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Cultural Identity Components – Romanian Parents and German School

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Abstract

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In Sibiu, German school has a tradition of hundreds of years. Some parents, Romanian ethnics, choose to enroll their children in German department starting with preschool level. This study examines the components of cultural identity of these parents. Data was collected using a questionnaire applied in 16 public kindergartens in Sibiu, with German teaching classes. The objectives of the study are: describing the identification level of parents with elements of Romanian culture, investigating the consistency or inconsistency between the identification of parents with elements of Romanian culture and updating type of identity (through new/old items), describing the perception of parents over the adaptation of their children enrolled in German classes, and analyzing the motivation of parents to enroll their children in the German department. Cultural identity components covered are: ethnicity, nationality, place of birth, age, sex, socioeconomic status, language, religion and cultural heritage. The analysis of components is made in relation to motivation for choosing the German section and perception over children adaptation in kindergarten.

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Keywords: Cultural identity components; Romanian parents; German school.

1. Introduction

This study takes into account Romanian parents who have children enrolled in German preschool classes in Sibiu. However, parents are not the actual interest, but mostly their influence on the cultural field, as foundation for building cultural identity for their children.

In order to analyze the cultural field we start with two reference systems, the internal/ affiliation one, and the external/optional one. In the first system, we include social memory, latencies, symbols, tradition, religion, ethnicity, language, family, cultural heritage and subjective status. And in the second one, we cover opportunities, needs, motivation, personality, career, and objective status. Starting from these two reference systems we extract the main components of the cultural identity of parents and then we put them in relation with the perception over children's adaptation process in kindergarten and the motivation for choosing the German department.

We emphasize that this research is descriptive and the methodological process has a naturalistic approach, non-experimental, and non-comparative.

2. Methodology

2.1. General objective

The general objective of this study contributes to the achievement of a higher research aim regarding the process of cultural identity construction of children from a multiethnic space. The aim serves a more extensive work, concretized in a doctoral thesis. Methodological issues and results presented here will be included in the thesis mentioned.

This study aims to describe parents' identification, updating identity modalities, perception over children's kindergarten adaptation and motivation for choosing the German department. Also we want to expose the relationship between these dimensions.

2.2. Specific objectives

- Describe identification level of parents with elements of Romanian culture;
- Investigate the consistency or inconsistency between the identification of parents with elements of Romanian culture and updating type of identity (through new/old items);
- Describe the perception of parents over the adaptation of their children enrolled in German classes;
- Analyze the motivation of parents to enroll their children in the German department.

2.3. Working hypothesis

- Most of Romanian parents identify strongly with elements of Romanian culture, especially those of religious nature;
- Although identifying themselves with elements of Romanian culture, parents mainly updated their cultural identity through new elements;
- Parents agree with the possibility that their children could change religion;
- Parents perceive positively their children adaptation to kindergarten environment.

2.4. Other methodological aspect

Research tools: self-administered questionnaire and interview guide for focus-groups;

Research type: descriptive;

Sample: convenience nonprobability sampling;

Eligibility criteria: parents who have children enrolled at the German department preschool, in Sibiu.

Exclusion criteria: parents who are not of Romanian ethnicity;

Population: 544 parents from all 16 public kindergartens from Sibiu with German classes (27 classes in total) – for applying the questionnaire; two groups of 8 and 12 parents – for focus-groups.

2.5. Dimensions and variables

The following dimensions and variables will be discussed: identification (variables: self-identification, nationalism, religion, language, behaviors, social networks), updating identity (variable: old items, new items, the individual's relationship with society), kindergarten adaptation (variables: pleasure to be in kindergarten environment, tendency to seek pretexts to skip kindergarten days, contact with colleagues outside the kindergarten, frequency of speaking about kindergarten activities, the attitude towards teachers, interest in extracurricular activities, the agreement regarding parents decision of enrolling them in a German class) and the reasons for choosing the German department (variables: subjective and objective reasons).

2.6. Fidelity and validity

The study takes into account perceptual issues. Therefore, validity was measured by testing the questionnaires relevance of content through two focus groups. Also, the questionnaire uses scales from European Values Study (Romanian Values, 2008). Being a questionnaire that seeks to describe parents' *perception*, fidelity of the research instrument has not been tested with Cronbach Alpha. Scales built measure exactly what intend to measure and comparison in different times or of different populations would not respect the non-comparative and non-experimental approach. Of course, the clarity and redundancy of questions has been traced.

2.7. Ethics Research

The questionnaire is anonymous. In the header are mentioned issues relating to the confidentiality of the person who fills in. After completing, the questionnaire is sealed in an envelope.

For the focus-groups, written consent of the participants was obtained. Also, the possibility of withdrawing from the study at any time up to the handover of the research was presented.

3. Results

3.1. Ethnicity, nationality, place of birth and membership

We had a total of 544 parents who responded to the questionnaire. Of all respondents, 91.7% are Romanian ethnics, 5.5% are German ethnics, 2.8% are Hungarian ethnics, and 0.2% have Roma ethnicity. The majority of parents who choose for their child/children the German department in Sibiu is therefore of Romanian ethnicity and with Romanian nationality.

With regard to the feeling of belonging, the respondents sustain that they first feel proud to be born in Sibiu, second, that they are Transylvanians, and, in the end, Europeans.

Of all parents, 54.6% consider the possibility of emigrating. Among those who want to emigrate, 39.6% prefer Germany as destination. Even those not contemplating the idea of leaving Romania

support future emigration possibility of their children in case of career opportunities and think about supporting studies at a University outside the country.

Bogardus scale analysis included in the questionnaire has a constant note. Of all ethnicities, parents prefer detached the Saxons. This ethnicity receives the highest appreciation for friendship (91.5%), the possibility of them being neighbors (89.2%), colleagues (90.8%), or life partners (64.3%). Even in the negative situation of the proposal to be expelled from the country, Saxons are rescued by a large number of respondents (64.7%).

3.2. Age and sex

Out of the total number of respondents, 34.9% are up to 34 years old, and 52.7% are aged between 35 and 54. The majority of parents are part of the active population. Also, 55% of the questionnaire respondents are women and 43% are men.

3.3. Socioeconomic status

3.3.1. Income

Though 22.8% of parents choose not to answer, we can point that 46.2% of those who choose a category of income, earn monthly more than 1700 lei. According to the INSSE, in 2015, in Sibiu, the monthly average net salary was 1890 de lei (Institutul Național de Statistică, 2015). Therefore, the ones who did answer have, in a large proportion, an income close or above the average.

We can add here the amount of money that parents invest monthly in private German language classes. Only 11.8% of parents give answers regarding this issue. Of them, 74.6% of them declare that they monthly invest up to 200 lei, while the rest of 25,4% pay over 200 lei per month. The highest amount mentioned is 620. However, most of these parents (42%) invest monthly 200 lei in private German language classes. Just to compare, this amount represents 11.9% of the average net salary in Sibiu.

3.3.2. Studies

A large number of parents have completed higher education. Asked if they have studied at the German department, only 20% of parents respond affirmatively and most of them stopped at secondary level. However, 62.6% of parents evaluate their own level of German language knowledge as low or very low.

3.3.3. Family

A large proportion of the respondents are married, few are divorced and fewer live in concubinage. Most of parents have two children.

3.4. Language

For 91.9% of parents, the native language is Romanian. And for 67.3% of cases, in family they do not speak another language than Romanian. Of the 29.2% who say they speak another language than Romanian at home, 81.7% claim that speak German, with all that out of the total of 544 respondents, 62.6% evaluate their own level of German language knowledge as low or very low.

Parents agree in 67.1% of the cases that living in a particular region makes it necessary to learn a certain language. They also assert the importance of foreign language in access to a particular group, in raising the status of a person and in obtaining a job.

With respect to the region and the necessity of learning a particular language, for Sibiu parents judge the importance of foreign languages in this order: German – 96.1%, English – 88.8%, French – 40.9%.

3.5. Religion

Orthodox Christians respondents are the majority, 83%, and most of them (87.3%) have not changed their confession. But among those who have changed their religion, most renounced orthodoxy. And of those who have renounced orthodoxy, most agree that the Orthodox Church needs a reform to be in harmony with today's society.

God is important for 82.5% of the parents, although 91.7% affirm belief in divinity. Another difference is that between the importance attributed to God, and the importance given to the Church. God is not only Orthodox, and 78.3% of parents consider that the Church needs a reform to be in tune with modern society.

Although the vast majority are Christians, percentages show us that there are respondents who do not believe in the existence of life after death, heaven, hell, or sin. These elements are especially important in describing Orthodox principles. Moreover, the scale includes a clear updating variable: reincarnation. Among those declaring themselves to be Orthodox, 14% believe in reincarnation.

However, in large proportion, parents questioned say they have religious behaviors, attend church and generally consider themselves to be religious. Moreover, the media shows that in family feasts are celebrated in a traditional Romanian way. German holidays (St. Martin, Ziua Recoltei, and Mother's day in May, not in 8th of March) are celebrated in less than 25% of cases. Furthermore, 90.7% of parents consider that they shall teach the child/children about traditional Romanian culture and believe that family is the first responsible for building cultural identity. After family, school comes second then media and groups of friends.

In relation with a recent problem, we note that 70.2% of parents agree with religion classes in schools, while 15.1% disagree, 5.3% don't know and 9.2% choose not to respond.

3.6. Cultural heritage

We note the high average (4.12 of maximum 5) for the importance parents attach to tradition and symbols. In terms of behaviors that show affiliation to symbols or practicing tradition, in addition to those already discussed, we mention attachment to Romania's flag, singing of the national anthem in various events, appreciation of national currency, visiting historical monuments and trust the Romanian education system.

4. Discussions

Cultural identity components discussed until now will be connected to ways of updating the cultural identity of parents, with reasons for choosing of the German department for their children and with

perception over the adaptation of children in kindergarten. Taken together, the aspects mentioned will lead to the image of the cultural field in which children shall construct their own cultural identity.

4.1. Update

The ways of updating the cultural identity will be analyzed from two points of view: update by new items and update by old items (Baumeister, 1986).

With regard to updating through new elements, we observe that parents attach great importance to jobs, personal achievements, skills, career and success obtained by career. Material purchases are in conjunction with self-esteem and personality.

We see a split in the old items that used to define our identity. On one side, parents still have the need for permanency, so they resist to mobility, the belief in marriage as a sacred institution of society, strong bond with parents and the responsibility of taking care of their orders. On the same line we note the low tolerance regarding homosexuality.

On the other side, we note elements that destabilize and standardize identity. Having children is no longer seen as a responsibility for society. Therefore, we point out the trend of individualization and tagging of uniqueness. Flexibility in relation to gender roles is an argument for smoothing the edges of rigor.

Interesting to note is that in the statement which includes the word *holy*, highlighting the formal *religious* bond between man and women, the score is high in favor for *family*. When it disappears, flexibility increases in relation to unmarried couples.

4.2. The child's school adaptation

Parents do not see problems in the adaptation process of their children to kindergarten. Large percentages of expresses consent lead us to the conclusion that children go to kindergarten gladly, talk fondly about preschool activities and about teachers, participate in extracurricular activities and play together with colleagues outside kindergarten.

4.3. Reasons to choose the German department

Parents express both objective and subjective reasons for choosing the German department. Objective reasons receive the highest percentage (program, location of the kindergarten, kindergarten type – public, recommendations, educational offer, and facilities, having brothers/sisters in kindergarten).

Of the subjective reasons we note the projection of some upcoming opportunities, the positive perception of German education in general and the high future social status achieved by studying in a German school. The fact that parents didn't have the opportunity to study in a German school is for 72% of them a reason for taking the decision to enroll their children in this department. Reasons create a pseudo environment for parents, an imaginary in order to resolve their own frustrations, in which they are placing their own children.

4.4. Validate assumptions

We validate the proposed hypotheses discussed the following:

- Most of the parents identified strongly with elements of Romanian culture, especially those of religious nature;
- Although identifying themselves with elements of Romanian culture, parents mainly updated their cultural identity through new elements;
- Parents perceive positive adaptation to kindergarten environment.

Assumption number three does not check:

- Parents agree with the possibility of a change of religion for their own children.

Most of parents who recommend enrolling children in the German department do not agree with the possibility of their children to change religion.

4.5. Limitations of the research

We point out the following limits: sampling of convenience and the length of the questionnaire.

5. Conclusion

From the results presented we can conclude that the cultural identity of the parents involved in the study has internal contradictions. We can mark the latent lines which persist in defining their cultural identity, such as religion and tradition. But these lines are not sufficient and are drawn towards the desire to upgrade their cultural identity through present motives, values, goals and personal needs (Turner, Oakes, Haslam, & McGarty, 1994).

The aim of describing the Romanian parents who choose to enroll their children in the German department was the surface for exploring the idea of the interior conflict that inevitably becomes part of the cultural field in which children are building their own cultural identity. Parents have a desire to update their own cultural identity. Inside this desire we find elements in conflict. This conflict is transmitted in the cultural field.

The main items in conflict are objective latencies and subjective hopes (Bourdieu, 2012). We have on one hand, language, religion, and aspects of tradition. Parents do not speak German, they are Orthodox, and although there have many critics for the Orthodox Church, they are not willing to change their own religion. Also, they celebrate and speak with pride about the traditional music, national flag, customs, traditions and literature.

On the other hand, we have subjective hopes: career opportunities, possible material acquisitions, status. German school is seen as a gate for achieving these subjective hopes. Parents emphasize the usefulness of the German language. Still, they keep out to provide information about how much they financially invest in the materialization of these hopes.

We stop here for a moment of reflection. Dencik (1992) speaks about the current parental model disability. Parents find themselves today in face with the challenge of educating their own children in a way they were not educated and to become someone they are not. This situation becomes even more a problem in case of lack of coherence inside the process of transmitting cultural identity aspects. For the parents and children in this study the challenge is even greater because it is supplemented by the

conflict shades transmitted in the cultural field. These shades effect would be interesting to investigate over time.

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