereotypes

Stereotypes have been defined as simple "images" of our heads of people or events around us. Lippmann explains that our actions are not based on direct knowledge of the real world, because the real environment is too vast and complex to be directly perceived. To adapt to this situation, the author explains that we are building a series of "images" of the environment (including the people around us) (Lippmann, 1922). Stereotypes have also been defined as beliefs or a set of beliefs about the characteristics, attributes or behaviors of a particular group of people or a category of people. Moreover, they are not only beliefs about groups, but also small theories about how and why certain attributes fit (Schneider, 2004). In other words, stereotypes are cognitive structures that link knowledge to a category of people (Bless, Fiedler, & Strack, 2004). Although stereotypes usually tend to get negative valence, they are not necessarily negative by nature. Stereotypes about people outside our reference group tend more to be negative than for group members, even when attributes are based on positive things (Hilton & von Hippel, 1996).

Stereotypes are particularly insidious factors in the formation of students' image by teachers. Teachers who rely on stereotypes in favor of knowledge beyond that risk allowing individual and cultural influences to work to their disadvantage and disadvantage to that generation of students (Cook-Sather & Reisinger, 2001). There have been researchers who have classified stereotypes as correct or incorrect, referring to their validity (Allport, 1954), the correct value of a stereotype as a set of beliefs about people, idea reinforced by Ehrlich (Ehrlich, 1973).

The way teachers and schools treat students with social requirements has a major impact on their intellectual and emotional development, as well as on their self-esteem. Teachers' expectations can be sources of maintenance of stereotypes, especially for children with special requirements, as teachers can use the true level of children's development and performance as proof of the validity of their stereotypes (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). When we make social categories in school and attach a label to them, we focus on the characteristics that make that child part of that category. As long as students with disabilities are assigned stereotypes and are described as disabled rather than differently empowered or capable, schools receive an image of individuals unable to make a productive contribution and participate in the school community.

Furthermore, while these issues related to the attribution of stereotypes are also added to additional criticism from teachers who also exhibit stereotypes that influence judgments about the performance of students with special requirements, increase the

level of rejection by peers and the level of non-help in learning on the part of the student as a result of self-assignment and internalization of the label put by others (Zembylas & Isenbarger, 2002). Previous research found that the most common mentioned stereotypes on disabled people would be that they have poor social skills, are introverted, communicate poorly, have difficult personalities or behaviors, have poor emotional intelligence. (Wood & Megan, 2016). Another study concerning able-bodied and disabled students have found that the stereotypes attributed to each of the two categories are totally opposite, the disabled students being called introverted, lazy, unassuming, submissive. (Fichten & Amsel, 1986). A study that had teachers as participants (Campbell & Gilmore, 2003) verified the existence of stereotypes for students with Down Syndrome, with teachers demonstrating "extremely happy" and "affectionate" stereotypes.

### The present study

Despite the constant efforts to implement an inclusive education system at the level of educational policies and practices, there are nevertheless a number of factors influencing the effectiveness of inclusive education. This research aims to analyze the relationship between inclusive education and stereotypes of mainstream teachers. Based on the assumption that certain aspects of teachers influence their beliefs about inclusive education, we aim to look at the extent to which stereotypes about students with disabilities are an influence factor for these beliefs.

A secondary objective of this research is also to examine the extent to which stereotypes can be influenced by aspects related to the professional experience of teachers. The aim of this study is to provide relevant conclusions and directions on how stereotypes can influence inclusive education and how these stereotypes can be influenced by certain personal attributes, in order to increase the efficiency of inclusive education in Romania, beyond the inclusive policies and practices described and recommended.

In researching the relationship between stereotypes and inclusive education, we will analyze the latter variable through several constructs, *general beliefs about the importance of inclusion, expected inclusion outcomes and inclusive practices used in the classroom*. When we refer to *general beliefs about the importance of inclusion*, we are talking about the belief that the students with disabilities have the right to be educated together with typically developed students and that this is most beneficial option to them. With regard to the *expected inclusion outcomes*, we are talking about a number of real expectations about the outcomes that inclusive education can have on students and on the class. These expectations lead us to the third dimension, that of *inclusive practices used in the classroom*, which relate to the adaptations, facilities and changes needed for an inclusive education. Therefore, once realistic expectations are established, classroom practices will be optimally analyzed and applied.

## Hypotheses

In order to analyze how certain factors influence beliefs about the importance and necessity of implementing inclusive education, this research aimed to verify the following hypotheses:

**H1:** Teacher stereotypes influence their beliefs about inclusive education

H1.1: Teachers with lower levels of stereotypes have significantly better results in general beliefs about the importance of inclusion.

H1.2 Teachers with lower levels of stereotypes perform significantly better in terms of expected outcomes of inclusive education.

H1.3 Teachers with lower levels of stereotypes perform significantly better in terms of the results of inclusive practices.

**H2:** Working experience with students with disabilities influences their stereotypes.

H2.1 Teachers who have experience working with students with disabilities have a lower level of stereotyping than teachers who have no experience working with students with disabilities.

**H3:** Teachers' years of teaching experience influences their stereotypes

H3.1 Teachers with teaching experience in education between 21 and 40 years of age have a higher level of stereotyping.

## Methodology

### Participants

The research was carried out on a sample of 90 teachers from mainstream education in Romania. The sample contains teachers who teach in all four study cycles (pre-school, primary, secondary, high school). The average age of the participants is 43 years, the minimum age being 22 years and the maximum age is 65 years. Subjects teach in both rural and urban areas, 40 of them (44,44%) teaching in rural areas and 50 (55,55%) in urban areas. Also, the teaching degree they have differs, having 11 starting teachers, 19 definitive, 52 who have the didactic degree I and 8 who have the teaching degree II. Years of teaching experience is also diverse in this sample, with 52 teaching staff with experience between 1 and 20 years and 38 teachers with experience between 21 and 40 years.

### Measures

*Beliefs about inclusive education* were measured using the My Thinking About Inclusion Scale (MTAI) questionnaire (Stolber, Gettinger, & Goetz, 1998). This questionnaire aims to measure beliefs about inclusive education and can be used for the application of both teachers and parents. The questionnaire consists of a total of 28 items, evaluated on a Likert scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means total disagreement and 5 means

total agreement. The 28 items are divided into 3 subscales covering 3 areas of inclusive education: general beliefs about the importance of inclusion (12 items), expected inclusion outcomes (11 items) and inclusive practices used in the classroom (5 items). For this study, the instrument has good internal consistency ( $\alpha=0.856$ ).

*Stereotypes* were measured using the Stereotype and Metastereotype Questionnaire (SMQ) (Barkley, 2015) was built to address the appearance of five constructs of stereotypes described by May and Stone (2010) on students with disabilities, with 28 items in total. The questionnaire was divided into five subscales related to the 5 stereotypes: low intelligence (5 items), impossibility of compensation (5 items), processing deficit (6 items), insurmountable condition (6 items) and working the system (6 items). A Likert scale was used from 1 to 5, where 1 means total disagreement and 5 means total agreement. These concepts of stereotypes describe an attribute or characteristic of students with disabilities, or a behavior that researchers have proven in previous studies to be relevant in the construction and emergence of stereotypes. The results show good internal consistency ( $\alpha=0.884$ ).

### ***Procedure***

The questionnaires, translated and adapted in advance, were completed by participants in electronic form using the Google Forms tool. Prior to the study, participants were informed of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses, and asked to give honest answers. Also, prior to completing the questionnaires, the subjects were asked to give the consent to participate in this research.

## **Results**

### ***Correlation analysis***

Table 1 presents the correlations of the 5 constructs of stereotypes, general beliefs about the importance of inclusion, expected results and classroom practices. Following the calculation of the Pearson correlation coefficient, the following significant correlations were identified:

**Table 1.** Table of correlations of the 5 constructs of stereotypes, general beliefs about the importance of inclusion, expected outcomes and classroom practices.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1.Low intelligence								
2.Impossibility of compensation		,470**						
3. Processing deficit	,716**		,539**					
4.Insurmountable condition		,444**	,353**	,438**				
5. Working the system		,509**	,214*	,491**	,416**			
6. General beliefs about the importance of inclusion		-,283**	-,153	-,295*	-,229*	-,295**		
7. Expected inclusion outcomes		-,415**	-,121	-,378**	-,151	-,345**	,640**	
8. Inclusive practices used in the classroom		-,298**	-,561**	-,268*	-,397**	-,137	,369**	,239*

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , N=90

General beliefs on the importance of inclusion correlate positively with expected outcomes of inclusion ( $r=0.640$ ). The level of occurrence of the low intelligence stereotype positively correlates with the level of the occurrence of the stereotype working the system ( $r=0.509$ ). Low intelligence has a positive correlation with processing deficit ( $r=0.716$ ). The impossibility of compensation correlates positively with the processing deficit ( $r=0.539$ ). General beliefs about the importance of inclusion are positively correlated with the level of inclusive classroom practices ( $r=0.369$ ). The stereotype of working the system has a positive correlation with the insurmountable condition ( $r=0.416$ ). Processing deficit correlates positively with working the system stereotype ( $r=0.491$ ). The insurmountable condition and processing deficit are positively correlated ( $r=0.438$ ). The impossibility of compensation correlates positively with the insurmountable condition ( $r=0.353$ ). Low intelligence correlates positively with insurmountable condition ( $r=0.444$ ). The impossibility of compensation correlates positively with low intelligence ( $r=0.470$ ). There is a positive correlation between inclusive classroom practices and expected inclusion outcomes ( $r=0.239$ ), the same being for the impossibility of compensation and the stereotype of working the system ( $r=0.214$ ).

The level of inclusive classroom practices correlates negatively with the impossibility of compensation ( $r=-0.561$ ). Inclusive classroom practices have a negative correlation with the insurmountable condition ( $r=-0.397$ ). The level of expected inclusion outcomes correlates negatively with the stereotype of working the system ( $r=-0.345$ ). Expected

**Table 3.** Statistical results of T-Test

<b>t Level</b>	<b>p Level</b>	<b>Experience*</b>	<b>Mean</b>
Level of stereotyping	-2,528	0,013	Yes
			No

\* Experience working with students with disabilities

results of inclusive education are in a negative correlation with processing deficit ( $r=-0.378$ ). Low intelligence correlates negatively with expected results of inclusive education ( $r=-0.415$ ). The level of inclusive classroom practices correlates negatively with the processing deficit ( $r=-0.268$ ). General beliefs about the importance of inclusion correlate negatively with working the system stereotype ( $r=-0.295$ ). Inclusive classroom practices are in a negative correlation with low intelligence ( $r=-0.298$ ). The level of general beliefs about the importance of inclusion correlates negatively with the insurmountable condition ( $r=-0.229$ ). General beliefs about the importance of inclusion correlate negatively with processing deficit ( $r=-0.265$ ). The level of general beliefs about the importance of inclusion correlates negatively with low intelligence ( $r=-0.283$ ).

### **Hypothesis testing**

The testing of the H1 hypothesis was carried out by applying the statistical T-Test for independent samples in order to analyze possible differences between subjects who recorded a high level of stereotyping and subjects with a low level of stereotyping. For all three subscales that make up the MTAI instrument - general beliefs about the importance of inclusion, expected inclusion outcomes and inclusive practices used in the classroom - the results of the statistical test confirmed the general hypothesis according to the following table:

**Table 2.** Statistical results of T-Test

	<b>t Level</b>	<b>p Level</b>	<b>Level of stereotyping</b>	<b>Mean</b>
General beliefs about the importance of inclusion	3,095	0,003	High	38,95
			Low	43,22
Expected inclusion outcomes	3,855	0,000	High	36,03
			Low	40,70
Inclusive practices used in the classroom	3,157	0,002	High	9,83
			Low	11,82

The second hypothesis, H2, was also verified by statistical T-Test for independent samples, with the results indicating that there are significant differences between teachers who have experience working with students with disabilities and those who do not have, in terms of the level of stereotyping. Thus, on the basis of statistical results, the hypothesis formulated by confirms:

The H3 hypothesis was verified using the statistical T-Test for independent samples, with results indicating that there are differences between the level of stereotypes in teachers that have between 1-20 years of teaching experience and the level of stereotypes for teachers that have between 21-40 years of teaching experience, but these differences have proved not statistically significant, so that the hypothesis is rejected:

**Table 4.** Statistical results of T-Test

	<b>t Level</b>	<b>p Level</b>	<b>Teaching experience (years)</b>	<b>Mean</b>
Level of stereotyping	-0,805	0,423	1-20 21-40	1,52 1,61

To analyze which of the five stereotypes recorded a higher level of occurrence, we analyzed the statistical descriptive data in Table 5.

**Table 5.** Statistical data for the five stereotypes

<b>Stereotype</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Dev</b>
Low intelligence	90	11,87	3,623
Impossibility of compensation	90	18,91	3,776
Processing deficit	90	13,32	3,625
Insurmountable condition	90	19,86	4,476
Working the system	90	12,79	4,139

According to these statistical results, in this sample of 90 teachers in mainstream education, the highest level of occurrence was the stereotypical *insurmountable condition* ( $M=19.86$ ), followed by *the impossibility of compensation* ( $M=18.91$ ). The least recorded stereotype was *low intelligence* ( $M=11.87$ ). The results thus show us the increased tendency of teachers in education to consider that the disability of pupils is an insurmountable condition and that they are unable to compensate. At the same time, this data shows a low tendency to assign students with disabilities the label of low intelligence.

## Discussions

This study looked at the relationship between teachers' beliefs on inclusive education and the stereotypes they present about students with disabilities, and investigated how certain factors can influence beliefs about the importance and necessity of implementing inclusive education, with stereotypes being analyzed in this paper.

The mean of general beliefs on the importance of inclusion for subjects with a high level of stereotyping had a lower result (38.95) compared to subjects with a low level of low levels of stereotypes (43.22), which shows that those teachers with a low level of stereotypes report a higher level of beliefs about the importance of inclusion than those with a high level of stereotypes. From a psychological point of view, teachers with a low level of stereotypes towards students with disabilities tend to have a greater openness to inclusive education and to understand the importance of practicing it, not limited by stereotypes in shaping positive beliefs about inclusion. With a high level of stereotypes, teachers in this category will have limitations in believing that inclusive education is important, thereby affecting its implementation to high quality standards. The fact that they present stereotypes about students with disabilities will not allow them to see beyond these constructs to explore the resources and potential of these students. Studies on teachers' beliefs show that they often manage to overcome stereotypes and change their beliefs about inclusion, despite their training in this field, but manage to do so through their actual experience working with students with disabilities in an inclusive context (Olson & Bruner, 1996).

Scores on expected inclusion outcomes in subjects with lower stereotypes (40.70) are higher than for subjects with a high level of stereotyping (36.03), which means that those teachers with a lower level of stereotypes have a higher level of expectation when it comes to outcomes of inclusive education than for teachers with a higher level of stereotypes. From a psychological point of view, teachers who report a low level of stereotypes tend to have higher expectations about the possible results of inclusion, precisely in view of the fact that there are no strong stereotypes that could overshadow the achievement of those results. For teachers with high levels of stereotypes, they will have difficulty seeing beyond them, in order to set a number of expectations and objectives for the results of inclusive education. Teachers who report a low level of expectations and a high level of stereotypes cannot see beyond the labels assigned to children with disabilities, without a clear horizon in terms of the results that inclusive education could have. At the same time, based on Olson and Bruner's (1996) idea that each teacher creates his or her own pedagogy based on how children learn and the results they expect from the instructional-educational process (Olson & Bruner, 1996), pedagogy based on a high level of stereotypes about the results of inclusive education will be significantly affected by them, with low expectations that keep the teacher in an area of simple idea of access to education in terms of inclusive education, without a high level of expectations for the results of inclusion. (Lieber, et al., 1998)

The mean for inclusive classroom practices for subjects with low levels of stereotypes (11.82) is significantly higher than the average for high-level stereotypes (9.38), meaning that those teachers with a low level of stereotypes are significantly higher in terms of inclusive classroom practices than those with high levels of stereotypes. From a psychological perspective, teacher stereotypes affect inclusive education and beliefs about the need for inclusive classroom practices, thereby affecting

the implementation of inclusion in school by these teachers. Studies show that those teachers who have had positive classroom experiences with students with disabilities tend to have a lower level of stereotyping than the original one, implicitly leading to an increase in inclusive classroom practices (Eiserman, Shisler, & Healey, 1995). At the same time, the literature highlights that the objectives of a teacher determine a number of expectations, expectations which in the case of students with disabilities are largely determined by the stereotypes that he has about them. These stereotype-based expectations also lead to fluctuations in the level of inclusive practices in the classroom, depending on the level and nature of stereotypes conveyed by the teacher (Schommer, 1994).

The result of the level of stereotypes for teachers with experience working with students with disabilities is lower (1.49) than for teachers who do not have experience working with students with disabilities. This result shows us that those teachers who have experience working with students with disabilities tend to have a low level of stereotypes compared to teachers who do not have this type of experience. Psychologically, coming into contact with a student with disabilities and experiencing how to work with them, including recording their progress, the attitude towards these students becomes more positive and the stereotypes about them start to be deconstructed. On the other hand, teachers who do not have experience working with students with disabilities manifest these stereotypes as a consequence of the lack of knowledge of this field and the lack of information on the specifics of these students. Previous studies have shown that contact and experience working with students with disabilities are in a negative correlation with the level of teacher stereotypes, their level decreasing as teachers have more positive experiences with students with disabilities (Aksamit, Morris, & Leuenberger, 1987). Zaromatidis demonstrated that there is a significant link between working experience with students with disabilities and the level of stereotyping only in certain cultures, in other cultures this link being insignificant (Zaromatidis, Papadaki, & Alissa, 1999). Villa, Thousand, Meyers and Nevin argue that practical experience working with students with disabilities and practicing inclusive education develops teachers' skills, fostering positive beliefs about them and reducing the level of stereotyping (Villa, Thousand, Meyers, & Nevin, 1996).

The results obtained on the level of stereotyping in teachers with teaching experience between 1-20 years are lower (1.52) than for teachers with teaching experience in between 21-40 years (1.61), but this difference is not statistically significant. Psychologically speaking, not confirming this hypothesis is a controversial result. On the one hand, more years of teaching experience lead to higher exposure of teachers to possible inclusive classes containing students with disabilities, their experience having an important influence on stereotypes. In the context of working with students with disabilities for a longer period of time, but not applying inclusive practices, work experience can be classified as negative, and this leads to an increase in the level of stereotypes. Buysse & Bailey discovers that teachers more years of teaching experience

in the field felt less comfortable when working with students with disabilities than teachers with less experience in the field (Buysse & Bailey, 1993).

## Conclusion

Despite its limitations, this study draws a number of relevant conclusions in the knowledge of issues that can influence effective inclusion and in the implementation of inclusive and positive education by teachers as key actors. The results of the research highlighted that those teachers with a low level of stereotypes report a higher level of beliefs about the importance of inclusion, expectations when it comes to the outcomes of inclusive education and a higher level of approach to inclusive practices in the classroom than those with a higher level of stereotypes. Also, those teachers who have experience in working with students with disabilities tend to have a low level of stereotyping, compared to teachers who do not have this type of experience, so coming into contact and the experience, predominantly positive, with students with disabilities leads to knowledge of the specifics of this area, finding resources in diversity and, ultimately, lowering the level of stereotypes that can lead to exclusion and segregation. At the same time, a fair and effective approach to inclusive education develops teachers' skills, fostering positive beliefs about students with disabilities. Another conclusion of this study is that there are no significant differences in the level of stereotypes between teachers with different levels of years of teaching experience. In this regard, studies show that more years of teaching experience lead to higher exposure of teachers to possible inclusive classes containing students with disabilities, their experience valence having an important influence on stereotypes. In the context of working with students with disabilities for a longer period of time, but by not performing inclusive practices, work experience can be classified as negative, and this leads to an increase in the level of stereotypes.

This study provides significant information regarding the influence of stereotypes on inclusive education and it is believed that teachers should take these issues into account in educational practice, in particular with a view to promoting quality inclusive education. The results of this study are a good starting point for an insight into the influence of stereotypes in pedagogical practice and a milestone in designing and implementing a plan to increase inclusion in schools.

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## Teachers' digital competences in the first educational policy responses to the COVID-19 crisis in four countries

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### Abstract

*With the sudden widespread closure of schools since February-March 2020 due to the physical distancing measures associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, the digital competences became a focus of attention, being of central importance to the swift and equitable transition to the various forms of emergency remote teaching implemented throughout the world as a strategy to insure continuity in education. This almost instantaneous mass shift to teaching online has made transparent great disparities in how digital competences – particularly those of teachers - were conceptualized, taught and assessed within various educational programs. We present a comparative analysis of the approaches to teachers' learning and professional development that state and non-state actors in four Central and East European countries have articulated in the first months of COVID-19 related lockdown. We take a Critical Frame Analysis approach to exploring the roles played by state and non-state actors in the four countries in conceptually framing the relationship between the digital competences required in emergency remote teaching and teachers' learning and professional development at the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis. It is suggested that the educational policy debate at the beginning of the crisis rendered visible: a) that this massive sudden shift required understanding digitalization as a complex multifaceted process requiring levels of digital and pedagogical competence teachers were unlikely to have previously developed; b) that addressing these issues through short-term interventions would only exacerbate the risk of ignoring arising equity issues; c) that situating emergency measures in the context of potential medium and long-term developments could open opportunities to explore mainstreaming the digitalization of education and promoting blended learning, as well as offer a better perspective on issues of digital poverty and the inequitable impact of not addressing it adequately will have in the future.*

**Keywords:** digital competences, teachers' learning and professional development, emergency remote teaching.

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## Introduction

At stage one of the COVID-19 pandemic outburst, with the closure of schools, policy makers were faced with two main challenges: first, ensuring the learning needs of students from all socio-economic backgrounds, but especially for those from vulnerable backgrounds; second, providing systemic responses for the long-term educational, social and economic challenges generated by the pandemic (Van Lancker and Parolin, 2020). This twofold challenge prompted a global haste to produce the fastest and most fitting policy responses to ensure safety and continuity of educational provision.

Originally addressing the shift away from face-to-face activities at university due to the continuously extending period of social distancing and lockdown measures since early March 2020, the term 'emergency remote teaching' coined by Hodges and collaborators (2020), took over the language of transitions in educational provision associated with the Covid-19 pandemic. Educationalists everywhere have quickly picked up on the notion of 'emergency remote teaching' (Hodges et al, 2020), if merely to stress that the [Covid-19 pandemic] imposed 'rushed activities [which] should not be equated with e-learning, distance learning or another form of carefully planned and administered online learning experience' (Kerres, 2020: 692).

Whilst the impending educational shifts might have been rooted in the best of intentions (Aguilera and Nightingale-Lee, 2020), it almost immediately and quasi-ubiquitously became apparent that it raised significant challenges on various organizational, pedagogical and ethical aspects. The four countries where our analytical focus is located, namely: Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria and Republic of Moldova, were no exception. The shift to emergency remote teaching meant facing, almost overnight, the challenge of assessing and developing an adequate infrastructure of educational technology making possible whichever chosen continuation strategy.

Worldwide, this challenge impacted educational systems and organizations in the most diverse ways, ranging from either expanding the use of well-articulated infrastructure already in place and use (Scull et al, 2020), to having to invest for the first time in educational technologies making remote teaching possible (Hodges et al, 2020), either facing traditional cultural resistances to the widespread use of technology for educational purposes (Kerres, 2020), or the lack of funding immediately available (OECD, 2018; Di Pietro et al, 2020), and great socio-economic disparities affecting students, parents and families living in historically marginalized communities the most (Aguilera and Nightingale-Lee, 2020). Eurostat data from 2019 indicates that access to broadband internet connection varies greatly by household income across all European countries, and that cross-country variability is much larger in the bottom quartile, with the percentage of households with broadband internet connection in the lowest income quartile varying between less than 40% in Bulgaria as opposed to more than 90% in the Netherlands (Di Pietro et al, 2020). Closely connected to technological and digital

infrastructure disparities, digital competences and capabilities of adults and caregivers suddenly being appointed responsibility to mediate their children's access to classes and other school related activities online (in the context of newly imposed continuation measures requiring educational activities be transferred online) were among the most significant factors impacting the risk of exacerbating educational inequities. Parental education appears to be positively correlated to children's access to computer possession at home, differences between high and low skilled parents being especially significant in Romania, Bulgaria and Hungary amongst other countries (OECD, 2019).

Aimed at preventing students from missing out whilst away from schools, initiatives promoting the continuation of school activities remotely, particularly those involving digitalization, raised questions concerning teachers' digital competence and content pedagogical knowledge (Schulmann, 1987) needed for teaching online (Rapanta et al, 2020; Ching, Su and Baldwin, 2018), either addressing implications for initial teacher education (Scull et al, 2020; Dyment and Downing, 2020), or continuing teacher learning and professional development (König et al, 2020; Carillo and Assunção-Flores, 2020). The general situation was quite diverse in terms of national systems' preparedness to orchestrate efficient support for teachers' learning and professional development. The almost instantaneous mass shift to teaching online has made transparent great disparities in how digital competences – particularly those of teachers - were conceptualized, taught and assessed within various educational programs (Reimers and Schleicher, 2020). In international comparisons, some countries appeared to have more problems than others in insuring a smooth and efficient transition to online education, particularly when uneven distributions of access to internet across rural and urban areas and of software available in schools, coupled with lower levels of digital skills – especially those of teachers (Holotescu et al, 2020).

Here we present a comparative analysis of the approaches to teachers' learning and professional development that state and non-state actors in four Central and East European countries, namely Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria and Republic of Moldova, have proposed in the first months of COVID-19 lockdown.

## Methodology

The data, findings and discussions presented here are part of a larger study designed as a cross-national comparative analysis of the policy responses to the crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic during the state of emergency and general lockdown between March and June 2020. In the extended comparative analysis our main focus was on exploring the discursive power dynamics connected to policy making (Verloo, 2005) in the four countries, during the early stages of the COVID-19 crisis in CEE region, seeking to form a contextualized understanding of the political and systemic triggers of inequity in education.

The goal of the analysis proposed here is to explore the specific relationship between approaches to teachers' learning and professional development and the ways in which

teachers' digital competences were addressed in the policy debates in the four countries. To this avail we specifically address the following research question: *How have digital competences and teachers' learning and professional development been addressed in the first educational policy responses to COVID-19 in Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria and Republic of Moldova?*

In our comparative analysis of the educational policy responses in the four countries, we operationalized this aspect of inquiry on two specific coordinates, seeking to form a deeper understanding first of how *teachers' learning and professional development* reflected in the policy debates by looking at its specific focus, who was addressing it, to what end and questioning what the proposed provision strategy was; then, we inquired over how *digital competences* were conceptualized, whose digital competence have policy debates addressed, and to whom was responsibility for action assigned to in addressing issues of digital competences.

### ***Research design***

In order to capture comparatively the ways in which the first policy responses in the four countries addressed teachers' professional learning and development in relation to issues of digital competence, we employed an adapted version of CFA (Dombos et al, 2012). CFA concentrates on identifying *policy frames* which function as an organizing principle that transform fragmentary or incidental information into a structured and meaningful problem, in which a solution is implicitly or explicitly included (Verloo, 2005).

### ***Data sampling and collection***

The data collected and analysed in this cross-national comparative study consists of educational policy documents, including policy statements by non-governmental actors issued in the period between mid-March and mid-May 2020 in the four countries.

Documents issued by the following categories of actors were sampled: international organizations/supranational bodies (where relevant), governmental bodies, NGOs, and experts.

Our data selection followed two steps: a) identifying state policy documents and policy related statements issued outside the state apparatus (i.e. by NGOs, stakeholders and experts) addressing education in the four countries during the lockdown and state of emergency period, with a specific focus on explicitly/implicitly addressing inequity issues and b) narrowing our selection to the texts which made it to the flow of open data resources, therefore could be considered potentially referential to other voices engaging in the policy discourse at the time of the pandemic. We did not limit the number of documents sampled within types or issues. For the purposes of this specific analysis, the sampling process in the four countries followed the principle of saturation within the national samples considering: a) the specific timeframe; b) relevance to issues of digital

competence and teachers' learning and professional development; c) the potential of creating authority by means of influencing the mainstream policy discourse.

In the broader comparative analysis exploring inequity issues in the first educational policy responses to the COVID-19 crisis, we conducted open sampling and then categorized the documents in six story-grammars: inequities in educational *provision, access, educational technology, curriculum, digital competence, teachers' learning and professional development*. We have made the necessary adaptive changes to the CFA methodology to render it operational in a context of crisis, characterized by a condensation of statements from policy relevant actors that needed to be processed quickly.

We constructed issue-histories (Dombos et al. 2012) in each country: we created detailed chronological listings of policy developments in the proposed time frame in each country, as well as texts that framed the policy debate in education *before* the beginning of the pandemic crisis and could be traced in relevance to the issues on the educational policy responses to the pandemic crises' agenda. Our final sample included 68 policy documents: 21 for Romania, 21 for Hungary, 15 for Bulgaria and 11 for the Republic of Moldova.

Out of this general pool of national policy documents and texts we initially sampled, in line with the scope of analysis presented here, we are selectively looking at the texts that were relevant to understanding the ways in which the first policy responses in the four countries addressed teachers' professional learning and development in relation to issues of digital competence.

### **Coding and Analysis**

Sets of syntactic relations characteristic of statements in a particular genre of texts (Dombos et al, 2012, p. 10) served as a way of setting the format of coding in advance (standardizing) per each general category: digital competence and teachers' learning and professional development. These syntactic relations were structured as story-grammars, allowing for an organization of the codes researchers produced in the open coding of data that made comparison possible at issue-frame level. The story-grammars were discussed in detail by the team of researchers at the beginning and throughout the first phase of analysis when the documents were coded for content in the national sets of data. Adjustments were permitted, the researchers being advised to call for a group discussion of the proposed changes whilst progressing with coding and analysis of data at national level.

Following coding and code standardization the next step was to construct issue frames. The frame construction started from identifying the marker fields - fields that marked the difference between the frames (Dombos et al, 2012). The marker fields in our coding of the six story-grammars, which were especially helpful in identifying issue frames were *actor categories* (who authored the text, who is nominated in it), *document*

*genre* (i.e. decree, resolution, civil society text, etc.) and *modality* (i.e. agenda-setting, contesting, regulative, delegating, proposing alternatives), *key points* (content), *related issues* (i.e. access, provision, educational technology, curriculum etc.), and *descriptive/normative features* (i.e. creating authority, practical, problem/solution oriented, targeted). In the second phase of analysis, issue-frames identified in the coding of story-grammars at national level were discussed.

## Findings discussed

### Teachers' digital competences

Table 1 presents the documents sampled in the extended comparative study for each of the six story-grammars at national level, and indicates the categories of actors (state/non-state actors) who have articulated issues of inequity within each story-grammar, in each country in our analysis. Our national samples of policy documents and texts have been structured to facilitate an ample analytical scope through the six-story grammars, yet for the purposes of this analysis we will focus particularly on the findings on two specific topics: digital competence and teachers' learning and professional development. In Table 1 these two story grammars appear in highlight.

Table 1 The number of documents sampled per story-grammar, engaging either state or non-state actors, in each of the four national contexts, at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic

	Romania		Hungary		Republic of Moldova		Bulgaria	
Story grammar	Sample size/actor category/story-grammar							
	State actors	Non-state actors	State actors	Non-state actors	State actors	Non-state actors	State actors	Non-state actors
Provision	2	14	6	3	3	5	7	5
Access	6	12	7	6	2	5	8	6
Educational Technology	1	3	1	3	1	5	4	4
Digital competence	1	2	1	-	1	5	4	3
Curriculum	3	9	1	-	2	4	6	3
Teachers learning and professional development	1	5	3	3	1	2	7	3
Total National Sample size	21		21		11		15	

The shift to online teaching prompted a general call in all four countries for implementing or improving and expanding existing digital infrastructure and available educational technology. The uneven distribution of technological means and infrastructure along the socio-economical and residential characteristics of the student populations (in all four countries) and the inadequacy of available educational technology to the educational needs of various age and ability categories of students (i.e. SEND/ special educational needs students in Hungary, pre-schoolers in Romania, Roma or other minority language speaking students in Romania and Bulgaria) were among the most significant topics marking the policy debate at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Particularly non-governmental actors in the four countries were quick to remind state actors of the danger of further exacerbating social and educational inequities by ignoring evidence of technological disparities emphasized in internationally produced data pre-existing the COVID-19 crisis, such as reports by OECD or Eurostat in 2019 and the years before that (OECD, 2019, 2020; Eurostat, 2019).

In the context of setting up emergency remote teaching as a strategy to insure continuity to educational activities within the different national contexts, digital competence was generally conceptualized as the ability to use available digital technology for educational purposes (teaching, learning and assessment). It became visible in close proximity to discussing learning goals and assigning teaching and learning roles to teachers, students and parents in the context of shifting to online education. The development of students' or parents' digital competences was generally not addressed by the state actors, the lack of educational provision in this respect being noted by non-governmental actors in Romania. In Hungary, non-governmental actors explicitly focused on the digital transition of teachers, students and parents with digital skills and teaching materials.

### ***Opportunities for teacher's learning and professional development***

The strategies to operationalize teachers' learning and development of digital competences varied from recommended e-learning platforms and digital resources to be used by teachers for learning purposes (Romania and Hungary), to self-guided learning (Moldova), sharing best practices in online professional groups and programs organized by traditional providers of professional development in each country (all four countries). However, access to the proposed learning and professional development opportunities was not equal, certain professional categories' learning needs (i.e. higher upper secondary teachers in Romania) not being addressed at all, thus raising educational equity issues.

Table 2 presents an overall image of the approaches state and non-state actors in the four countries have proposed in the first months of COVID-19 lockdown, for setting up

support for teachers' learning and professional development and the ways in which their specific proposals presented the different aspects of digital competence being prioritized.

*Table 2. Teachers' learning and professional development & approaches to Digital competences prioritized in the first policy responses to COVID-19 by state and non-state actors in the four countries*

		Romania		Hungary		Republic of Moldova		Bulgaria	
Teachers' learning and professional development (TLPD)		Sample indicating Actor category responsible for formulating problem/proposing /advancing action							
		State actors	Non-state actors	State actors	Non-state actors	State actors	Non-state actors	State actors	Non-state actors
	<b>Mentoring teachers</b> (mentors from programs of TLPD for digital competence, running before the COVID-19 Pandemic )	1	1	1					
	<b>Online repositories</b> and collections of teaching materials	1		1	1	1		1	
	<b>Access to online courses</b> , and teaching platforms, apps	1		1	1		1	1	
	<b>Teachers' sharing best-practices</b> online	1					1		
	<b>Support networks</b> for schools		1		1		1		
	<b>Support and recommendations</b> for SEND/minority groups		1	1	1			1	1
<b>Specific Emphasis on Teachers' Digital competence</b>	<b>Short-Term</b> – instrumental to emergency remote teaching	1		1	1	1		1	
	<b>Medium &amp; Long Term</b> – overall development of digital competences for teaching and learning		2		1		2		

As Table 2 indicates, state actors in Hungary and in Romania advanced the idea of using existing programs or policies (i.e. the CRED programme in Romania, or the National Digital Education Strategy in Hungary) to harbour large scale mentoring opportunities, whereby experts or teachers who were previously trained on ICT and related skills for teaching could provide mentoring on digital methodologies for education to teachers who have not yet acquired these skills, at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic:

Based on the prior assessment of needs, schools within the range of their infrastructural possibilities can help students and families by lending tools. (...) It is advisable to assign a technical team of teachers/special educators who work as the institutional helpdesk and support specialists. If this is not possible in the school, it is useful to involve parents or to seek civic initiatives which connect specialists with the schools in need. (Hungarian state actor)

However optimistic and reassuring the state actors in Hungary were, what was missing from the picture was that the country's digital education strategy ratified by the parliament in 2016 was only partially realized, most importantly the digitalization of schools and the competence development of teachers having been left far behind the planned schedule. Nevertheless, having had appointed an office at the Ministry for Innovation and Technology dedicated to this programme allowed the Hungarian state to assign some responsibilities to it, as an immediate response to the COVID-19 crisis, which became apparent in the policy documents we have analysed. Whilst state actors would thus far claim teachers and schools are well prepared, and even more so, it is thriving in the context of emergency remote teaching, non-state actors highlighted that the reality contradicts by large the image state actors put forth, and there are huge disparities across the education system in the schools' infrastructural and professional readiness to shift to online teaching methods.

In Romania, non-state actors were quick to notice that state's recommendations in this respect were lacking relevance for the teaching requirements of certain age groups (i.e. upper higher secondary students). They also noted that independently conducted inquiries and analyses of the teachers' levels of confidence and familiarity with digital technologies and methodologies for teaching online were less than optimistic. Furthermore, the state's postponement of publicizing a national strategy for emergency remote teaching for almost one month after declaring the state of emergency and national lockdown, coupled with the realization that prior to the COVID-19 crisis merely 4 % of the teachers in the country had been included in professional development programs addressing ICT and digital competences were promptly criticized straight from the beginning of the first educational policy responses to the COVID-19 crisis:

The level of digital competence of teachers in secondary education cannot be assessed; only 4% of the in-service professional development programs implemented by the CCD in 2013-2018 aimed at developing digital competences related to teaching, learning and assessing. (Romanian non-state actor)

Another prominent aspect readily observable in Table 2 is that in all four countries the states had provided online repositories of recommendations, best practice examples and curated digital teaching tools as a fast (and rather short-term) response to the

teachers' needs in the course of setting up and delivering online teaching. In doing so, non-state actors (i.e. multinational and national companies) have partnered with the states to ensure online resources for education were free of charge. Except in Moldova, state actors in all other countries have also recommended freely accessible online courses and tutorials for accessing different digital platforms suitable for emergency remote teaching. Overall, state-actors in all four countries have mainly focused on addressing teachers' learning and professional development on a short-term timespan, building on a rhetoric of immediate responses to a major crisis and on doing everything possible to contain its' potential negative effects on health and education.

In addition to expressing opposition and contestation to the states' approaches to teachers' learning and professional development needs related to the digital competences required in rendering operational emergency remote teaching, non-state actors – especially those in Romania and Moldova – have also had in common expressing prospective positions over the medium and long-term implications of teachers' learning and professional development addressing digital competences. In doing so, they have also shifted the conceptual perspective over digital competences for teaching – by expanding its' approach in the policy debates at the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis to incorporate capabilities beyond the technical and instrumental aspects of learning to use certain digital tools, or to copy ways of doing exemplified in best-practice models. This conceptual expansion implied creative and reflective capabilities associated with digital competences were implying wider, more complex horizons of pedagogical responsibility. Such were those implied in the Romanian non-state actors' proposal to prospect the possibility of using the crisis as an opportunity to revisit the educational resources of blended and hybrid learning in the long-term perspective of educational reforms:

One model successfully implemented in other European systems is *blended learning* which combines traditional and digital teaching. This model ensures not only fruition of the potential of digital resources, but the resilience of the learning processes in the face of crises such as this one, as well as improving educational standards by providing best-practice e-lessons to all children. (Romanian non-state actor)

The same was visible in the Moldovan non-state actors' call for national strategies addressing continuous development of digital competences for teachers and school managers.

In the perspective of prolonging the state of emergency, it is necessary to develop curricula and educational content using e-learning principles. (Moldovan non-state actor)

In terms of policy-making during the pandemic, our data sets in the four national contexts indicate that the agenda-setting role was played by the government. However, government documents predominantly served a regulative and delegative purpose. Other actors typically reacted to these actions either by expressing discontent and contestation (i.e advocacy NGOs, Teacher Unions, Student Councils), offering support for the government in tackling the crisis (corporations, international organizations),

expressing contestation and proposing policy alternatives (Unions, advocacy NGOs, experts), proposing targeted best practices (specialized advocacy NGOs); or setting up non-governmental services to address the lack of government provision and setting the agenda by taking action that addresses government failures (NGOs addressing digital poverty and providing digital support).

Teachers' learning opportunities targeting the development of their digital competences were topics in the policy debate mainly framed by concerns related to digital poverty in the four countries and by calls to explore the crisis as an opportunity for change and improvement in education. Both these frames were dominantly articulated by non-governmental actors. The concerns addressing issues of digital poverty indicated that disadvantaged communities were being excluded from online teaching (due to lack of stable internet connection, digital proficiency, etc.) and that their educational disadvantage was likely to exacerbate as a result of the crisis. This issue was neither recognized, nor addressed by the state.

For example, in Hungary, state documents exclusively expressed that schools can lend equipment to families (within a contractual format), or students can use school facilities, but did not go into details about the challenges of those who did not have access to online learning from home and how this could be mitigated by state measures. In Romania state documents advanced a national strategy set up as an intervention national plan for ceasing all face to face educational activities and shifting to online, but failed to identify the problem and address the needs of students who are unable to use age and ability appropriate educational technologies, or do not have access to electrical energy. A similar situation could be documented in Moldova and Bulgaria.

### **[The Covid 19 pandemic] Crisis as an opportunity**

Oftentimes in the policy debates at the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis, general concerns addressing digital poverty issues prompted other, more specific issue frames, as was that of addressing the technological, methodological and learning support for actors in education, involving the transfer of digital competences to teachers, pupils, parents, etc. The improvement of digitalization and of digital competences was more of a prognostic frame in the policy debate at the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis, involving medium and/or long-term solutions based on blended learning, and on adapting the curricula and the teaching methodologies to fit the requirements and principles of online pedagogy. Yet, despite state actors recognizing digitalization involved rather pedagogically complex processes, emphasis was placed on the importance of schools rendering it operational and functional within a short-term horizon of action. This has prompted non-state actors to voice concerns over the state actors' disregard of digitalization as a complex process going beyond access to technology and involving a proper diagnosis of the actual digital competences and knowledge of online pedagogy professionals in education could realistically demonstrate in their current professional practice.

The idea of using the crisis as an opportunity for improving access to and provision of education, and for developing digital competences in education was generally missing from state communication in the four countries at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. It was, however, an idea put forth by non-state actors in Romania, emphasizing the medium and long-term horizons for possible action on digitalization in education.

When state actors in Hungary did touch the idea, it was treated in state communication completely independent from the issue of digital poverty:

Hungarian public education as a whole is going through unusual times due to the coronavirus pandemic. Almost all involved in the sector agree that the digital work scheme which was introduced as a necessity holds possibilities alongside difficulties: addressing it suitably could mean a great step towards more knowledge and broader spread of digital methods and contents. (Hungarian state actor)

The rhetoric of state communication was more imbued with defensive tones, building on the idea of short-term measures, containing the negative effects of a major, unprecedented crisis, than on prospective thinking, taking the COVID-19 early stages of the crisis as a point of departure for medium and long-term educational reforms. None of the state documents we have analysed has employed this specific issue-frame.

Another clear pattern can be noted in the discursive dynamics between state and non-state actors. State and non-state actors find themselves in a role-assigning and agenda-setting exchange. This exchange is marked by two co-constitutive dynamics: (1) state actors delegate and diffuse responsibilities to other actors and (2) non-state actors operate discursively through contesting the actions of state/ governmental actors. (1) The first dynamic is visible in legislative documents typically taking on roles of control and monitoring, whilst assigning implementation responsibilities to teachers and schools, with little reference (i.e. a general endorsement of a digital platform to be used as reference point for teaching and learning resources for all age groups and all subjects), or no reference at all – i.e. in regard of inclusive education, particular age groups, or newly appointed responsible educational agents, such as parents - to the support and guidance teachers and schools might need to produce the required responses. (2) The second dynamic is visible in documents of contesting modality, issued by unions and advocacy NGOs assigning responsibility to the state to provide means of access to digital teaching and mitigate inequalities generated by unequal access to online teaching. State communication is defensive in the sense that it emphasises that emergency measures and not long-term policy strategy is being implemented.

## Conclusion

In the comparative analysis presented here we have used the CFA approach to understand how digital competences and teachers' learning and professional development have been addressed in the first education policy responses to the COVID-19 crisis in four Central and East-European countries.

Despite efforts to support remote learning, the efficiency of digitalized educational provision in the four countries at the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis was limited due to the lack of and/ or inadequacy of internet connection and digital devices to facilitate online learning. Educational inequities were likely to be exacerbated by great disparities in the level of digital competence of teachers, students and supporting family members.

The initial educational policy responses to the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic involved an unprecedented shift towards online teaching and learning that took the form of emergency remote education. Both state and non-state actors in CEE recognized that this massive sudden shift required understanding digitalization as a complex multifaceted process, as well as required from teachers, digital competences that they were unlikely to have previously developed to a sufficient extent for successful educational provision. State actors addressed these issues through short-term interventions (such as providing teachers with repositories and best practice examples) and implemented these unequally, ignoring arising equity issues (e.g. in Romania, the needs of upper-secondary teachers remained unaddressed in official government promoted repositories for online teaching). Non-state actors placed emergency measures in the context of medium and long-term developments focusing on both the present crisis as an opportunity to mainstream the digitalization of education and promote blended learning, as well as to draw attention to the unequal effects on different vulnerable groups of students of inadequately provisioned online education, especially to issues of digital poverty and the inequitable impact which not addressing this adequately will have in the future. For teachers' learning and professional development, this has largely meant that many of their urgent needs were met with selective and partially adequate measures that did not fully address the unfolding challenges of remote teaching that they were faced with.

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## Autonomia copilului de vîrstă mică. Repere pedagogice. Book review

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By

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In the increasingly pronounced context of social change caused by digital technology, globalization and multiculturalism, more and more educational policies have focused their goals in the direction of developing autonomy lately. Seen as a pillar of adaptation in the face of ambiguity and uncertainty, dimensions of contemporary society, the schools of the 21st century pay special attention to identifying those fundamental skills that young people need for academic and social success.

In the frequently prominent circumstances of new technologies, the learning process resizes its format, both in terms of content, learning mechanisms and the role played by the teacher. Thus, under the influence of the virtual environment that offers unlimited access to information, success in education is no longer brought by the reproduction of ideas, but consists in the ability to use them in concrete life situations. At the same time, curiosity, learning through discovery, interaction, cooperation, collaboration, and experimentation are the new dimensions of the learning process. Among these coordinates, the role of the teacher shifts its focus from transmitting knowledge, to guiding students in the optimal direction of learning, to stimulating motivation and developing their abilities.

Thus, the educational approaches must be adapted to the contemporary reality, bringing useful strategies for the development of autonomy, configured as a transversal competence and inherent to our days. In this sense, the development of creativity, critical thinking, development of initiative, decision making, problem solving have become the main directions that support this desideratum.



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Developed in a theoretical-reflective, but also practical-applicative manner, this book is a valuable tool both for researchers in the field of education and students, teachers, and parents concerned with the formation of children's autonomous behaviors. The author's rich experience in the field of educational sciences research, well combined with the vast list of bibliographical references, gives this work a prestigious title. The readable perspective of the content presentation attracts the reader, maintaining his interest by well-balanced intertwining of theoretical and practical-applied guidelines. Thus, the paper presents guiding aspects for building and supporting young children's autonomous behavior, as well as the values of a broader framework for their integration.

In the context of the increasing emphasis of pedagogical research on the development of autonomy, seen as the general purpose of the educational act, this paper offers a significant contribution in the educational literature for early education. The novelty element is given by the outlining, in a pragmatic way, of the necessary steps to build child autonomy at an age when addiction and self-determination coexist.

Being structured in six chapters, the book presents fundamental landmarks in the preschool child's formation of autonomy, starting from "Autonomie și educație. Repere conceptuale"/ "Autonomy and education. Conceptual landmarks". Thus, a series of definitions of autonomy are outlined, a concept analysed later in relation to freedom, identity, responsibility, independence and dependence. A series of philosophical, sociological, but also psychological perspectives on autonomy emphasize the differences that remove the synonymous sign with these terms, beyond the correlations provided. Finally, it is concluded that autonomy is that competence of the human individual manifested through self-determination, the expression and responsible fulfillment of their own decisions, their assumption and internalization. Analyzing in detail one of the basic concepts of the paper, the chapter is the starting point in addressing this issue.

Also, the paper presents "Teorii și modele explicative privind formarea comportamentelor autonome"/ "Theories and explanatory models on the formation of autonomous behaviours", investigating the theories of development and their implications in educational actions meant to form the child's autonomy. Thus, following the development of autonomous behavior especially in the early period, the chapter illustrates points of view discussed by both classical and contemporary theories, such as: the socioconstructivist theory of L.S. Vygotsky, E. Erikson's psychosocial theory, J. Bowlby's theory of attachment, A. Bandura's theory of social-cognitive learning, and E. L. Deci and R. M. Ryan's theory of self-determination. The chapter addresses an inherent part of the issue, as the psychological models presented offer relevant values on the educability of behaviors, especially in early ontogenesis.

With the same accuracy, the trajectory "De la pedagogia autonomiei la educația pentru autonomie"/ "From the pedagogy of autonomy to the education for autonomy" is described, starting from the approach of autonomy from the perspective of the Montessori pedagogical system, from the perspective of Célestin Freinet, Adolphe Ferrière, but also from the perspective of the Step-by-Step project. Finally, education for

autonomy is presented, indicating the pedagogical principles, as well as ways of action for the formation of autonomous behaviour. Therefore, the chapter complements the general subject of the book by presenting some pedagogical concepts of great significance that have as educational principles the assurance of the child's freedom and independence of action, in accordance with his particularities and interests.

At the same time, the book brings to attention aspects of "Dezvoltării comportamentelor autonome ale copiilor de vîrstă preșcolară în mediul familial"/ "Development of preschool children' autonomous behaviours in the family environment", presenting the specifics of autonomous behaviours in the early age, the importance of the family environment in building autonomous behaviours and ways to support child autonomy. On the one hand, the whole chapter emphasizes the responsibility of the family in the development of the pre-schooler's autonomous conduct, as the first social link with which he interacts; on the other hand, it highlights the role of the kindergarten environment that engages the child in formal and non-formal learning situations.

In addition, the author considers "Dezvoltarea comportamentelor autonome ale copiilor prin curriculum preșcolar"/ "The development of children's autonomous behaviours through the preschool curriculum", presenting aspects of early education on the past-present axis, as well as the formative-educational values of playful activities. The chapter offers an x-ray of international and national policies in early education, bringing to attention the changes in the area of teaching practice in Romania.

Reflecting on the construction of child's autonomy in the early period, the paper concludes with an experimental study on the development of personal and social autonomous behaviours of preschool children aged 5-6 years. The study draws attention to the importance of family and kindergarten environments in the transition from support to independence, from guidance to autonomy. Thus, the role of educators and parents in supporting children's autonomy through educational interventions related to their particularities is emphasized.

In an extensive representation of the issue related to the development of kindergarten children's autonomous behaviour, the work of Genova Farcaş provides benchmarks for both beginners and experienced researchers in the present mirage of modern educational actions. Through the theoretical and practical-applied approaches of this pedagogical topic of maximum interest nowadays, the paper outlines elucidations regarding the educational practices that support the construction of autonomy, which gives it the merit for a wider dissemination in the field. Leveraging the theoretical and practical-applied evidence presented in a balanced and cohesive way, we recommend this paper to educators, students in preparation for preschool education, as well as parents interested in forming children's autonomous behaviour.