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Particularities of the Norm System in School's Environment

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Abstract: *This study represents an analysis of how formal norms and regulations are respected by secondary students within their schools. The starting point of the analysis is the concept of development stages and evolution of the class as every group has its particular profile. The research seeks to analyse the norming system in order to identify whether there are or not major differences concerning following the formal regulations by students as they evolve in school.*

Key Words: *formal, regulations, development, stages, norms, categories.*

Introduction

This research is based upon studies and theoretical work related to different subjects such as pedagogy psycho-sociology psychology of education and group's sociology. It is a quantitative study and its purpose is to define the main formal regulations to which students are more likely to adhere to.

In order to identify all norms types accepted as desirable and undesirable by the students this research has used a Likert scale and data collected was statistically interpreted.

As norms are dynamic (during the school years norms change year after year) all information gathered from students must be analysed within this scale. We took a close look and carefully contextualized the prevalence of certain regulations in relation to students' ages and different variables and the interpretations of the identified norm system to be cautiously analysed with concern for psycho-socio-cultural details.

Theoretical foundation. Particularities of the norm system in school

Ideally the norm system consists of sets of behaviour regulations that are known and accepted by the members of the group. Norms prescribe behavioural patterns and due to that particularity, we can evaluate the existence of those desirable behaviours that would be appreciated as well as the existence of those defined as unacceptable and requiring teacher's intervention.

School groups have their own dynamic therefore defining a psycho-social profile can be done through analysing different types of norms. Some are related to instruction whilst other are related to institutional regulations to which they are specific to.

If we consider norms as behavioural assessment criteria for individuals and groups, we can categorize them as explicit and implicit. Explicit norms are meant to regulate learning and implicit norms arise because of group members' relationships becoming results of a collective experience. Integrating norms by the groups becomes therefore a force we can describe as a pressure to the groups. The desired effect is unity and cohesion¹². If all members of the group, choose to follow the external norms then the result will create the premises for a high level of cohesion within the group³⁴.

The norm system of the class is characterized by some general particularities depending upon different aspects such as social and cultural and legislative as well as specific particularities that develop structures and designs according to different types of schools and institutions⁵. Conformism and unity are direct results of the cohesion of the group because of a psycho-social pressure exercised on the group members. All systematic interactions determine uniformity when it comes to attitudes and group behaviours. This uniformity becomes step-by-step norms and behavioural models for the group members. Conformism is defined „guarantee of the acceptance by the group of proper functioning survival and maintaining of the unity of the group within the context of pressure generating the feeling of individual and collective security”⁶ The lack of convergence between explicit and implicit norms generates normative conflicts and impairment of the psycho-socio-emotional climate leading to the instauration of the deviationist phenomenon⁷. According to Păun⁸ norm types specific to class groups includes explicit norms that students get to know, and implicit norms built as a structure within larger periods of time.

¹ D. Sălăvăstru, *Psihologia Educației*. Iași, Editura Polirom, 2004.

² R. B. Iucu, *Managementul clasei de elevi. Aplicații pentru gestionarea situațiilor de criză educațională*. București, Editura Polirom, 2006; Adriana Denisa Manea, A.D. (2018). Features of educational activities in the contemporary society,” in *Astra Salvensis*, 6 (2018), no. 12, p. 255-260.

³ V. G. Krâsiko, *Psihologia socială*, București, Editura EuroPress Group, 2007.

⁴ D. Andronache, M. Bocoș, L. Budiu, „The need to promote intercultural education in disadvantaged youth groups by active methods,” in *Educația 21 Journal*, 9 (2011), p. 1-13.

⁵ D. Cristea, *Tratat de psihologie socială*, București, Editura TREI, 2015.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p.115.

⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁸ E. Păun, *Sociopedagogie școlară*, București, Editura Didactică și Pedagogică, 1982.

The explicit norms can be categorized as constitutive and institutional. The constitutive ones design pedagogical normativity related to the teaching-learning-assessment process while the institutional ones are related to the particularities of the school seen as a social environment. Both categories act as regulating tools designed to support instruction and education. Although they present a general and uniform pattern for all students the teacher is the facilitator as he presents and clarifies norms limits. The attitude and personal style of teacher imposing explicit norms have a significant influence on the acceptance or rejecting them by the student. One example is related to those situations where the groups' resistance is not pointed to the norm itself but to the way it has been introduced⁹. The specific of the group communication is reflected in how student choose to respect rules when it comes to address problems, actively listening related to aims the specific of the task of roles and position¹⁰¹¹.

The norm system forms and develops along with the evolution of the group through the specific stages as the group reaches its maturity. Hybel and Weaver¹², then Gamble and Gamble¹³ show that stages can be explained through two paradigms: reunion and separation. Reunion refers to building and developing relationships and separation refers to weathering of the relationships all way to the disappearance of the group.

Reunion has some stages: initiation experiment intensification integration and mutual obligations.

- a. Initiation is characterized by positive attitudes of the members. Students and teachers develop relationships that are enhancing psycho-individual patterns but in a non-competitive manner generating a chain of mutual appreciations. The way classes are constituted does not allow the members to create an efficient team in this phase which is explicable if we consider the fact that on one hand they are attracted by the interactions with the others and on the other hand they are focused upon school tasks. Within this phase new groups prefer activities that aren't related to academic activities and the educational and psycho-social climate allows the building of the relationships. This is a particularly favourable phase

⁹ *Ibidem.*

¹⁰ A. M. Petroi, *Abordări conceptuale și praxiologice în științele educației*, Cluj-Napoca, Editura Eikon, 2007.

¹¹ D. Andronache, M. Bocoș, „Designing curricular frameworks for critical thinking development,” p. 39-42.

¹² *Ibidem.*

¹³ *Ibidem.*

if we consider presenting getting to know each other and even negotiation of the formal regulations of the institution.

- b. The experimental phase allows members of the group to extend the inter-relations evolving on a climate of affective and communicational availability. Common interests appear using similarities and personal interests of the members of the group as well as the need to make activities together. It is the phase where informal norms are beginning to show up. The group will begin to separate into smaller groups due to similarities of interests or personal aspects. Even if we speak about interactions in the context of learning activities students’ interests are still focused to connecting. Teacher’s intervention within this phase is more likely to be like a facilitator’s intervention and he or she can achieve this using communication techniques reciprocal interview or role-playing.
- c. Intensification is a stage where relationships become more affectionate. Students spend time in the classroom or gather in small groups. Now it is time to assume roles and share experiences whether positive or negative about families, friends, teachers school pathways or themselves. The feelings of trust within the groups is enhanced by the courage to show frustrations dissatisfactions or biases. Affectionate communication appears as well as personal codes in communication or specific jokes. The raised interest for colleagues and class are specific indicators showing which is the best time for group activities and school academic performance.
- d. *Integration* is the signal that a powerful cohesion is present in the group. Student feel they belong to the group and separation is about each one of them. Small groups reunite with the larger group in the classroom and develop common actions.
All combinations were already tried, and each student can characterize the others. Teamwork is more effective roles and positions are clearly defined
- e. *Mutual obligations* represent the highest point of a social group. Although it can be rarely found in schools, we can identify some characteristics. The moderate intensity and the stability of the relationships make the students wish to remain with the group. If events occur forcing them to leave the group, they will resent pressure and discomfort. Following the formal norms offers to the teacher a great freedom to act and team is productive.

At the opposite side of reunion separation is about breaking the social group. There are some phases helping us to identify the causes and ways of

intervention in order to prevent or even to stop the disintegration of the group. Separation from the group goes through all phases of differentiation shallowness stagnancy and superposing avoidance with ending.

- a. *Differentiation* is characterized by the fact that members of the group are focused upon the differences between them rather than upon the task. It is interesting to notice that those differences were present in previous stages as well but at the time they were accepted. Discontent is more likely to initiate disagreements that can turn into conflicts. If pressured in the classroom students tend to interact less the quality of the relationships decrease and so focus turns to new people or interests.
- b. *Shallowness* is the stage where the information exchange between students is functional at the group level. Students make efforts in order to avoid conflicts when it comes to multiple interrelations. However, when the context is external students tend to hide their problems at a relational level. Although it is a difficult stage both for the group and teachers from this very point the negative path can be changed.
- c. *Stagnancy* refers to a time when relationships in group are almost inactive. Students perform their tasks and only settle those connections related to academic activities. Although they feel comfortable because of the lack of pressure they can also feel frustration because of their inability to communicate and to return to initial stages where emotional elements were present. It is up to the teacher to maintain or to shorten this stage.
- d. *Avoidance and ending* are the final stage that prefigure the breaking of the group as its members try to avoid connecting with the others. In the classroom students experience lack of implication in formal and informal activities and if teachers insist the group conflict can migrate towards the teacher.

Approaching the class through these stages allows the teacher to identify those moments where educational intervention can be efficient whether through stimulating the process to increase cohesion or through preventing the breaking of the group. Even if the relationship's dynamic's boundaries presented in the evolution stages of the groups aren't precisely defined as there always exists the possibility to superpose and interfere different other elements from other stages making use of the methods designed to increase cohesion can be beneficial to quality and lifetime of the school group¹⁴.

¹⁴ I. O. Pânișoară, *Comunicarea Eficientă*, Iași, Editura Polirom, 2015.

Research methodology. The purpose of the study

The purpose of the study consists in measuring the level to which secondary students respect norms.

The purposes of the study are:

- To list and categorize formal norms in schools through analysing official documents
- To identify the level to which secondary students respect norms function of their categories
- To identify the level to which secondary students respect norms
- To analyse the evolution level of the adherence to the norms for all secondary school years

Study hypothesis

The norm system within school institutions gets modified while the class group crosses evolution stages from a school year to another.

Study instruments

In order to create a measuring scale to analyse students’ compliance to the norms we took a close look to official documents such as Frame Regulation for Organizing and Functioning of educational institutions, O.M.E.N.C.S. no. 5079/2016, The Education Ministry Order no. 3027/2018 and internal regulations from three secondary schools. Following this analysis seven norms categories were identified.

These categories are:

- 1) students’ behaviour during classes
- 2) students’ behaviour outside classes
- 3) students’ outfits
- 4) attitude towards the belongings of the school
- 5) frequency
- 6) to pouch belongings of the school;
- 7) students’ safety in school

A five answers Likert scale was designed, and the values were settled from 2 to -2. Maximum and minimum values highlight the closest or the farthest answer considering personal option. The scale has 36 items half of which being measured from the upper to the lower.

The sample

The research was conducted upon a sample of 306 secondary students. All students are coming from urban environments and study in two different schools.

Study procedures

The research's first stage was to analyse the official documents in order to prepare the grouping of formal norms. A Likert scale was conceived to measure the level towards which students follow these norms. The scale was completed in class groups following the procedure:

- a) Students were informed about the identity and the purpose of the researcher
- b) Students were informed about the purpose of the research
- c) The anonymity was totally guaranteed
- d) The scale was presented and explained
- e) To clarify the significance of the answers first two items were completed in group with the support of the researcher

Findings

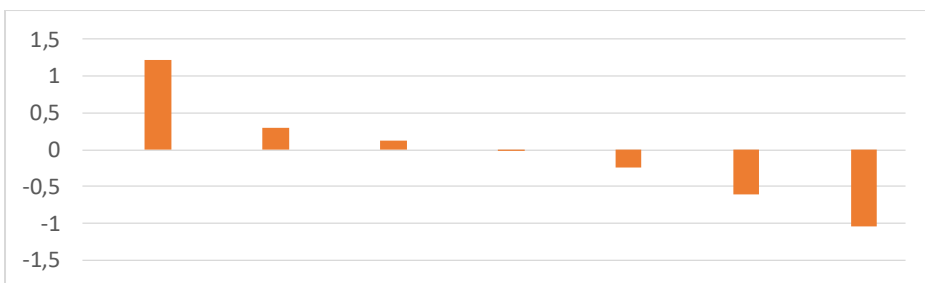
The results of the study can be synthesized as follows:

Figure 1 illustrates the level of acceptance of the norming system by the secondary students. According to the quotation average we notice that the most respected category of norms (the third category) is the one that refers to the outfits and aesthetical elements while the opposite are norms referring to integrity and safety in school (category no7).

The second category refers to students' behaviours outside classes and is placed in the second position considering the level of acceptance. This category is followed by the category of rules regarding students' behaviour during classes.

The downward curve of non-compliance to the norms is visible if we look to categories 5-7 beginning with students' frequency and including punctuality and leaving school without permission. The curve continues to go down when it comes to pouching school belongings and reaches a maximum when questioned about integrity and safety of students in school. This last one is characterized by using discriminatory messages or emotional discomfort addressed to other students along with the usage of dangerous objects such as firecrackers.

Figure 1: Norms level of acceptance – 5th to 8th grade



As the school group goes through evolution and growing up stages, we considered it is important to identify if compliance to different types of norms manages to get to know differences as school years are passing.

This way 5th graders respect all norms related to outfits, but they admit not to comply to pouching norms as they consider school’s belongings as being worthless.

Norms regarding behaviour during classes are situated on the second place considering the acceptance level followed by the attitude towards the belongings of the school. From the data analysis we discovered that fifth graders have frequency problems and make use of messages that endanger safety and integrity of their schoolmates.

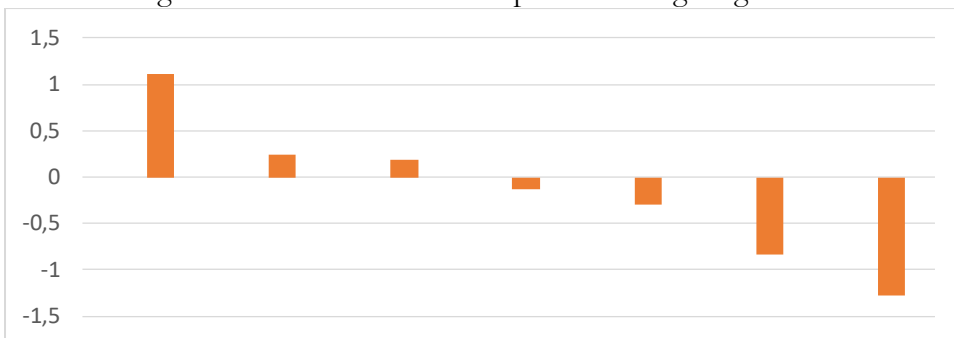
Figure 2 – Norms level of acceptance among 5th graders



Students from the 6th grade are maintaining almost the same patterns when it comes to accepting school norms as their mate’s 5th graders. A slight difference can be observed when it comes to 7th category (which envisages the integrity and safety). If the 5th graders are concerned about respecting the rules and regulations about keeping school’s belongings in good conditions, the 6th graders are more focused on their own behaviour during classes. The level of non-compliance of the norms in categories 4-7 follows a downward curve therefore students do not show a

positive attitude concerning school's belongings their frequency is lower and they pouch.

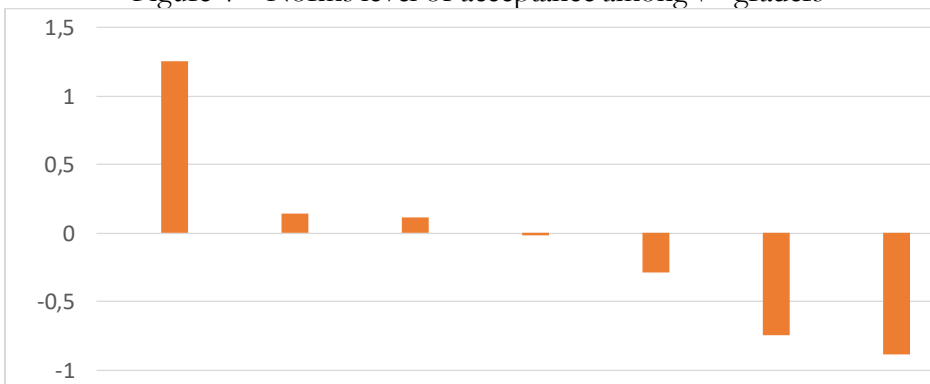
Figure 3 – Norms level of acceptance among 6th graders



The 6th graders tend to accept and respect norms concerning school outfits as well as the behaviour during classes and attitude towards school's belongings. But they tend to disrespect norms concerning frequency and pouching as well as norms related to their mate's integrity and safety.

We noticed that norms related to frequency are also related to issues like getting late to school being in the classroom when the teacher comes returning from the breaks in time or leaving school's perimeter without agreement.

Figure 4 – Norms level of acceptance among 7th graders



Data collected from the 7th graders show these students are most likely to be part of the larger picture of acceptance of the norms by the secondary students.

Figure 5 – Norms level of acceptance among 8th graders



Conclusions

The class group has its own journey through evolution and development stages each and one of these having its own particularities. However, compliance does not meet significant changes. There are even less significant changes whilst journeying through school years.

The most accepted category of norms refers to school outfits. The less accepted category of norms refers to integrity and safety of students. Here we observed we are mostly talking about verbal and written messages that are offending or discriminatory. The acceptance pattern by the 8th graders is close to the average results of the entire group of students.

One possible interpretation of the results is correlated to the age of subjects as they are experiencing the age of puberty and adolescence characterized by the desire of independence identity settling and discovering limits when it comes to norms non-compliance. Those tendencies are enhanced by the pressure resented by the subjects when formal authority is exercised. Schools are generally perceived as rigid institutions. There are rules and tasks sometimes described by students as exhausting and so their compliance must be increased. This is why it’s so important in accordance to the changes we anticipate understanding what students can and are willing to accept and what not. Teacher’s mission is to identify students’ expectations and to propose measures to facilitate integration in order to stimulate cohesion. This is only possible if the acceptance and compliance of students is optimal and in perfect accordance with those norms and values that are specific to the school.