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**SOCIO-EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF STUDENTS IN THE  
CONTEXT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

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**Abstract**

The work "Socio-emotional development of students in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic" is based on the application dimension, on how to capitalize on the relationship between the online educational environment and the socio-emotional development of high school students, but also to highlight the complex mechanism of the online learning process, which influences the development of empathy, tolerance in communication and interrelationships. This approach aims to present to teachers solutions and methods by which they can capitalize on digital learning and development, the link between the pandemic context and the socio-emotional development of students, with direct effects on the adaptation of preadolescents to the culture of global society, building a digital identity and a digital well-being. This study also took into account the growing awareness of educators about the need for interconnection and adaptation to the demands of today's society availability for cooperation and collaboration and active involvement in global teamwork and professional networks through constructive and reflective dialogue. Emphasis is also placed on the complex mechanism that exists between emotional development and learning, which are the solutions adopted by educators, but also viable strategies used in the work at the department both online and offline on dysfunctional emotional processing in middle school students.

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## **1. Introduction**

The socio-emotional development of the individual is a long process, carried out from early childhood to adulthood, through the interaction between the emotional temperament of the individual related to his experience of others and the world, but also through the interaction between the emotional balance of the other related to subject experience. The human self, in a synergy with the world, permanently organizes itself through a dynamic process, is reborn like a Phoenix bird and takes complex, particular forms through which each of us individualizes in this human constellation. Our internal "burning" allows us to develop, to change the direction of our (self) organization through the superior regulation mechanism.

## **2. Problem statement**

In this process of internal search and turmoil, the individual learns new skills, develops adaptation mechanisms, penetrates the dimensions of the complex mechanism of emotional change and develops his willingness to identify and work with his problems. In his educational and social journey he learns how to accept emotions, when it is time for change, why it is important to have developed self-regulation mechanisms, if he is ready for transformation and why not, what is his degree of adaptability.

## **3. Research Questions**

The Romanian education system in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic has undergone a series of mutations regarding the intersection between the instructive-educational process and technology. The state of emergency declared at national level led to the tracing of new directions of action in the educational system, achieving fundamental restructurings in formal and non-formal education. working both at the macro-educational level of educational policies, which have become more coherent, fluent and involved in the national reality, but also at the meso-educational level of the institutional context of the school and implicitly the dynamics of changes in the micro-educational class. Also, in the last two years they have been marked by the revision of the educational curriculum, by the re-evaluation, selection and restructuring of the educational content, by the generation of digital school contents, the online learning supports, which by the elaborated working methodology and the creative strategy of the teachers. brought an added value in the flexible dimension of the curricular support by focusing it on the educable, on the high degree of interactivity teacher-student, student-student, teacher-student-expert; through the efficient partnership between teacher-student in structuring the curricular content; teamwork and professional work networks; much more efficient synchronous and asynchronous communication between teacher-educator-expert-tutor; streamlining digital learning and digital teaching; building a digital identity for the agents of educational action and implicitly of a well-being in the digital context (Albulescu & Catalano, 2021; Ceobanu et al., 2020).

Given the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, the study aims to be guided by the question:

To what extent does digital counseling of middle school students influence socio-emotional development, in order to initiate and maintain interpersonal relationships in the pandemic context, but also to increase the quality of lifestyle?

#### **4. Purpose of the Study**

Given the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, new reconfigurations in digital education, learning models using digital technology, but also changing the learning profile of the learner, the way of communication and interpersonal relationships, it is important how educational communities project and implements resilient educational systems. It is not at all surprising that at the level of the dynamics of change in world political, economic or social life, everything related to the major objectives of globalization policy, developing socio-professional networks and the emphasis on learning through cooperation and collaboration using information technology, the protection and security of personal data is only part of the needs for change and evolution accessed by the education system. From this point of view, the transformation has become a constant for both the social community and the educational system, which requires competence, motivation, involvement, a high degree of adaptability, organization, transparency. In this context, rethinking the digital identity of learners and implicitly building a well-being in the digital context, is also under the influence of emotional balance and emotional resilience of preadolescents, which influenced the academic performance of both individuals and teams. This synergy that exists between individual or group performance and emotional resilience in instructional-educational activity, contributes significantly to increasing the performance of the school organization, which makes in the context of organizational learning, preadolescents have the same shared vision, to access favourable mental models through reflection personal and information on the views of other colleagues (Bharrwaney, 2020; Senge, 2016).

#### **5. Research Methods**

In this pandemic context of Covid-19 in the Romanian school, the issue of socializing students online arose, by ensuring the protection and security of personal data, which is the level of empathy in cyberspace, which is the level of development of emotional self-regulation of preadolescents generating alternative behaviors in dysfunctional situations; and also the way of developing personal and group emotional resilience, which also influences the way he thinks, the preadolescent acts in social networks, the impact that emotions have on his results in the online or offline environment. Through the social experiences of the pre-adolescent, they develop their level of adaptability and are able to reach their expected potential, through the experience of social learning they become empathetic, and "a vicarious experience is a form of empathic receptivity: openness to another person's experience" who is able to understand the other, to have the ability to understand the potential of the other; to correctly and coherently interpret the data about the other's experience through his empathic reaction, which validates the preadolescent's empathic response in the online environment (Weinberg & Rolnick, 2020).

The aim of the research was the analysis of the educational strategies implemented in the didactic approach that contributed to the development of the socio-emotional competencies of preadolescents in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic.

### **5.1. Research objectives**

1. Studying the extent to which teachers apply in the instructive-educational activity the principles of digital counseling, but also their specific strategies for socio-emotional development of high school students and their active integration at the social level in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic;

2. Highlighting the possible solutions advanced by teachers in order to streamline specific strategies for developing socio-emotional skills.

The study is based on a pedagogical diagnosis on approaching the principles of digital counseling, but also their specific strategies for socio-emotional development of middle school students and their active integration at the social level in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic by reference to indicators: resources materials, pedagogical resources, human resources (initial and continuous training, professional skills, specializations), new access technologies, improvement of the instructive-educational process and development of digital skills.

The objectives of the research are supported by formulating the working hypothesis.

### **5.2. Research hypothesis**

Acquiring the necessary resources to develop socio-emotional skills in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic and practicing the mobilization of these resources by students in high school determines the positive reaction to streamlining social relations both online and offline.

### **5.3. Participants and methodology**

In the pedagogical study the choice of the sample of subjects was made based on the simple random sampling technique, by reference to the population of teachers in pre-university education, who came from 12 educational institutions with their related structures, with a social and cultural diversity and economics of the school population. In order to describe the sample of subjects consisting of 76 full and substitute teachers in education, we took into account: initial training and continuing education, didactic degree obtained, completion of psycho-pedagogical training programs, seniority in the education system, seniority allocated to officials in the institution where it is the holder or substitute, the urban or rural environment in which the school institution is located, disadvantaged community or not. Following the research objectives, the working methods and tools were delimited, so as to ensure the sustainability of the ascertaining research. In the ascertaining research, the interview method was used, as well as the interactive research method, and through the semi-standardized and non-standardized interview technique, relevant data were obtained from respondents on the problems they face in the educational environment in the context of the Covid pandemic to practice the mobilization of resources by high school students. Also, the questions in the interview were managed in the possibility of the time they can allocate by offering possible solutions with lasting effects in order to overcome barriers in the socio-

emotional development of learners and increase the degree of emotional resilience. The solutions offered by the interviewees were influenced by the high or low degree of sincerity of their statements, by the responsibility, the flexibility with which they were involved in the professional interview initiated on this topic. In the analysis and interpretation of research data, other methods were considered: the research method of curricular documents and other school documents, research tools and methods used in data collection, analysis and interpretation of research data, so that the hypothesis is validated.

## 6. Findings

Regarding the educational approach undertaken in order to develop the socio-emotional skills of high school students, in this pandemic context of covid-19, a percentage of 92% of teachers focused on counseling on the development of the ability of students to learn emotional resilience, which should be reflected both at the personal level, teamwork, but also at the level of the school organization, so that the preadolescent is able to function at a maximum level of resources and skills. From this point of view, the respondents emphasized that, on a personal level, the activities of developing personal resilience focused on developing a high self-esteem, which would favour the development in high school students of the feeling of self-efficacy, unconditional acceptance of their own people and others by recognizing personal values, qualities, but also defects, positive or negative attitudes without judging and criticizing, both in the social environment, but especially in social networks. From this point of view, the strategies adopted by teachers were also oriented towards the development of emotional self-regulation competence, which favored in students the development of communication conflict resolution skills and implicitly the identification of existing barriers in conflict resolution by building online environments. positive interpersonal relationships based on active listening, accountability, mutual respect, providing constructive feedback or exercises based on building an open dialogue, through which learners initiate and maintain a constructive conversation in which they express their own values, feelings or attitudes. Also, 73% of respondents in collaborative learning activities through online learning platforms or applications, sought to ensure the quality of interpersonal interactions of learners through empathy, an attitude that facilitated learners to express their values, emotions in the spectrum of positive emotion or negative, of the level of emotion they face in the interpersonal relationship with their own notes of subjectivity and intersubjectivity. However, the same percentage of teachers also highlighted barriers in the emotional development of learners, noting that in online activities the empathic receptivity of preadolescents is low in intensity, while the level of empathic understanding and interpretation offered by digital technology is high technologies offer educable advantages, but also disadvantages, ways of expressing ambivalence, emotional and mental conflict, meaningful experiences, behavioral expressions, distinctive and varied emotional states from student to student both in intensity and description, interpretation and communication (Bohart & Greenberg, 2011; Neacșu & Suditu, 2020; Stoica-Constantin, 2018). Thus, 61% of respondents pointed out that their real success in the virtual environment was their counseling activities based on the development of evaluative abilities of learners and the capacity for realistic self-control of stress sources, regardless of whether they were external or internal situations. a high frequency and intensity that required preadolescents to have alternative behaviors and adaptive reactions. Also, 68% of the respondents noticed existing barriers in the socio-emotional

development of preadolescents through psychosocial illusions that are projected in the online environment, as a result of marketing activities or increasing the visibility of social models "born" from the need of generation z to find patterns and identify with them, out of the desire to achieve an ideal state, which promotes in social networks in addition to the object of false representation emotional dysfunction or false value judgments. The Internet, virtual games, social networks are real sources of models and represent the cyberspace for testing them by preadolescents. However, in their work at the department, 63% of the interviewees noticed an increase among educators of dysfunctional emotional processing, due to the peculiarities of the pandemic context, identified by maladaptive emotional reactions in the virtual or offline communication environment, also problems in narrative construction and in defining the significance of misunderstanding one's own emotional experience and developing in learners online discourses that are maladaptive about oneself, others, or the community and the world at large, through lack of proper information, which sometimes leads to blame. In the current context of virtual learning, 76% of respondents pointed out as a solution that the purposes of counseling activities were aimed at assessing emotions, major goals of emotional change and educational interventions guided by indicators. In the working groups with preadolescents, it was shown that their understanding of their emotions and the inclusion of cognition in emotion were the best indicators of anticipation of success in educational interventions designed on emotional change and for the mentioned dysfunctional emotional processing. Even if the remedial activities took place both in the virtual educational environment, by observing "security measures, as integrated parts of the digital educational platforms used in the virtual educational environment, and for the protection of students' health "(Order No. 5545 / 10.09 .2020, art.4, paragraph 2), but also offline, the aims of the intervention programs were achieved by awareness by preadolescents of the importance of emotional expression in the dynamics of online communication, because adapting expressiveness helps the student in clarifying some barriers in emotional communication. Another solution supported by the participants in their work at the department was to encourage emotional reflection, as a tool for narrative interpretation of the individual experience of each student employed in the intervention program, able to assimilate it in their present self-reports (Cuc, 2013, 2014, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c, 2020a, 2020b, 2020c; Johnson, 2020), because the literature has "demonstrated the positive effects that writing about emotional experience has on the activity of the autonomic nervous system, the functioning of the immune system and physical health, and emotional" (Greenberg et al., 2020, p. 212). Also, 68% of respondents used as a solution in online teaching have emotional transformation, maladaptive emotions of learners (fear, shame, anger, hatred, etc.) with another adaptive emotion, helping to transform the memory of learners, by integrating new experiences in the past, updated to the present. The solution promoted by teachers was to build corrective interpersonal emotional experiences in educators, who in social life, school, virtual environment can activate alternative adaptive emotional schemes in communication and interpersonal relationships of preadolescents, contributing through this approach to a reorganization of the self" (Greenberg et al., 2020; Cuc, 2013, 2014, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c, 2020a, 2020b, 2020c). Thus, the interviewees highlighted as a solution - the quality that the teacher has in professional relationships with preadolescents, teacher-reflective and teacher-expert, who in this current dimension of digital education is fundamental to develop counseling and coaching skills , through online advice and the high degree of adaptation to the current context, to which it is necessary to find effective

solutions; also, the promotion through online platforms, professional social networks of workshops, meetings with specialists in the field of personal development and educational counseling. Also, another solution is aimed at the level of institutional management by involving managers in the institutional promotion of training programs for employees, which involves familiarizing them with experiential training and experiential learning, development among educators of perceptual skills and intervention for emotional processing in learners.

## 7. Conclusion

In the current dimension of the Covid-19 pandemic, the study revealed the need for professional training of teachers in the socio-emotional development of high school students, their familiarization with educational intervention strategies aimed at solving the crisis of virtual or physical environment of the school institution located at individual, educational, group or social level; also the promotion at institutional level of the training programs with specialists in the field of educational and psycho-pedagogical psychological counseling, which in the training design to follow the problems of school, social and relational adaptation, self-regulated learning in the virtual environment; the management of personal conflicts and dysfunctions in the school or social context, but also an efficient management in the development and capitalization of the personal resources of preadolescents, implicitly of one's own potential for a more efficient social adaptation in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic.

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