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Rolul parteneriatului școală-familie în reglarea emoțională a elevilor care susțin
examenul de Bacalaureat

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THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL-FAMILY PARTNERSHIP IN THE EMOTIONAL REGULATION OF STUDENTS TAKING THE BACCALAUREATE EXAMINATION

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Abstract

School anxiety belongs to the category of social anxiety disorders and has broader consequences on emotional development. If a student's academic self-concept does not align with their academic goals (such as success on an assessment), this can cause anxiety. Students may then try to use strategies to reduce the level of anxiety they feel. The ability to cope adequately with difficult academic assessment situations plays a major role in emotional regulation and increasing students' psychological well-being. Our objectives for the study were to assess the level of test anxiety and level of worry of 12th-grade students, the level of communication between the school and the families of students taking the Baccalaureate Examination, to identify associations between students' test anxiety and family involvement in students' preparation and emotional regulation.

Keywords: school-family collaboration, teenagers, test anxiety.

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Rezumat

Anxietatea școlară face parte din categoria tulburărilor de anxietate socială și are consecințe mai largi asupra dezvoltării emoționale a elevilor. În cazul în care conceptul de sine academic al unui elev nu este în concordanță cu obiectivele sale academice (cum ar fi succesul la o evaluare), acest fapt va provoca un nivel crescut de anxietate. Capacitatea de a face față în mod adecvat situațiilor dificile de evaluare academică joacă un rol major în reglarea emoțională și creșterea nivelului de bunăstare psihologică a elevilor. Obiectivele studiului nostru au fost evaluarea nivelului de anxietate de testare academică și a nivelului de îngrijorare a elevilor de clasa a XII-a, a nivelului de comunicare dintre școală și familiile elevilor care susțin examenul de bacalaureat, identificarea asocierilor dintre anxietatea la testare a elevilor și implicarea familiei în pregătirea și reglarea emoțională a elevilor.

Cuvinte-cheie: adolescenți, anxietate de testare, colaborare școală-familie.

1. Theoretical background

1.1. Adolescent anxiety in the context of school assessment

School assessment is a complex process of reporting the results of instructional activity and academic performance against students' prior achievement and planned educational goals. Academic assessment consists of a set of measurement and judgement operations that are based on value judgements and result in decisions to optimise student performance and self-image.

Assessment makes it possible both to check the state of cognitive acquisition and to improve the teaching-learning process by correcting errors and adapting learning tasks to the individual characteristics of students. The assessment process will be geared both toward the evaluation of academic skills in different areas of knowledge and toward the evaluation of personality traits or axiological skills like critical thinking skills, problem-solving skills, and the ability to argue and counter-argue. School assessment fulfils both educational and social functions.

Assessments in education serve multiple purposes. They are used to monitor the quality of education students receive, to develop skills and knowledge, and to certify attainment of those skills and knowledge (Newton, 2007), the latter of

which are required by higher education institutions and employers. For some students, assessments can be a source of concern. In this section, assessment anxiety is defined and the contexts in which it arises are explored, drawing on the findings of two key resources. These are meta-analyses that examined the associations, causes, and effects of test anxiety by collectively considering findings from 800 studies published between 1950 and 2017 (von der Embse et al., 2018).

According to theories developed in the 1980s by a group led by Albert Ellis called Rational-Emotional Theories of Behaviour, a range of emotional conduct disorders are manifested in adolescents, including symptoms such as anxiety, depression, anger, or in the most severe cases suicidal ideational behaviour (Ellis, 1980). Emotional reactions and dysfunctional attitudes of adolescents may be assessed by them as worthless behaviour, beliefs such as *“I won’t cope with failure”* or catastrophic reactions.

The literature exploring intra- and interpersonal factors contributing to test anxiety analyzes many interrelated constructs, some of which overlap to some extent. Here, these constructs are summarized in four related themes: academic competence beliefs, coping, motivation, and emotional contagion.

Academic competence belief

According to Piaget’s concept, high school students are at the stage of formal operations when they begin to become aware of the role of basic cognitive processes (abstract thinking, hypothetical-deductive reasoning) as well as the role of executive functions (attention, motivation) on increasing their performance in the baccalaureate exam. Students in technological high schools consider that there is a need for an adequate understanding of the teaching content in STEM subjects and will spend more time preparing for these subjects.

Motivation

Motivation is a source of emotions which in turn act on the motivational structures that regulate learning activity. In general, the activation of positive, mobilising emotional states leads to increased interest and engagement of

the learner in the learning task, while negative, demobilising emotions (e.g., sadness, apathy) diminish engagement (Curelaru, 2016).

Emotional contagion

Emotions are reactions determined by the possibility or impossibility of achieving actively pursued goals in school experiences. Therefore, the action of school environment variables on students' emotions depends on their goals. If the student has goals of knowledge and development, a school task can be perceived as a challenge and the emotions experienced are positive (joy, optimism, self-confidence), but if the student is oriented towards avoiding failure, the emotions experienced are fear, shame, or anxiety.

Emotional contagion can be associated with over-motivation and has a negative influence on baccalaureate exam results, especially in technical subjects where a sustained effort of concentration over a long period is required.

It is important to consider these factors because understanding them can help manage and reduce test anxiety. People tend to make lifelong assessments of their skills. This is also true in an academic context; when students assess their academic skills, this is in relation to their academic self-concept and academic self-efficacy (Rosen et al., 2010).

The literature on the academic self-concept indicates that those who have negative evaluations of their ability (regardless of actual ability) and low academic efficacy are more likely to experience test anxiety (von der Embse et al., 2018). These negative evaluations can be represented, for example, by low self-esteem about academic ability and poor regulation of setting and working towards academic goals. If a student's academic self-concept does not align with their academic goals (such as success on an assessment), this can cause anxiety. Students may then try to use strategies to reduce the anxiety they feel. The ability to cope adequately with adverse situations plays a major role in the degree of test anxiety experienced, as well as in psychological well-being in general.

Coping may be in the form of behavioral mechanisms, such as problem-focused coping vs. emotion-focused coping (Skinner & Saxton, 2019), or it may be a

personal characteristic that facilitates the ability to sustain academic failures (Putwain et al., 2012).

Other authors consider that test anxiety consists of the following symptoms: “physiological overload” – often called emotionality, worry and fear – “maladaptive cognitions: irrational, catastrophic beliefs, and include fear of being wrong, feelings of incompetence, self-condemnation, negative self-confidence, frustration, and unfavorable comparison with others”. To these we can add cognitive/behavioural issues – poor concentration, “mind blank” or “freezing”, confusion and poor organisation and emotional issues – can mean low self-confidence which can lead to hopelessness, anger and in more serious cases, depression (Cherry, 2012).

1.2. The role of school-family collaboration in the management of teenagers’ anxiety disorders

A nationally representative U.S. survey conducted by AFHK (Action for Healthy Kids organization) in January 2020 found that while 86% of parents are interested in providing input on children’s health issues, 51% of parents do not feel included in decisions about their children’s health and well-being in their schools. Family-school partnerships aim to bridge this gap through meaningful collaboration (AFHK, 2020). If schools want to develop a whole-school approach to mental health and well-being, it is essential to engage widely with all members of the school community and this should be an essential part of the school’s mission and values.

This broad involvement should include parents/carers - creating important links between home and school, allowing them to express their ideas and opinions, and communicating effectively with them to promote their children’s learning and educational experience. Involving parents is important as working together (with mothers and fathers) has been shown to have a promising impact on children’s well-being, attendance, behaviour, sense of belonging at school, intellectual development, and outcomes from different social and economic backgrounds (AFHK, 2020). Working closely with parents can be more challenging in secondary schools and continuing education settings. Parents of older children tend to be less open to school staff as they are less

likely to drop off or pick up their children from school. However, parental involvement is very important for students of all ages.

An important role in counselling students taking the baccalaureate exam to overcome emotional problems and test anxiety is played by school counsellor. The school counsellor will build a cognitive-behavioural intervention plan with the student that focuses on raising awareness of the importance of academic training and managing dysfunctional emotions and test anxiety. The school counsellor will assist students in self-regulated learning and problem-solving by creating an environment conducive to learning and by proactively selecting and using varied and flexible metacognitive and motivational strategies. The school counsellor will then provide feedback to parents on modalities of emotional regulation, coping strategies, and reduction of test anxiety for students. The joy of success, pride, challenge, and hope, but also shame, boredom, or disappointment are examples of affective feelings associated with events and activities that take place in school. Since emotions play an essential role in the self-regulation of learning activity and school and social adaptation, knowledge of them and the mechanisms underlying them must be an important objective of the training of school psychologists and teachers, as well as of parents interested in the academic success of their children (Curelaru, 2016).

2. Research methodology

2.1. Research objectives

- Objective 1: To assess the level of test anxiety and level of worry of 12th-grade students.
- Objective 2: To assess the level of communication between the school and the families of students taking the Baccalaureate Examination.
- Objective 3: To identify associations between students' test anxiety and family involvement in students' preparation and emotional regulation.

2.2. Research hypotheses

- Hypothesis 1. It is assumed that there is an indirect (negative) association

between the level of communication between school and family and the level of test anxiety of students in grade 12 taking the Baccalaureate Examination.

- Hypothesis 2. It is assumed that there is an indirect (negative) association between the level and frequency of communication between school and family and the level of worry of students in grade 12 taking the Baccalaureate Examination.

2.3. Research tools

- Family Involvement Questionnaire FIQ - HS version, 2015 (40 items, 3 scales - Involvement in Family Activities; Grover, Houlihan & Campana, 2016).
- Test Anxiety Inventory, Parallel Form/IAT-III (20 items, 3 scales: Anxiety, Emotionality, Worry; Spielberger et al., 1978).

The completion of the two questionnaires was made possible through the online environment - Google Forms platform, and was carried out in a technological high school in Constanța county, Romania (Technological High School of Electrical Engineering and Telecommunications Constanța, Romania).

2.4. Batch of subjects

The group of subjects included 12th-grade students from a technological high school and their parents. We used a non-probability group of 60 male and female people: the 30 students aged between 17 and 19 years (18 girls and 12 boys) responded to the Test Anxiety Inventory and 30 parents (28 women and 2 men) responded to the Family Involvement Questionnaire FIQ - HS version, 2015. The students are aged between 17 and 19 and their parents are aged between 38 and 52 and live in urban areas.

2.5. Ethical principles

This research has respected the ethical principles that allow it to be carried out in good

conditions. To begin with, identifying the physical and psychological risks to which participants are exposed in research and eliminating or minimising them, as well as protecting participants from the remaining risks. Another important step is obtaining informed consent from prospective research participants.

3. Findings

3.1. Presentation and analysis of statistical data

Testing of Hypothesis no. 1

It is assumed that there is an indirect (negative) association between the level of test anxiety of students in grade 12 taking the Baccalaureate Exam and the level of communication between school and family. To test this hypothesis we used the two variables in question, described above. Based on this hypothesis, the dimension of test anxiety was related to the dimension of communication between school and family. Below are the descriptive statistics of the results for test anxiety and level of communication between school and family, obtained by students and parents respectively.

Table no. 1. Baseline indices for the variables test anxiety and level of communication between school and family

Statistics			
		Test anxiety (TAI)	Communication between school and family
N	Valid	30	30
	Missing	0	0
Mean		35.70	46.43
Median		34.00	49.00
Mode		18	49
Std. Deviation		15.647	13.190
Variance		244.838	173.978

The average level of communication between school and family is 46.43 and the standard deviation is 13.190. For the test anxiety variable, the mean is 35.70 and the standard deviation is 15.647. For the interpretation of this hypothesis,

we checked whether the data were statistically normally distributed. We used the Kolmogorov - Smirnov test to test the normality of the distribution.

Table no. 2. *Test of normality for the variables test anxiety and parental involvement in family activities*

	Test of normality					
	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Test anxiety	.253	30	.000	.837	30	.000
Communication between school and family	.144	30	.115	.957	30	.266

^a Lilliefors Significance Correction

The average level of communication between school and family is 46.43 and the standard deviation is 13.190. For the test anxiety variable, the mean is 35.70 and the standard deviation is 15.647. For the interpretation of this hypothesis, we checked whether the data were statistically normally distributed. We used the Kolmogorov - Smirnov test to test the normality of the distribution.

Table no. 3. *Spearman correlation table - test anxiety and level of communication between school and family*

Correlations					
			Test anxiety	Communication between school and family	
Spearman's rho	Test anxiety	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	-.611**	
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	
		N	30	30	
	Communication between school and family	Correlation Coefficient	-.611**	1.000	
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	
		N	30	30	

Conclusions Hypothesis no. 1

The Spearman correlation coefficient has a value of -0.611 and we can say that there is a negative correlation between the two variables at a significance threshold lower than $p = 0.05$. We find a statistically significant negative relation between test anxiety and the level of communication between school

and family, meaning that high values of school-family communication lead to low levels of test anxiety, and *vice versa*.

Hypothesis 1 is therefore confirmed, there is an indirect (negative) association between test anxiety and the level of school-family communication.

Thus a low level of communication between school and parents is based on a low frequency of direct communication based on mutual respect between students, their parents, and teachers. If teachers effectively monitor pupils' academic performance and inform parents of their progress, pupils' academic performance will improve and their anxiety will decrease. In many situations, students focus on anticipating failure. Focusing on the anticipation of failure, self-evaluation, or blaming distracts the pupil from thoughts relevant to the task and therefore reduces the chances of achieving optimal results. According to Curelaru (2016), students who are anxious in assessment situations tend to blame themselves if they have forgotten an answer, to recall past situations in which they have failed, to worry about what will happen next, so this hinders them in understanding relevant test tasks in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) subjects.

Our research can also be correlated with other research where parents insist on psychological control over their teenagers and avoid communication. Psychological control is a parenting practice characterized by intrusive and manipulative behaviors targeting the thoughts and feelings of children or adolescents, whereby adults exercise power by controlling the psychological world of their children. These behaviours include inducing guilt, withdrawing affection, and/or manipulating the parent-child relationship (Barber, 2002; Barber & Harmon, 2002).

Our research also confirms findings from other research that the experience of positive parenting behaviors, such as support and emotional warmth, typically results in a positive influence on children's mental well-being, whereas, in contrast, negative parenting behaviors, such as unavailability, psychological control, and rejecting or hostile behaviors, can propel children to poorer academic outcomes (Peng et al., 2021; Rohner et al., 2005).

Testing of Hypothesis no. 2

It is assumed that there is an indirect (negative) association between the level and frequency of communication between school and family and the level of worry of students in grade 12 taking the Baccalaureate Examination.

To test this hypothesis we used the results from the two questionnaires in question, described above. Starting from this hypothesis, the dimension of concern was associated to the dimension of the level of communication between school and family. Below are the descriptive statistics of the results for concern and level of communication between school and family, obtained by pupils and parents respectively.

Table no. 4. *Baseline indicators for the variables worry and level of communication between school and family*

Statistics			
		Worry	Level of communication between school and family
N	Valid	30	30
	Missing	0	0
Mean		18.03	46.43
Median		15.00	49.00
Mode		9	49
Std. Deviation		8.775	13.190
Variance		76.999	173.978

The mean for the level of communication between school and family is 46.43 and the standard deviation is 13.190. In the case of the concern variable, the mean is 18.03 and the standard deviation is 8.775. For the interpretation of this hypothesis, we checked whether the data were statistically normally distributed. We used the Kolmogorov - Smirnov test to test the normality of the distribution.

Table no. 5. *Test of normality for the variables worry and level of communication between school and family*

Test of normality						
	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Worry	.169	30	.029	.871	30	.002
Level of communication between school and family	.144	30	.115	.957	30	.266
^a Lilliefors Significance Correction						

The interpretation of the statistical data obtained shows that the significance threshold obtained in the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test is greater than 0.05 only in the case of the dimension of the level of communication between school and family, which means that the distribution is not normal for both variables to be correlated. Because the distributions of the scores obtained for these variables are not normal, we applied Spearman’s non-parametric test of correlation.

Table no. 6. *Spearman correlation table - concern variables and level of communication between school and family*

Correlations				
			Worry	Communication between school and family
Spearman’s rho	Worry	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	-.586**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.001
		N	30	30
	Communication between school and family	Correlation Coefficient	-.586**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.
		N	30	30

Conclusions hypothesis 2

The Spearman correlation coefficient has a value of -0.586 and we can say that there is a negative relationship between the two variables at a significance threshold less than $p = 0.05$.

We find a statistically significant negative association between concern and the level of communication between school and family. This result indicates that low levels of communication between school and family lead to high levels of worry, and *vice versa*.

So hypothesis 2 is confirmed, there is an indirect (negative) association between worry and the level of school-family communication.

Students' anxiety before the Baccalaureate exam is also caused by an intolerance of uncertainty. Dugas and colleagues (1998) define uncertainty intolerance as the tendency to regard uncertain situations or outcomes as intolerable and threatening, regardless of the actual likelihood of events occurring.

Recent research has attempted to investigate the cause of test anxiety and design an intervention to help manage it. Researchers found that one of the main causes of test anxiety is "uncertain control", a construct in which a student doesn't understand the connection between their actions and outcomes. This results in a lack of confidence in one's abilities and anticipation of future failures (Putwain & Pescod, 2018).

In our sample of parents, there were situations where parents displayed a harsh parenting style, believing that it had a stimulating effect on students. As we observe in other research, harsh parenting is mainly manifested through physical aggression (such as spanking and hitting) and verbal aggression (such as abuse and yelling), as well as harsh emotions and attitudes, such as indifference, anger, excitement, and insensitivity (Wang & Wang, 2018; Wei et al., 2020). When practicing a harsh parenting style students refuse to sit exams, they become anxious and when they agree to attend exams they fear that they will be punished by parents and teachers in case of low results. Parents along with the school counselor need to explain to students that through hard work and constant preparation, they will manage the emotional state of uncertainty and perform effectively on tests. Teachers together with school counsellors and parents of students can explain to them ways of communicating to reduce worry before the baccalaureate exams. An important role is also played by students practising cognitive behavioural training. This involves informing students about how to control negative, irrational thoughts but also developing skills for organising learning time.

3.2. The limits of the research

The group of students and parents involved in the study is very small and it does not allow the extrapolation of the results we obtained.

4. Conclusions

This research allowed us to know, describe, and understand in more detail the phenomenon of anxiety of students who sit national exams, as well as the role of collaboration between school and family in the management of anxiety disorders.

The problem of anxiety disorder in students is a topic of interest in specialized research, mainly in Romania, considering the important step that students have to go through by taking the baccalaureate exam. Test anxiety manifests itself at a physiological level, through specific complaints, and at an emotional level, through fear of making mistakes, worry and discouragement. These manifestations may occur during, before, or after the assessment situation. In these circumstances, students experience a high level of stress and discomfort. Anxiety takes its toll on their learning and academic performance. The stress they experience leads not only to reduced performance but also to higher rates of absenteeism and dropout. Negative effects include adverse social, behavioural, and emotional development. Also, students' feelings and perceptions of themselves and school are influenced by anxiety. Considering the concept of anxiety, as a condition with an essential role in the context of an examination in the light of the above, the need for communication with students' families is relevant.

At a time when schools are adopting problem-based curricula and real-world information, families can make a valuable contribution by sharing information about work, hobbies, history, and other personal and professional experiences. Perhaps most importantly, parents can simply take the time to go to their children's schools and observe, learning what their children and their teachers are doing. Parents can get involved in schools in some roles: encouraging children to do their homework, attending parent-teacher meetings, and active participation in the school's parent-teacher organisation (Comer & Haynes, 1997).

In conclusion, the partnership between teachers, parents, and school counsellors plays an important role in optimising students' performance on the baccalaureate exams and reducing academic test anxiety.

Our paper focused on the need for school psychologists to explain the mechanisms of emotion production in the school context, the role of positive group emotions in the self-regulation of learning and school performance, and the optimization of communication between students and families to reduce dysfunctional emotions and increase student self-efficacy. Through discussions with parents, school counsellors, and teachers, students will manage dysfunctional emotions, and anxious reactions and develop their social-emotional skills, self-brainstorming ability, and emotional-affective health. This level of parent involvement in schools allows parents and teachers to work together in a respectful and mutually supportive manner, creating an environment where understanding, trust, and respect are continually developing. At the same time, students receive consistent messages from the important adults in their lives. When children see that parents and school are engaged in a respectful partnership for their benefit, they will develop more positive attitudes toward school and achieve more.

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