

Andreia ȘTEFĂNESCU, Ion ALBULESCU, Daniel ANDRONACHE, Mirona STĂNESCU, Diana Mariana BOERIU, Petre Daniel CÂRCIAG

## **Attitudes Towards School and Learning. Analytical Perspectives of Students and their Parents**

Andreia ȘTEFĂNESCU, Ion ALBULESCU, Daniel ANDRONACHE, Mirona STĂNESCU, Diana Mariana BOERIU, Petre Daniel CÂRCIAG

„Babeș-Bolyai” University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania  
National University of Physical Education and Sports, Bucharest, Romania

**Abstract:** *The study describes a research based on the application of two Likert scales on a sample of 698 students from all schooling years starting with the 4<sup>th</sup> grade and ending with the 12<sup>th</sup> grade, respectively by the parents of these students (550 subjects). This research tracks students' attitudes and, comparatively, parents' perceptions of students' attitudes toward school in general and toward learning in particular. The main aspects are related to: learning motivation (generated by ambition, desire to get good school results from intrinsic or extrinsic needs and reasons), learning dynamics (boredom at school, ease of learning and the objective of learning), and climate classroom learning, measured from the perspective of students' trust in their teachers. The research results indicate existing vulnerabilities of the Romanian educational system, specifically of the teacher-student and teacher-parents relationship. Learning motivation, teaching interactivity of and classroom climate decrease gradually during schooling years, recording some increases only due to test results and in proximity of national exams.*

**Keywords:** *attitude towards school, learning motivation, school performance, trust, class climate.*

### **Introduction**

In contemporary research in education sciences, there is a permanent and active epistemic interest in investigating the problems faced by Romanian education, thus seeking to generate solutions to lead to innovation and development of strategies and methods applicable in school and extracurricular activities. In this sense, we aimed to conduct a complex research aimed at investigating both students and parents of their attitude towards school, in general, and towards learning, in particular

### **Theoretical framework**

As an acquired psychic disposition having a social character, the attitude is a manifestation of the position in relation to the objects, actions and social phenomena that we perceive and evaluate, being marked almost exclusively by the sociocultural environment. This influence takes place both on group and individual attitudes<sup>1</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> P. Iuț, *Psihologie socială și sociopsihologie. Teme recurente și noi vizțiuni*. Iași, Editura Polirom., 2009.

„Attitudes Towards School and Learning. Analytical Perspectives of Students and their Parents,” *Astra Salvensis*, IX (2021), no. 18, p. 47-60.

The attitude towards learning involves motivational aspects and is manifested by the interest for this activity. The underlying reasons, the vision of how effective learning should be produced, as well as the trust in teachers are strong predictors for students' school performance and personal development<sup>23</sup>, increasing their self-efficacy<sup>4</sup>, self-determination, intrinsic motivation, psycho-cognitive development and well-being<sup>5</sup>. Therefore, these were the predictors, on which we built our general premise from which we started this research.

During the school years, various complex elements of psychological anchoring can determine success or failure through a transactional process that takes place during learning. In understanding these influencing factors, the interactive or transactional model was developed<sup>6</sup> which explained how the interactions between the individual and his environment take place, in response to the situations in which he is engaged. Extrapolating the model to the topic of this study, it can be stated that students participate as active agents in school, influencing the learning process through various emotional, cognitive and behavioral strategies, depending on their abilities to apply these strategies. This process involves rationalizations and emotions, which will shape the motivations and generate attitudes towards school (as a psychosocial environment) and learning (as an individual activity, but mediated by the interaction with the other actors of the educational system / environment), outlining a class climate<sup>7</sup>. As a background of the research, this study provides an image of this climate.

## **Research methodology**

### **The purpose of the study**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the attitude of students and their parents towards school and learning. Based on the results obtained, we will later develop a series of techniques to optimize the positive engagement of students in the school environment and to improve the educational climate - in the classroom activities - on various dimensions

---

<sup>2</sup> P. Senge, *Școli care învață. A cincea disciplină aplicată în educație*, București, Editura Trei, 2016.

<sup>3</sup> D. Andronache, M. Bocoș, V. Bocoș, C. Macri, „Attitude towards teaching profession,” in *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 142 (2014), p. 628-632. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.07.677>.

<sup>4</sup> A. Bandura, *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*, New York, Freeman, 1997.

<sup>5</sup> E. L. Deci, R. M. Ryan, „Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being,” in *American Psychologist*, 55 (2000), p. 68-78.

<sup>6</sup> R. S. Lazarus, S. Folkman, *Stress, Appraisal and Coping*, New York, Springer, 1984.

<sup>7</sup> A. E. Woolfolk, *Educational Psychology*, 5<sup>th</sup> edition, Ma: Allyn and Bacon, 1993.

(cohesion, communication), aiming to promote performance through cooperation and group competition.

**The objectives pursued by this research** were the following:

- Investigating the students' learning motivation from 4<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grade;
- Investigating the dynamics of learning motivation throughout the school years;
- Investigating the way in which parents identify and perceive their children's learning motivation;
- Investigating students' perceptions of the efficiency and attractiveness of the teaching-learning process;
- Identifying the extent to which students trust in teachers;
- Identifying the extent to which parents trust in teachers.

### Research tool

In order to be able to capture the relevant statistical trends and report the results to the assumed objectives, it was decided to apply a standardized questionnaire to as many respondents as possible. The theoretically selected sample was heterogeneous by gender, environment of residence and age category (school cycles) given the suggestions in the methodological literature in the sciences of education<sup>8</sup> anchored for the purpose of research.

Two questionnaires were used which include dichotomous Likert scales (with YES or NO answer), a variant for students and one for parents, respectively. The elaborated scale has ten items, these being constructed in such a way as to correspond to the specific objectives in order to study the dynamics of the attitude towards school and learning from the perspective of several variables. The elaborated scale has ten items, these being constructed in such a way as to correspond to the specific objectives in order to study the dynamics of the attitude towards school and learning from the perspective of several variables like: *learning motivation, perception of the degree of interactivity of teaching-learning, perception of learning difficulty, perception of learning objectives, trust in teachers*. The scale was constructed following the rigors suggested by the literature<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> L. Cohen, L. Manion, K. Morrison, *Research Methods in Education*, 2007, available at: <http://books.google.com/books?id=iYKKgtngiMC&pg=PR1&dq=Cohen+Manion,+Morrison+2007&lr>, 21. 08. 2021.

<sup>9</sup> A. Bryman, D. Cramer, *Quantitative data analysis with SPSS 14, 15 and 16: A guide for social scientists*, New York, Routledge, 2008.

„Attitudes Towards School and Learning. Analytical Perspectives of Students and their Parents,” *Astra Salvensis*, IX (2021), no. 18, p. 47-60.

### Description of the research sample

A total of 698 students and 550 parents were involved in the research, distributed according to the descriptive tables below.

### Descriptive statistics of the student sample

Out of the total number of students involved in the research, 309 (44.3%) of them were boys and 389 (55.7%) were girls. The number and their percentage are presented in the table 1:

Table 1. Distribution of the sample of students by gender

Gender	N	%
Boys	309	44,3 %
Girls	389	55,7 %
<b>Total</b>	698	100 %

Regarding the distribution by class of students in the research sample, there is a relatively uniform distribution of them (noting a higher number of students in 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, and 11<sup>th</sup> grade) according to the table 2:

Table 2. Distribution of the sample of students according to the grade

Grade	N	%
4 <sup>th</sup>	67	9,6 %
5 <sup>th</sup>	54	7,7 %
6 <sup>th</sup>	45	6,4 %
7 <sup>th</sup>	49	7,0 %
8 <sup>th</sup>	55	7,9 %
9 <sup>th</sup>	125	17,9 %
10 <sup>th</sup>	115	16,5 %
11 <sup>th</sup>	115	16,5 %
12 <sup>th</sup>	73	10,5 %

<b>Total</b>	698	100 %
--------------	-----	-------

We also considered it important, related to the pursue the research objectives, to include in the research sample both students from urban and rural areas. Their distribution is presented in the table 3:

Table 3. Distribution of the sample of students according to the area

<b>Area</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Urban	485	70 %
Rural	213	30 %
<b>Total</b>	698	100 %

### **Descriptive statistics of the sample of parents**

Regarding the sample of parents, the research aimed to involve both mothers and fathers of students, their total number being 550. Of their total number, 169 (30.7%) were fathers and 381 (69.3%) were mothers. Their distribution is presented in the table 4:

Table 4. Distribution of the sample of parents according to the gender

	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Fathers	169	30,7 %
Mothers	381	69,3 %
<b>Total</b>	550	100 %

Another variable that was considered, in the case of describing the sample of parents, was their level of education. As can be seen in the table and diagram below, most of them have secondary education - 253 (46%) and higher education - 208 (37.8%) and the fewest attended vocational school – 89 (16.2%).

„Attitudes Towards School and Learning. Analytical Perspectives of Students and their Parents,” *Astra Salvensis*, IX (2021), no. 18, p. 47-60.

Table 5. Distribution of the sample of parents according to the education level

Level of education	N	%
Secondary education	253	46 %
Vocational school	89	16,2 %
Higher education	208	37,8 %
<b>Total</b>	550	100 %

**Research findings. Descriptive, comparative and inferential analysis  
Learning motivation (generated by ambition, desire to achieve good school results and intrinsic or extrinsic needs)**

Regarding the learning motivation, the data analysis was done for all the educational levels, in general, but also for each level. In this case we followed both perspectives: students and parents.

In a general data analysis, it is observed that for the fewest students, respectively only for 215 (i.e. for 30.8%) the learning activity is motivating and for a very large number, it is not.

Analyzing the same variable, we were interested to evaluate the parents' perception about their children's learning motivation. Thus, after the analysis it is observed that the data are significantly different from the statistical point of view. So, there is a very large discrepancy between the vision of students and their parents. Therefore, 410 (i.e. 74.5%) of the parents involved in the research notice that their children's motivation is increased and only 140 (respectively 25.5%) consider the opposite.

Comparing students' answers with those of their parents, it becomes extremely obvious that parents overestimate their children' learning motivation, which may also show that they do not know well enough the reasons why their children learn.

To identify if there is a statistically significant difference between students' and parents' opinions, we used the *t* test. The results of this test are set out below:

Table 6: *T* test for the differences between the sample of students and the sample of parents regarding the learning motivation

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Variable: Learning motivation	Equal variances assumed	2,572	,111	-4,076	548	,000	-1,2728	,21022
	Equal variances not assumed			-4,062	543,29	,000	-1,2728	,21070

According to Table 6, it is found that after questioning the two groups involved in the research (students and parents), the average results of parents' perception of their children's learning motivation are significantly higher ( $t = - 4.076$ ,  $df = 548$ ,  $p$  bidirectional = 0.000) compared to the average results of students' self-perception.

Another aspect of the research was to identify the evolution of learning motivation over the study years. Analyzing the obtained data, it was found that if in the 8th grade the percentage of students who self-assess as motivated for learning was 88%, this percentage decreased gradually until the 5th grade, where only 52% were self-assessed as learning motivated. We present the obtained data obtained the table below:

Table. 8: The evolution of learning motivation from the 4<sup>th</sup> to the 12<sup>th</sup> grade

Grade	Learning motivation
-------	---------------------

„Attitudes Towards School and Learning. Analytical Perspectives of Students and their Parents,” *Astra Salvensis*, IX (2021), no. 18, p. 47-60.

	<b>YES Answers</b>	<b>NO Answers</b>	<b>Total %</b>
4 <sup>th</sup>	88%	12%	100%
5 <sup>th</sup>	76%	24%	100%
6 <sup>th</sup>	76%	24%	100%
7 <sup>th</sup>	73%	27%	100%
8 <sup>th</sup>	84%	16%	100%
9 <sup>th</sup>	54%	46%	100%
10 <sup>th</sup>	46%	44%	100%
11 <sup>th</sup>	48%	42%	100%
12 <sup>th</sup>	52%	48%	100%

As can be seen in table 8, it is noted with concern that students' learning motivation decreases during the study years. Also, a deep data analysis, shows that there is a slight increase of learning motivation in the grade where students have national exams, respectively in the 8th and 12th grade. This increase cannot be considered a significant one and could be explained by the imminence of the exams. So, we can conclude that students do not learn mainly to develop their skills but to pass the exams or. So, for most of the students the purpose of learning is not learning itself, but assessment.

As we presented above, in general parents consider their children more motivated to learn than they are, but even in this case, this perception is changing over the years of study.

From the presented data, during the school years there is a decreased value of the learning motivation both from the parents' perspective and from the students' perspective. It is possible that in these years of school parents are seeing that students make an effort in learning in the perspective of national exams (8<sup>th</sup> grade for national testing and 12<sup>st</sup> grade for Baccalaureate).

### **Learning dynamics**



Our aim was to study the extent to which students' activation, interactivity and dynamism are ensured as learning facilitators, therefore we analyzed the answers offered by the students, regarding school boredom, ease of learning and purpose of learning.

Analyzing the data obtained it is found that most students consider that the learning activities in which they are involved are not dynamic and interactive. Thus, 63% of all students consider that the teaching-learning activities tend to be boring and less challenging for them. We also consider that it is possible that because of this aspect, the learning activity is perceived as difficult (58% of students gave this answer) and without concrete purpose (71% of students referred to this issue).

Table 9: Perception of learning

Variable	Percent
Teaching-learning activities are boring and little challenging	63%
Learning is hard	58%
Learning at school lacks concrete goals	71%

Therefore, considering the data described above as well as their corroboration, it is pertinent to state that students consider learning as difficult/ hard because they are not involved in interactive activities, which facilitate learning in a pleasant and attractive way. Thus, the data obtained on the Pearson correlations established between the variables *learning interactivity*, *learning difficulty* and *learning finality* are presented as follows:

Table no. 10: Pearson correlations between the variables learning interactivity, learning difficulty and learning finality

Variables		Learning interactivity	Learning difficulty	Learning finality
Learning interactivity	Pearson Correlation	1	-0,822**	0,765**
	Sig. (2-		,000	,000

	tailed)			
	N	698	698	698
Learning difficulty	Pearson Correlation	-0,822**	1	0,125**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000		,000
	N	698	698	698
Learning finality	Pearson Correlation	0,765**	0,125****	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	,000	
	N	698	698	698
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).				

It can be seen from the analysis of these correlations that between all three variables, there are statistically significant associations both positive and negative ( $p < 0.001$ ). Therefore, analyzing the Pearson correlation table presented in Table 10, we can formulate the following conclusions:

- The level of learning interactivity correlates negatively, statistically significant, with the perception of learning difficulty at a  $r = -0.82$ . Therefore, *the better the interactivity in learning, the less difficult it is for students to learn.*
- The level of learning interactivity correlates positively, statistically significant, with the perception of the purpose of learning at an  $r = 0.76$ . Therefore, *the better interactivity in learning is ensured, the more students are aware of the purpose / purpose of their own learning.*
- The level of perception of learning difficulty does not correlate significantly with the way students perceive the finality of learning ( $r = 0.12$ ). Therefore, it cannot be said that the perceived difficulty of learning influences in one way or another the awareness of students of the purpose of learning. In other words, students can

be aware of the purpose of their learning regardless of the degree of difficulty of the learning tasks.

### The learning climate in the classroom

Another aspect that we considered relevant for investigating students' attitudes towards learning was the learning climate in the classroom, measured from the perspective of students' trust in their teachers. This aspect was analyzed through the perspective of two dimensions:

1. the trust to ask for help when they have a learning problem
2. trust to seek help when they have a problem in general.

Thus, according to the data obtained, 56% of students trust their teachers and can openly express their difficulties in learning. Therefore, it can be considered that these students ask for feedback from the teacher and he can help them in regulating their learning. On the other hand, in terms of the trust that students show in their teachers when it comes to other categories of problems, with the exception of learning (problems with colleagues, problems with parents, disappointments, etc.) here the trust is significantly lower (37%). To highlight the data obtained, we present it in the table 11:

Table 11: Students' trust in teachers

Variable	Percent
Trust - exposure to learning problems	56%
Trust - exposure issues in general	37%

Given that there is a significant percentage of students who declare that they trust their teachers and ask for their support when they have learning difficulties, we can conclude that in most cases *teachers create an optimal climate for classroom learning, thus generating an climate of trust*. However, it cannot go unnoticed that students do not show a general trust in their teachers, who only declare in a proportion of 37% that they talk to teachers about other types of problems they have, like problems with classmates or various problems with parents. This fact leads us to note that *the role of teacher as a counselor is quite low and the possible crisis situations of students may remain unknown to most teachers*.

Out of the desire to identify whether there is a connection between the two dimensions of the manifestation of teacher trust, we resorted in this

„Attitudes Towards School and Learning. Analytical Perspectives of Students and their Parents,” *Astra Salvensis*, IX (2021), no. 18, p. 47-60.

case to the calculation of the Pearson correlation index. The data obtained for this purpose are presented in the table 12:

Table 12: Pearson correlations between the dimensions of trust in teacher

		<b>Trust – exposure to learning problems</b>	<b>Trust – exposure issues in general</b>
<b>Trust – exposure to learning problems</b>	Pearson Correlation	1	0,783**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,000
	N	698	698
<b>Trust – exposure issues in general</b>	Pearson Correlation	0,783**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	
	N	698	698

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

There is a significant positive correlation between the two variables ( $p < 0.001$ ). Therefore, according to the Pearson correlation index, we can conclude that the level of trust that students have in their teachers, in terms of exposing learning problems, correlates significantly positively with the level of trust in terms of exposing problems in general to a  $r = 0.78$ . In other words, *the more a teacher will ensure a climate of trust in such a way that students are exposed to learning difficulties, the more the general trust of students in their teachers will increase, thus having the courage to ask for help for other types of problems, not only for learning.* Given this, we encourage teachers to create the optimal framework and climate of general trust in and out of the classroom.

We were also interested in identifying the dynamics of students' trust in their teachers (from the perspective of the two dimensions) over the years of study. We noticed that the trust in teachers decreases as the years of study pass. The biggest drop occurs during high school. If in the 4th grade the trust in teachers is very high (95% in the learning dimension and 80% in

the general dimension) it decreases during the gymnasium (where it is relatively balanced at 60% in the learning dimension and 50% in the general dimension ) and decreases even more throughout high school reaching an average of 31.5% (41% in the learning dimension and 22% in the general dimension).

Given that the trust in teachers is an important aspect from the perspective of parents, the research collected data in this regard as well. Following the analysis of the parents' answers, it was found that they, compared to the students, have a significantly lower trust in teachers, both from the perspective of solving learning problems and from the perspective of solving problems in general. Also, in the case of parents, the level of trust decreases during the school years.

Therefore, the conclusion that emerges from the analysis is easy to formulate *parents have less trust in teachers compared to students*. Beyond the fact that this conclusion can be easily formulated, in our opinion the low trust of parents in teachers is an important alarm signal and schools must identify the fastest and most effective strategies to develop better collaboration with parents of students and so to increase their trust in those who take care of their children's education.

### **Conclusions**

According to the statistical data presented and analyzed above, the following research conclusions can be formulated:

- Students' learning motivation is low, and it is noted with concern that it is further decreased during the study years;
- Students do not learn mainly to develop their own skills but, to pass the exams;
- Parents overestimate their children's learning motivation which may even show that they do not know enough why their children are learning;
- Students consider learning to be difficult because they are not involved in an interactive teaching process;
- The better is the interactivity of teaching, the easier is for students to realize the purpose of their own learning;
- The role of teacher as a counselor is quite low and the difficulties of students may remain unknown to most teachers;
- If teachers will create for students a climate of trust, students will expose their learning difficulties, the trust and the courage will be increased;
- Students' trust in teachers decreases with the school years;

„Attitudes Towards School and Learning. Analytical Perspectives of Students and their Parents,” *Astra Salvensis*, IX (2021), no. 18, p. 47-60.

- Parents have less trust in teachers compared to students.

Therefore, several issues can be identified regarding the attitude that students and their parents had towards school and learning. We consider that each school must be aware of these issues and identify the most effective, relevant and functional strategies in the short, medium and long term to optimize the relationship with students and their parents, in fact to facilitate the cognitive and emotional-emotional development of the students.