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THE IMPORTANCE OF PERSUASIVE COMMUNICATION IN THE PREVENTION AND OVERCOMING OF SCHOOL ADAPTATION DIFFICULTIES

ЗНАЧЕНИЕ ПЕРСУАЗИВНОЙ КОММУНИКАЦИИ В ПРОФИЛАКТИКЕ И ПРЕОДОЛЕНИИ СЛОЖНОСТЕЙ ШКОЛЬНОЙ АДАПТАЦИИ

Abstract

The research study focuses on persuasive communication and its incidence in the prevention of school adaptation difficulties. The authors worked with two groups of respondents: students of ninth grade and teachers. The aim was to determine the level of school adaptation of the students and the main difficulties they encountered at the beginning of high school; the level of persuasiveness of the teachers. Instruments used: AISS (Adjustment Inventory of School Students) Questionnaire (A.K.P. Sinha and R.P. Singh, 2004), "Adaptation versus Adaptation

Difficulties" Questionnaire, so far unpublished (C. Adascalitei, 2019) and "Are you persuasive in communication?" Questionnaire (adapted after E. Țărnă, 2017). The presented data are the result of the determined study regarding the correlation between persuasive communication and school adaptation.

Keywords: communication, persuasion, persuasive communication, adaptation, school adaptation difficulties

Introduction

One of the prerequisites for preventing and removing adaptation difficulties is knowing the causes. It is advisable to intervene right before the obvious manifestation of the adaptive disorders. The phase of highlighting the potential factors of the difficulties of adaptation must be followed immediately by the differentiated application of the actions that are meant to prevent and liquidate the conditions that determine the maladaptation. In our view, persuasive communication can facilitate both school adaptation and stimulate love for a particular discipline or profession.

To understand the specificity of preventing and overcoming the difficulties of adaptation, it is necessary to approach the psychological foundations of education, which consist in the fact that the formation of a personality according to the educational ideal implies the conscious commitment of theories of personality development (the essence of personality; its developmental tendencies; factorial analysis of the components and qualities of the personality; the dynamic-volitional character of the personality); the psychological essence of education (highlighting the objectives, strategies, aims, social-psychological factors of adaptation to changing conditions); knowledge about age and individual particularities of the personality; the personality-society relationship (the demands of the constantly dynamic society constitute the mechanism for developing and adapting the personality, the tendency towards the educational ideal); assessing the psychic structure of the personality.

Theoretical background

The specialized literature attests to numerous definitions of persuasive communication illustrating the complexity of this process [1, 5]. From the perspective of understanding and using correctly the concept of persuasive communication, we will analyze some definitions starting from Gass and Seiter's explanation, who assert that «persuasion is better understood as an activity in which people are involved and by approaching persuasion as a process, specialists and researchers are more likely to understand how it works or what determines it, because it focuses on of what is happening, not just on the results» [5, p. 46].

In the context of these references, it follows that the linear view of persuasion, assumed by many other definitions, is replaced by a model that must be studied as a whole, and not just its effects recorded.

In a study on persuasion, conducted under the aegis of the World Bank, called Communication GAP (Communication for Governance & Accountability Program), persuasive communication is defined in Miller's acceptance, as "any message that is intended to shape, consolidate, or change responses to others or to others " [16, p. 1].

The remarkable psychologist R. Cialdini considers that the behavioral mechanisms set in motion by respecting the principles of persuasion (reciprocity, commitment, social validation, attractiveness, authority and rarity) support the manifestation of the act of complacency without exerting pressure and, in many cases, without the manipulation becoming evident.

Generalizing various researches on persuasion and adaptation, we will present the E. Ţarnas opinion [15, p. 127]: "Persuasive communication is a constitutive factor of education, a defining and structural factor in the culture of educational communication, without which we cannot understand the relational behavior of the teacher and the student. When we approach the correlation of persuasive communication - school adaptation, we highlight two directions: on the one hand, within the relationship we can develop a series of barriers that can turn into sources of difficulties of educational communication and school adaptation, and on the other hand, to overcome the difficulties of school adaptation it is necessary to be able to develop optimal situations of persuasive communication and efficient relations skills".

Persuasion in the school environment is more about encouraging students to make wise choices between the many options that surround them and to encourage them in affirming their own position and judgment, in attitudes and behaviors worth following. It does not, however, aim only at achieving success by any means and by any methods, but rather it is intended to be an efficient way of transmitting fair, moral and meaningful values.

In Johannesen's view, in argumentative and persuasive situations, the transmitter has the moral obligation to double check the validity of the evidence and arguments before presenting them to others; salvation preparation is not an accepted excuse and does not sweeten the harshness of ethical judgment [apud Larson 7, p. 45]. According to the stated concept, teachers must communicate clearly and concisely to students how to fulfill their duties responsibly and how to resolve certain unavoidable stress situations. On the other hand, certain measures of appropriateness of language, supporting materials and organization of message transmission to reflect the pupil's specificity are the key to success in communication. No sharp rule can be imposed. Teachers need to determine the extent to which they maintain their ideas and their own form and how much they modify them to have a maximum impact on students.

Communication that facilitates the construction of understanding, persuasion and sharing of ideas is an essential goal of education science reform, which promotes science education [2].

According to the Cristea's [4, p. 7]: «School adaptation is a complex process designed and directed by the teacher in order to achieve optimal relations between the student and the educational / didactic environment. From a psychological point of view, the school adaptation marks the tendency of necessary balance between the processes of assimilation and those of accommodation; a tendency achieved, objectively, at the level of the permanent interaction between man and reality. From a social point of view, school adaptation marks the tendency to integrate the object of education in a certain community, within a process that begins in the family and continues in kindergarten, school, society, etc. In this sense, school adaptation is an integral part of a more complex process, which is the process of social adaptation».

«To educate means to adapt the individual to the school environment» [10, p. 134]. Thus, according to J. Piaget, the new methods seek to favor this adaptation, using the child's own tendencies, as well as the spontaneous activity inherent in mental development; they strive to present to children of different ages the educational objects in forms similar to their structure and to the different stages of their development. In the curricular design, it is necessary to think about the particularities of the students, both from a cognitive point of view and from an affective, motivational, volitional point of view. In the work «Psychology and pedagogy», in the chapter "Principles of education and psychological data", the same author defines "adaptation" as a balance between two indissociable mechanisms - assimilation and accommodation, a balance whose conquest lasts throughout childhood and adolescence and defines the proper structuring of these periods of existence [ibidem, p. 136].

The ability of the individual to be flexible and resilient, to cope with stress, contributes to a good adaptation and allows the analysis of adaptation models in terms of: incidence of risk factors, vulnerability conditions and protective factors. Negovan author argues that "social / school adaptation involves much more than adjusting to stressful situations and resilience through flexibility to current or less common trials. The ecological perspective on adaptation (using the analysis of situations in which people with the same evolutionary risk factors - cultural disadvantage, problematic family relationships - go through both positive and negative development paths and have different capacities of recovery in stressful situations) operate more with the acceptance they are proposed by Zany, «according to the systems of social support (material, economic, etc.) and the available mediators (values, coping skills)» [apud 9, p. 175].

«The degree of adaptation to the school activity shows the capacity and the need of the student to know, to assimilate, to interpret the external requirements, the programmed instructional-educational influences, along with his / her desire and ability to model, to accommodate, to adapt the exterior» notes Kulcsar [ibidem, p. 169].

The period with maximum frequency of manifestation of maladaptive behaviors is puberty (10/11 - 14/15 years), a contradictory psychological stage, in which coexist specific characteristics of childhood (childish attitudes) with those characteristic of adolescence (increased abstraction and anticipation abilities).

Researchers L.R. Gherasim & S. Butnaru, citing the specialized literature, mention: «the ways in which the difficulties of school adaptation can be expressed: decreased school performance, superficiality in approaching learning tasks, decreased motivation for knowledge and involvement in learning, absenteeism, dropout the appearance of problems of behavior or of emotional adjustment to the daily challenges, the abuse of substances, the affiliation to groups with deviant behavior. They may manifest accidentally or continuously, singly or in increasingly complex combinations, which may seriously and in the long term endanger the educational, professional and social evolution of the person» [6, p. 13-14].

«In the well-adapted person (for example, the extrovert engaged in difficult social activities), the dynamic interaction between skills, self-regulation and real-life behavior acts harmoniously. Social ambitions, the high level of knowledge of one's own social capacities and positive emotions favor the participation in social activities, allowing the acquisition of more abilities and positive results and leading to the maintenance of confidence. In addition, the knowledge of one's own abilities makes the person inclined towards solving the problems focused on the task, leading to the effective implementation and development of the skills» [8, p. 419].

«The essence of identifying the difficulties of adaptation in the school context is outdated in practice by the concern for their prevention in order to develop a harmonious personality. Some preventive action is to identify complicated situations, early and risk groups, before they have a negative impact, triggering personal or group "crises» [apud 11, p. 24].

Therefore, the prevention and overcoming of the difficulties of school adaptation, as a dimension of the educational strategy through persuasive communication of the teachers, favors the organization of the psycho-behavioral functionality of the students.

Methodology

The determined study was attended by 23 teachers and 56 students from two high schools in Romania, the 9th grade, urban environment, at the end of the first semester, 2018-

2019. The classes were selected according to the three profiles: Mathematics-Computer science, Natural Sciences, Social Sciences.

The experiment found three stages, during which we aimed to determine the main difficulties of adaptation faced by students at the beginning of the 9th grade, the recording of the level of school adaptation, on the one hand and the persuasive style of the teachers, on the other hand.

The objectives of the determined stage:

1. Establishing the statistically representative sample;
2. Elaboration and application of the research methodology of the presence of the difficulties of adaptation and of the level of school adaptation and the investigation of the persuasive style of the teachers;
3. Processing and analyzing the results of the finding stage.

Experimental tests for students included the *"Adaptation versus Adaptation Difficulties" Questionnaire* and the *AISS (Adjustment Inventory of School Students) Questionnaire*, authors A.K.P. Sinha and R.P. Singh, translated into Romanian by Adascalitei Cristian.

As we mentioned in the theoretical benchmarks of the research, adaptation is a multi-dimensional construct.

In the context of the above, we have specified the dimensions for determining the level of adaptation to high school students: emotional, social and educational (AISS Questionnaire). For this purpose, the questionnaire with 60 items was applied to a number of 56 students from the 9th grade. The answer to the questions contains two yes / no variants, of which the student selects only one. The 60 items are representative of the three established dimensions: emotional (items 1, 4, 7, 10, 13, 16, 19, 20, 22, 25, 28, 31, 34, 37, 40, 43, 46, 49, 52, 55, 58), social (items 2, 5, 8, 11, 14, 17, 20, 23, 26, 29, 32, 35, 38, 41, 44, 47, 50, 53, 56, 59) and educational (items 3, 6, 9, 12, 15, 18, 21, 24, 27, 30, 33, 36, 39, 42, 45, 48, 51, 54, 57, 60). For each "yes" answer, one point is awarded, and for the "no" answer, no points are awarded. The points obtained from the answers of the items on the three dimensions are totalized, obtaining scores corresponding to each one, as well as an overall score of the adaptation. Depending on these scores, subjects can be allocated into one of 5 categories: A = excellent; B = good; C = medium; D = poor; E = very unsatisfactory.

In our research, we also took into account the fact that a special role in the prevention and overcoming of the difficulties of school adaptation comes back to certain benchmarks (the "Adaptation versus Adaptation Difficulties" Questionnaire): the general perception on high school education (item 1), the perception on the disciplines studied (items 2, 4, 5), time for

preparation for hours (item 3), accommodation with colleagues (item 6) and teachers (item 7), vision versus early school leaving (item 8).

The experimental test for the teachers consisted in filling out the «Are you persuasive in communication?» Questionnaire, adapted after E. Țarna, applied for self-evaluation, in order to establish the capacity of persuasion in communication. The grid contains 15 statements that can be evaluated using the following scale: 5 - always; 4- almost always; 3 - sometimes; 2 - rarely; 1- never. The questionnaire was anonymous.

Results

In the first stage of the experiment, based on the purpose and objectives of the substantive investigation, we applied the "Adaptation versus difficulties of adaptation" Questionnaire, elaborated by C. Adascalitei. Through this method, we aimed to find out the main difficulties of school adaptation that students encounter at the beginning of the ninth grade. The questionnaire was applied by the teachers from the classes subjected to the experiment, in the presence of the school counselor. The questionnaire comprises 8 items, and the questions were formulated so as to allow the choice of an option from 3 choices of answers.

Figure 1 presents the student's answers regarding the optics on the high school education, compared with the secondary one:

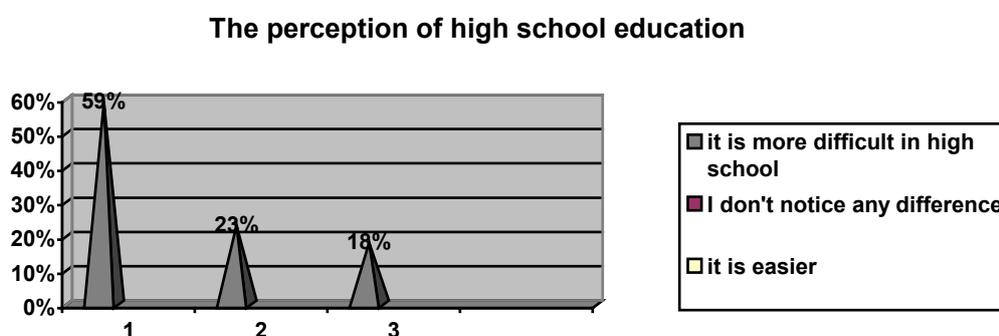


Fig. 1 Student's results on the perception of high school education (determined experiment)

From the data obtained, we observe that most of the students of the ninth grade - 59% consider it more difficult in high school, while 23% claim that they do not notice a big difference between the two levels of schooling. However, 18% of the students mentioned that it is easier in high school.

The situation regarding the perception on the disciplines studied in the first semester of the 9th class is represented in the table below:

The answer choice	The finding experiment		
	Difficulty of study disciplines (item 2)	Involvement in projects or other activities (item 4)	Degree of comprehension of the information (item 5)
1	62% - 35 students	72%- 40 students	70% - 39 students
2	18% - 10 students	14% - 8 students	5% - 3 students
3	20% - 11 students	14% - 8 students	25% - 14 students

Table 1 Student's results in the "Adaptation versus Adaptation Difficulties" Questionnaire (items 2, 4 and 5)

From the data obtained, a consistent percentage of students - 62% consider that the subjects studied in high school are more difficult compared to those in the secondary school; 18% of students say they are easier and 20% appreciate the difficulty level of the current disciplines similar to those up to the eighth grade.

72% of the students consider that the volume of involvement in projects or other learning or socializing activities is higher compared to the previous years, and only 14% mention that they have noticed the same volume of involvement. A similar percentage of students, 14%, could not make an estimate of their involvement in projects or other activities compared to the previous stages.

Regarding the degree of comprehension of the information provided by the high school study disciplines, 70% of the students declare that they are overwhelmed and notice that they have great difficulties; 25% say that only sometimes they have a hard time understanding the information presented, and 5% have never encountered difficulties.

Referring to the students's opinion regarding the time for preparation / learning for classes, we show in figure 2 the percentage situation of the recorded answers:

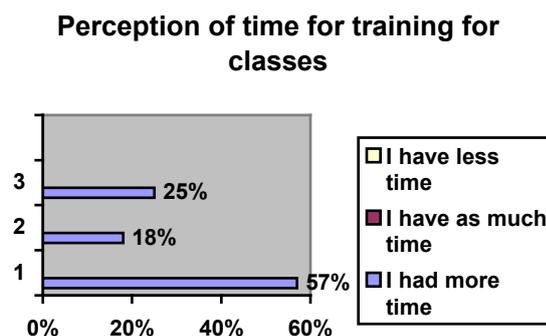


Figure 2 Student's responses regarding the time spent preparing for classes (determined experiment)

As we can see, 57% of the students claim that they had more time to prepare for classes, 18% say they have as much time as in the eighth grade for this activity and only 25% think that the time is longer reduced. We can see that the time spent preparing / learning for classes is a predictor of possible recordings of difficulties in school adaptation, and that is why it is important to know how students perceive this parameter.

Item 6 of the questionnaire aimed at assessing the adaptation with the new colleagues in the first semester of the ninth grade, recorded the following answers: easily (32% - 18 students), harder than I thought (18% - 10 students), respectively I do not believe that I could find colleagues like in the gymnasium (50% - 28 students).

Similarly, item 7 captures the appreciation of the adaptation with the new teachers: easily (21% - 12 students), hard (63% - 35 students), respectively they are the same as those in the gymnasium (16% - 9 students).

The content of item 8 is declared diametrically opposed to the one aimed at adaptation - "Would you like to drop out of high school?". The answers were: yes, but in the following years (38% - 21 students), no, not at all (32% - 18 students), I do not know (30% - 17 students).

The stage of determined experiment continued with the application of the AISS Questionnaire that determined the level of school adaptation. The frequencies of adaptation are shown in Figure 3:

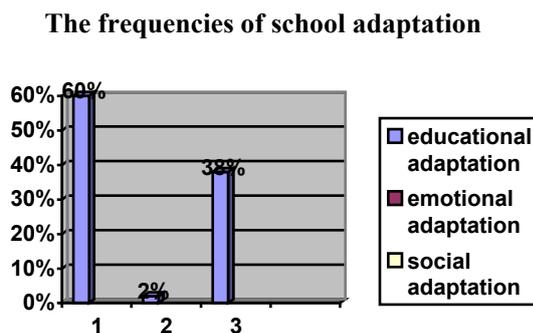


Figure 3 The frequencies of school adaptation of the students in the 9th grade (determined experiment)

Analyzing the illustration, we notice that the emotional adaptation is poorly represented because its frequency reached low levels (2%). In contrast, the feeling of educational adaptation predominates 60%, compared to that of social adaptation 38%.

We believe that the new learning environment is a challenge for the tested students. The results showed that, at the beginning, they are experiencing difficulties of adaptation that affect their development.

Thus, based on the purpose and objectives of the research, the results obtained in the first two confirmatory tests and the conclusion formulated above, the experimental approach continued with the study and determination of the persuasive style of the teaching staff, the need for their full involvement in overcoming the difficulties of adaptation and the setting benchmarks to prevent adaptation difficulties.

The research of the persuasive style of the teachers in overcoming the difficulties of school adaptation of the students of the ninth grade has generated a conventional classification:

1. Highly persuasive teachers (score higher than 64)
2. Teachers with a medium level of persuasiveness (score between 40 and 63)
3. Teachers with a low level of persuasiveness (score lower than 40).

Based on the aforementioned, we also conducted a determined study with teachers teaching in the ninth grade, to record the role of persuasion in overcoming the difficulties of school adaptation. The results are shown in Figure 4:

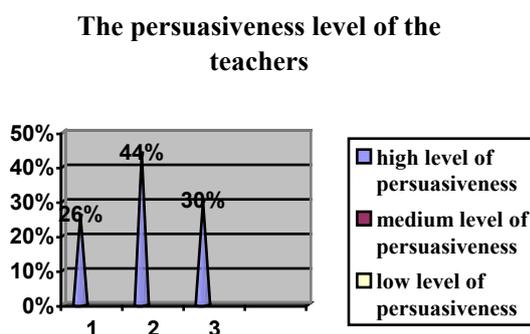


Figure 4 The persuasiveness level of the teachers (determined experiment)

Analyzing the data, we concluded that 6 teachers have a high level of persuasiveness (26%), 10 teachers have a medium level of persuasiveness (44%) and 7 teachers have a low level of persuasiveness (30%).

The field of preventing school adaptation difficulties is quite difficult, requiring some skills from teachers and a certain art in overcoming them.

The training actions must be organized systematically, having the role of exploiting the influences that can be exerted on the students.

Discussions

According to the authors M. Cojocaru-Borozan, E. Țărnă, L. Sadovei [3, p.46]: "The communication acts by which we influence the students, regardless of whether they are organized or not, whether they are held in specialized institutions or not, enter into the broad sphere of educational communication". In this sense, persuasive communication is a distinct form of communication through the content specific to the action of persuasion and involves a bilateral teacher-student relationship, following an inverse reaction, which implies the flexibility of roles, an interaction and not just a message transmission, determining the extent to which it was understood, believed and accepted by the student in order to prevent and overcome the difficulties of adaptation.

Conclusions

The data obtained from the finding experiment indicate that, in the 9th grade, the students adapt to the school environment in different ways, which relate to the construction of their personality, but also to many other factors, already under discussion. This aspect implies the existence of some capacities of the student to respond to the demands of the educational environment in relation to the requirements of the teachers. Thus, overcoming the difficulties of school adaptation can be achieved only under the conditions of an opportune climate of networking with colleagues and teachers, understanding the role of student and taking into account the responsibilities that come from it. Teachers with a high and medium level of persuasiveness use strategies that can help students to overcome the difficulty more easily, to find those personal resources that favor emotional, educational but also social adaptation.

The results of the present research can serve as a starting point in the implementation of vocational education programs for the prevention of the difficulties of school adaptation, from the secondary school.

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