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Training of Early Childhood Teachers to Develop Socio-Emotional Skills in Pre-Schoolers

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Abstract: The article is connected with a theoretical analysis of the emotional intelligence and empirical studies of the development of emotional intelligence in the context of personal dispositions of students future psychologists (n=84). The following methods were used in the empirical study: EQ test K. Barchard, «Diagnosis of emotional intelligence» (N. Hall), «Questionnaire SVF120» (V. Yanke, G. Erdmann, adaptation N. Vodopjanova), «Methods of diagnosing viability» (S. Muddy, adaptation D. Leontiev), «Oxford Happiness Inventory», «Diagnosis of emotionality» (Suvorov, 1976), «Questionnaire Machiavellianism of the individual». Mathematical data processing and graphical representation of the results were performed using the statistical package SPSS 17.0. It is noted that the real impetus for the emergence of the concept of EI in science were the works of G. Gardner and his theory of multiple intelligences. The basic models of EI and the author's interpretation of this concept are analyzed, which leads to the conclusion: the integrated understanding of this phenomenon by psychologists is still absent, the main definition of the concept of EI is often a list and description of its components, and the main justification for its importance is a list of those areas of life where the role of EI is most obvious.

Keywords: *Autonomy; collaborative skills; observation tool; perseverence; practice; social; training.*

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Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has brought a double shock to education. The massive closure of educational institutions threatens to exacerbate the global learning crisis. We are now facing a "crisis within a crisis."

The crisis of learning has at its centre a crisis of teaching, Bold et al. (2017). Increasing studies and research indicate that teaching is the most important external factor that determines student learning: Hanushek and Rivkin (2010); Snilstveit et al. (2016). The difference between the impact of a poorly trained teacher and one with a quality preparation on the students' exam results is equivalent to one to two years of schooling: Bau and Das (2017); Hanushek & Rivkin (2010); Evans et al. (2000)

Improving the quality of teaching is needed to address the global learning crisis. As part of this effort, it is essential that every teacher around the world has access to high-quality professional development opportunities to improve their teaching practice.

Problem statement

The first step in providing teachers with high-quality professional development opportunities is to investigate current practices so that professional development can be tailored to the needs of teachers.

Currently, most education systems in low- and middle-income countries do not regularly monitor teaching practices or the quality of interactions between teachers and students in the classroom. Even when education systems try to capture teaching practices, most of the tools used in low- and middle-income countries provide insufficient results (Ladics et al., 2018).

In response to these challenges the World Bank has developed Teach (Molina et al., 2019), a classroom observation tool, to help countries measure teaching practices and ensure that professional development programs are based on teacher training needs.

Research questions

In this research we want to observe the teaching practices of pre-school teachers and find out where there is a need for improvement that we can achieve through personalized feedback.

Purpose of the study

Analysing how to improve educational practices to develop social-emotional skills through classroom observation and feedback using the Teach tool.

The research hypothesis was that early childhood teachers who participate in observation and feedback processes based on the Teach tool develop educational practices more adapted to the socio-emotional needs of children.

Research methods

During this research we used the observation research method with the help of the Teach observation tool which was developed by the World Bank.

Teach measures teacher-student / preschool interactions, focusing on known techniques and behaviours for the development of children's cognitive and socio-emotional skills and the positive development of social and emotional learning skills.

The tool can be used to observing the cognitive and social-emotional growth of students / children. The educational model of the 21st century educates the whole child in and it is this process that manages to bring these two components together.

Social and emotional learning is a profound component of the way in which students and adults interact in the classroom and in the way in which children are provided with supportive, supportive learning environments.

Social and emotional learning is the process by which children acquire, then effectively apply, the knowledge (Tankersley et al. 2011), attitudes and skills needed to understand and manage emotions, to propose and achieve positive goals, to feel and show empathy for others, to establish and maintain positive relationships and to make decisions responsibly.

The World Bank Office in Romania has developed a training program for using the Teach tool in classroom observation and improving practice in schools.

TeachRo is a classroom observation tool adapted for the primary and pre-school levels in Romania, in accordance with the educational priorities included in the education reform program, following three main areas: classroom climate, training and socio-emotional skills.

The TeachRo tool is, at this moment, a variant adapted to the Romanian context, but which has kept its essence and practical quality, being

adapted to reality. TeachRo, the contextualized version for the Romanian educational culture, is a valid tool for diagnosing and improving teaching practices in the classroom / with a group of children, its application in school practice being an essential step in improving the practices used by teachers in the Romanian education system for pre-university students.

TeachRo facilitates emotional social learning and positive development.

The teacher stimulates the development of socio-emotional skills, encourages children to succeed both in the classroom and outside it. To develop children's social and emotional skills, the teacher: (i) contributes to the development of children's autonomy by giving them opportunities to choose and take on meaningful roles in the classroom (children show their autonomy by volunteering to participate in class activities); (ii) promotes perseverance through public recognition of children's efforts, rather than focusing exclusively on their natural intelligence or abilities, through a positive attitude towards children's problems, ensuring that failure and frustration are part of the learning process and encouraging children to set short and long term goals; and (iii) fosters the formation of social and collaborative skills, promoting collaboration between children by encouraging interactions between them and developing their interpersonal skills, such as perspective, empathy, emotion-management and social problem solving. Children show social and collaborative skills, cooperating with each other through interaction between colleagues.

The research group of the Teach study consists of 19 teachers, of which 9 are part of the experimental group and received the formative intervention, and 10 from the control group. The gender of the research group is female (100%).

Initial moment T1 - initial application at the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year of the Teach tool to all teachers in the research group. This testing serves to observe the educational practices of the teaching staff at the time of the beginning of the research.

The teaching staff working in the experimental classes benefited from the intervention based on the feedback sheet of the Teach tool. These teachers received personalized feedback and explanations on how to code practice for each item in the instrument.

Feedback was given by certified Teach observers. After the observation of the activity segments, the observed teaching staff had an open discussion with the observers with the aim of guiding and jointly identifying some solutions to improve the practices that needed improvement.

Moment T2 – application of the tool at the end of the 2020-2021 school year: all teachers were observed and their classroom practices were recorded, in several learning activities from different activity categories. These activities were analyzed and coded according to the Teach tool by experts.

Findings

Our contribution to the development and implementation of the feedback process was preceded by active involvement in national research that revealed for the field of socio-emotional skills:

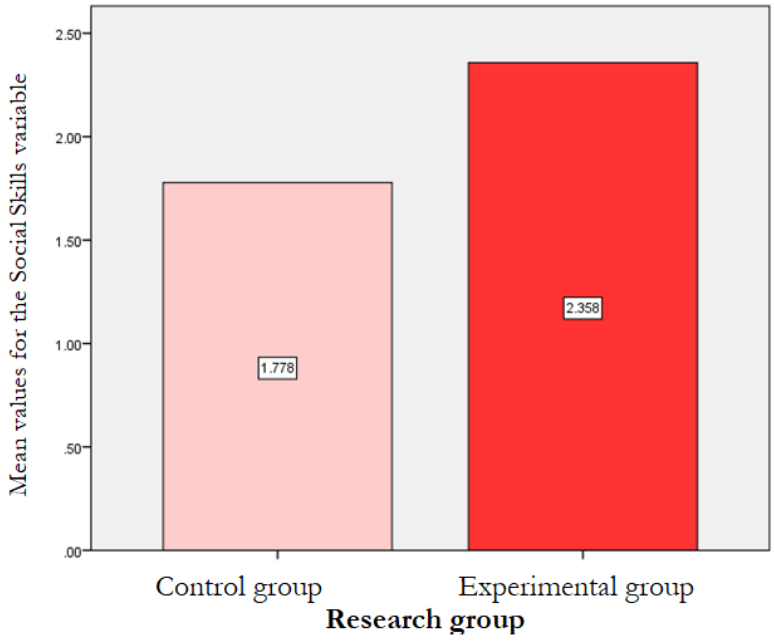


Figure 1. The mean values of the research groups for the Social Skills variable in the pre-intervention (T1)

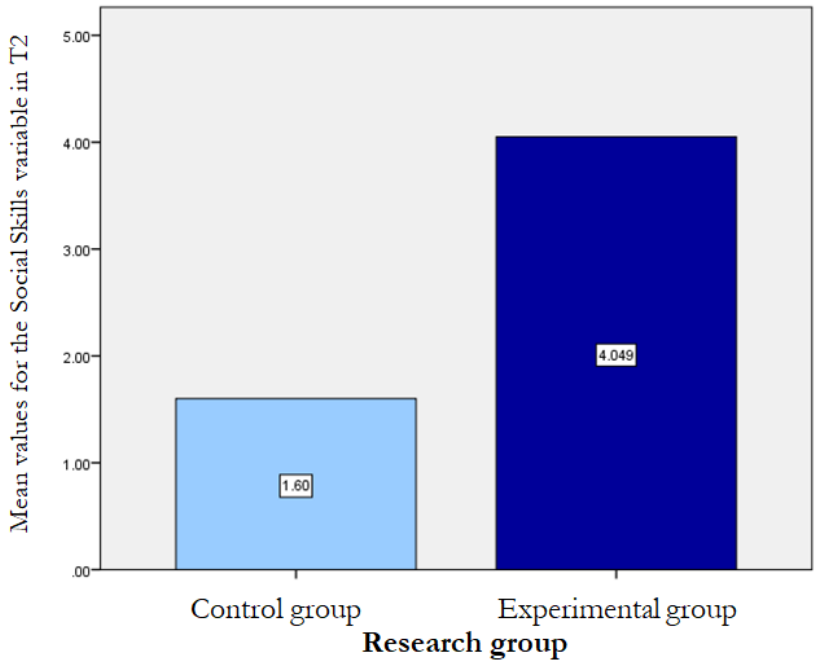


Figure 2. The mean values of the research groups for the Social Skills variable in the post-intervention (T2)

The differences between the scores and scores obtained by teachers at T1 and T2 are due to the familiarity of the teachers in the experimental group with the Teach observation tool and the actual training they received.

The evolution from one moment to the next on the elements within the field of Social and emotional skills and positive development are very small or even in reverse progression.

- Autonomy from 2 to 2.5
- Perseverance from 2.3 to 2.6
- Social and collaborative skills from 1.2 to 1.

Most teachers do not explicitly offer children the opportunity to make choices (53% low grade, 21% medium grade, and 28% high grade at Q1). The percentages at the time of Q2 do not change much, the low reaches 47%, the medium rises to 32% and the high 21%

However, teachers are also not effective in providing opportunities for children to take on roles. At Q1 the percentage of the low grade is 79%, decreasing to 58% at Q2. The average rating shows an increase in the time

of T2 compared to the time of T1 (from 5% to 21%), as well as the high rating (from 16% to 21%).

In most cases, only a few children volunteer to participate in the activity (58% at the time of Q1 obtaining an average qualification, and 42% at the time of Q2). At the time of Q2 the high-grade increases from 16% to 47%, a considerable increase which indicates that most children volunteer.

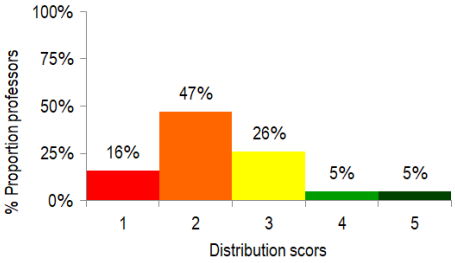


Figure 3. Autonomy scores T1

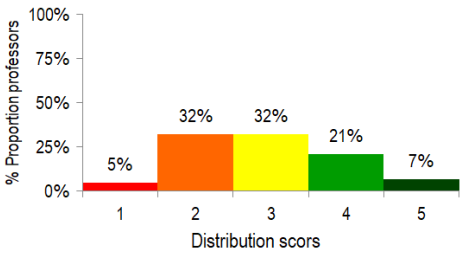


Figure 4. Autonomy scores T2

Autonomy is one of the behaviours that has been improved. If at T1 most teachers got a score of 2-3 points out of 5 possible, at T2 most teachers got 3-4 points.

Regarding Perseverance at T1, most teachers do not recognize children's efforts (67%), but at T2 there is an improvement with the majority percentage being at the average grade (63%) which means that sometimes they recognize children's efforts, even if most praise focuses on the results of the children, not on their effort.

In general, teachers have a neutral attitude towards children's challenges and help them understand that failure and frustration are normal parts of the learning process at both T1 and T2; the high grade, which means a positive attitude on the part of the teacher, increases from 21% at T1 to 37% at T2.

Finally, most teachers do not encourage planning or encourage it only in the short term, with the percentage for the grade point average rising from 58% at T1 to 63% at T2.

Figure 5. Perseverance scores T1

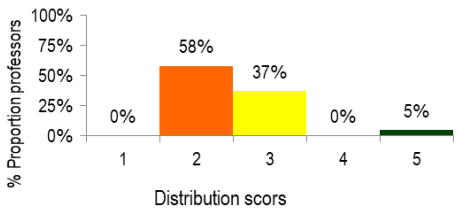
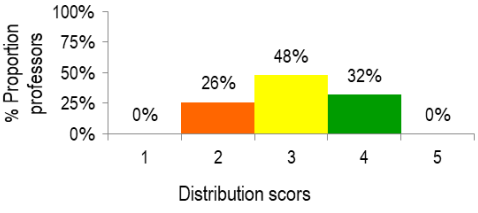


Figure 6. Perseverance scores T2



In general, teachers perform poorly on all behaviours in the area of social and collaborative skills. In most of the observed groups, both at T1 and T2, teachers do not promote children's collaboration (68% at T1 and 78% at T2), and children do not collaborate with each other (74% at T1 and 69% at T2). Moreover, most teachers do not promote interpersonal skills at all (84% at T1 or 69% at T2) or promote them superficially (5% at T1 and 26% at T2).

There are no major differences between teachers responsible for different age groups in the development of children's socio-emotional skills. A slight difference can be observed in the development of social and collaborative skills both in T1 and T2, in the oldest group (5-6 years) being the highest score.

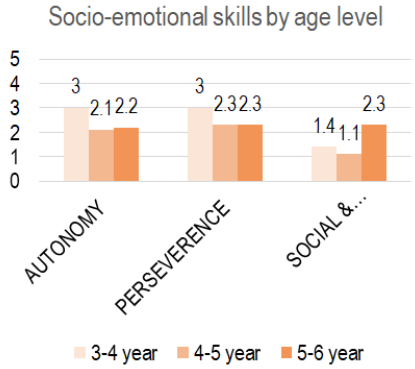


Figure 7. Socio-emotional skills by age level T1

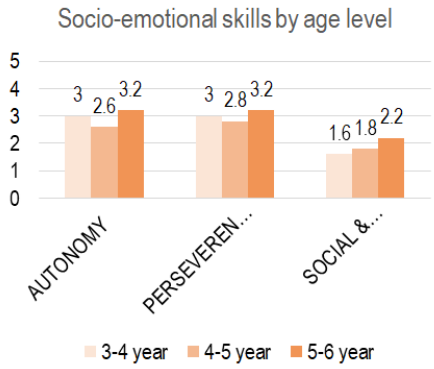


Figure 8. Socio-emotional skills by age level T2

Also, of all the areas of the instrument in the national research undertaken, it is found that in this field the practices are the lowest.

Between the two moments, the teachers from the experimental group benefited from feedback through the Teach program with an emphasis on socio-emotional development where the highest percentage was obtained with the low-quality level and implicitly the lowest scores. Teachers are rated high in promoting children's autonomy, but educational practice is quite weak in promoting perseverance and social and collaborative skills.

It should be noted that it is impossible to draw a clear line between teaching practices related to academic learning and socio-emotional learning. Many teaching practices included in common teaching professional models influence socio-emotional development but are usually thought of in terms of academic learning and not socio-emotional learning. The explicit linking of teaching practices to socio-emotional outcomes in the measurements used for assessment will serve to highlight students' socio-emotional skills for teachers as well as other stakeholders and decision makers, thus ensuring a focus on both academic learning and the socio-emotional one in the classroom.

The training is focused on the promotion by teachers of children's collaboration, interpersonal skills, autonomy, perseverance, positive classroom interactions, creating an environment without emotional or physical hostilities.

Conclusion

The results we have presented in the pages above bring to our attention multiple perspectives that must be taken into account by all the participants in the educational process: from the decision-makers, to the management of the educational institution, teachers and children. As the educational community is the main beneficiary of this study, we believe that the results of the research should be complemented by a series of recommendations that can be implemented by the governing factor as the Ministry of education or school inspectors, as well as by teachers and management teams. The purpose of these suggestions is to support the transformations in the Romanian educational system in order to have improved teaching practices.

In most of the observed classes, children are not explicitly offered choices, their autonomy thus being neglected. The fact that the teacher is the only authority in this process makes the children believe that they are not responsible for their own education, demonstrating low personal

responsibility. We recommend that teachers actively involve their students, giving them the opportunity to make substantive choices about the activity.

- The teachers I have seen make several comments about their children's intelligence, but very few of them consider the effort involved in the tasks. Praising children's efforts is a key point in every educational process, as it helps the child to understand that they should only be compared to their previous self and makes them understand that while there is more to learn, progress should be appreciated. The attitudinal dimension can only be learned by example. This is why we strongly recommend teachers start having a more positive attitude whenever a child has a problem, making it clear that making a mistake is part of the learning mechanism and can be overcome by analysing what didn't work correctly and trying not to repeat it.
- It is advisable for teachers to encourage pre-schoolers to take on roles and get involved in activities on a voluntary basis;

During the pandemic, children had limited opportunities to work in teams, to collaborate effectively, to develop intra / interpersonal skills, or to work together to create a product. Since almost all future jobs these children will have involve cooperation, teachers should create contexts to explore, play roles, and learn how to manage a participatory environment.

Social-emotional learning and positive development is very challenging for the Romanian education system, because it is largely ignored in the process of teacher training. If teachers do not show a positive attitude towards failure, if they do not collaborate and do not teach / work in teams and if they have no choice in terms of content construction, they will not be able to develop these attitudes and skills in their children.

The number of teachers involved in the quasi-experiment: 19 (nineteen) is relatively small to support the generalization of the results. The teachers participating in the research are from the same educational unit and the phenomenon of contamination between the control group and the experimental group may occur. The study is to be extended to 600 teaching staff at national level, thus having statistical significance and being able to be used as a benchmark by other countries as well.

Acknowledgment

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