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TEACHERS' LEADERSHIP STYLE IN THE CLASSROOM AND THEIR IMPACT UPON HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

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Abstract: *The teacher, in the educational process, plans, organises and controls students' activity and thus he / she appears in the leader's position. Irrespective of the concrete content of the manager teacher's activity his / her work falls within one of the following activities; information processing, engaging in interpersonal relations and decision making.*

Research purpose: investigating students' perceptions about the impact of teachers' leadership styles in the classroom upon their psychosocial development.

Research objectives: 1. Analysis of the teacher-student relationship in relation with the way the students feel these interactions; 3. Exploration of the pupils' opinions regarding the characteristics of the desired teacher.

Research hypotheses: 1. If teacher-students relations are based on co-operation and involvement then the students' level of satisfaction towards the activity performed; 2. If teacher-students relations are based on encouragement in participation, students get the feeling they are in control of the activities they are about to deploy; 3. If the teacher exhibits communication and relationing skills, and has also vocation, in the vision of pupils he / she is the "ideal" teacher.

Methodology: The method of research was the opinion poll inquiry. The sample was made of 300 high school students.

Conclusions: The way in which a teacher organises his / her relations with the students is the most important ingredient for the subject assimilation; suggesting lifelong training programmes for the teachers with modules of pupil-focused learning; training teachers in pupil-focused counselling, modules of personal development destined to teachers.

Keywords: *leadership style, teacher-student relationship, student-focused learning.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The teacher, in the educational process, plans, organises and controls the students' activity and consequently appears in the position of leader [2]. Studies conducted in the field of class management present the teacher's authoritative, democratic and *laissez-faire* leadership styles.

The authoritative leadership style means that the leader (teacher) makes all the decisions about the organisation of the group and the activities performed in the group. He or she does not share with the students the overall plan of activities, nor the criteria for assessing individual or group performances. His / her evolution supposes keeping outside the group's concrete activities and exercising a strict control.

The democratic leadership style. The democratic leader does not participate either too much in the activities. Nevertheless, he / she avoids to make decisions alone, and invites the group to participate in setting the organisation manner. The students are offered the opportunity to choose every time, their advice is sought regarding the task fulfilment: the leader suggests at least two alternatives, letting them decide themselves. The leader presents the common criteria of assessment and criticism he or she observes together with the students; he or she acts, in a way, like a member of the group.

The laissez-faire leadership style means a passive role of the leader, who limits his or her participation as much as possible, leaving the students to take all initiatives. He / she exhibits a friendly attitude but by all he or she does suggests indifference and non-involvement: he / she hesitates when put in the situation of offering suggestions and constantly avoids any evaluation of participants ideas or behaviours.

Irrespective of the concrete content of the manager teacher's work, his or her *actions* fall within one of the following: processing information, engaging interpersonal relations and decision making [1].

The educator's roles are associated with the personal values and attitudes incorporated in the structure of each student's personality. The students address to teachers to get advice only if the latter are close enough to students, if the former trust to be understood and well advised. When they do it, students do not address to any teachers but only to those who *understand them*. Students wish to have closer relations with teachers in order to find in the latter moral support whenever they need it [3].

The purpose of the research is to investigate the students' perceptions related to the impact of teachers' leadership styles in the classroom upon their psychosocial development. The objectives are, on the one hand, to analyse the teacher-student relationship in relation with the way students feel these interactions, and on the other hand to explore the students' opinions on the characteristics of the desired teacher.

2. RESEARCH HYPOTHESES AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research hypotheses.

1. If teacher-student relations are based on co-operation and involvement, the students' satisfaction level towards the activities increases.
2. If teacher-student relations are based on participation encouragement, the students get the feeling they are in control of the activities they are to perform.
3. If the teacher exhibits and proves communication and relationing skills and also has vocation, he / she is the "ideal" teacher.

2.2 Methodology. The research was conducted by a study of the teachers' leadership styles in the classroom, performed from the perspective of the analyses of teacher-student relation and teachers' characteristics, monitoring the way these interactions influence students' attitudes and behaviours [4].

For formulating hypotheses, the following criteria were set for the two first hypotheses, the level of satisfaction and the degree of control, whereas for the third hypothesis the empathic capacity and the pedagogic talent.

The research method was the opinion poll inquiry. The Questionnaire "**Teachers' leadership style in the classroom**" comprises 6 items for which there are 3 answering options: a) to high extent; b) to medium extent; c) to low extent; and 1 item with free answer asking the students to list three essential characteristics of the "ideal teacher". The subjects who answered the questionnaire were 300 high school students, enrolled in technical training in an industrial high school of Reșița.

2.3 Questionnaire structure. For the first 6 questions there are 3 answering variants. Choose the answer that best corresponds to your opinion: a) to high extent; b) to medium extent; c) to low extent.

Questions:

1. Do you appreciate that the activity carried on in the classroom under the teacher's co-ordination offer you satisfactions?
2. Are there co-operation relations among the classmates, between them and the teachers in the fulfilment of the tasks?



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3. During the activities performed in the classroom, are students encouraged and objectively appreciated by their classmates and teachers?

4. Are the class students mutually integrated and accepted in order to solve learning tasks together?

5. Do classmates prove to be capable of interpersonal awareness and communication?

6. Are you allowed to express your own opinions and to take initiative?

Question no.7 asks you to list three essential characteristics defining, in your opinion, the portrait of the "ideal teacher". Please select form among the following: to be talkative, friendly and close to students, to be sympathetic and indulgent with students, to be fair, to be patient and calm; to be a good teacher, to teach well; to be well trained and qualified; to be kind; to give good marks, other: to be dignified, to be demanding and strict.

7. What should an "ideal teacher" be like?

3. PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION OF THE RESEARCH RESULTS

3.1 Presentation of results

- Question no.1: the students appreciate that the activities of school learning deployed in the classroom under the teachers' co-ordination create satisfactions as follows: a) to high extent 10%; b) to medium extent 76.66%; c) to low extent 13.34%.

- Question no.2: the students appreciate there are co-operation relations for fulfilling the work tasks among the students, between them and the teachers: a) to high extent 40%; b) to medium extent 56.66%; c) to low extent 3.34%.

- Question no.3: during the work activities realised in the classroom, students are

encouraged and appreciated objectively by their colleagues and teachers: a) to high extent 16.66%; b) to medium extent 63.33%; c) to low extent 20.01%.

- Question no.4: the classmates are mutually integrated and accepted in order to solve learning tasks: a) to high extent 30%; b) to medium extent 30%; c) to low extent 40%.

- Question no.5: the classmates prove to be capable of interpersonal awareness and communication: a) to high extent 13.33%; b) to medium extent 60%; c) to low extent 26.67%.

- Question no.6: the students are allowed to express their own opinions and to take initiative: a) to high extent 33.33%; b) to medium extent 30%; c) to low extent 36.67%.

We remark that in questions 1,2,3,5 the weight of the answers "to medium extent" is above 50%. In questions 4 and 6 the percentages of the answers "to high extent", "to medium extent" and "to low extent" are close.

The answers to question 7 "What should an ideal teacher be?" describe the students' perception as regards the portrait of the "ideal teacher".

According to the criterion "empathic capacity" the appreciation of answers is the following; 18.88% - to be talkative, friendly and close to students; 15.55% - to be sympathetic and indulgent with students

According to the criterion "pedagogic talent": 13.33% - to be a good teacher, to teach well; 7.77% - to be well trained and qualified.

3.2 Interpretation of results.

3.2.1. If we analyse the teacher-students relationship, according to the criteria students' "satisfaction level" toward the classroom activities under the teacher's guidance, considering the answers to questions 1,2,3,5 the following interpretations result:

1. It is encouraging that the students exhibit opening for awareness and communication at the level of the class to a 60% extent, which grants them satisfaction in their work (over 70%). We may say that the students are aware “to medium extent” of the necessity to know each other and to communicate and appreciate that their personal needs can be satisfied by the activities carried on in the classroom under the guidance of teachers.

2. We should also appreciate that the students consider in a percentage of over 50%, that their relations with the teachers are relations of co-operation in the fulfilment of task and not relations of imposing under the dominance of teachers’ power. Moreover, we found that at the level of the class group there are co-operation relations among the members.

3. What is to be praised is that teachers use techniques of student motivation and the latter feel encouraged and appreciated to a “medium extent” of over 60%.

3.2.2. When we analyse the teacher-student relations according to the criterion “students’ degree of control” over the activities they are to deploy, we may identify the following appreciations:

1. In Question 4 “Are the classmates mutually integrated and accepted in order to solve learning tasks together?” the percentages of appreciations are close, but answer c) stands out, which leads us to the following interpretations:

- We may say that the cohesion of the teacher-student group is not fully reached, either because there are teachers who don’t show interest and don’t get involved in the group dynamics, do not grant importance to becoming aware of the group and individual psychology, and at the level of the students’ group, they do not accept one another; or there are authoritative teachers whose work style is to impose themselves and not to co-operate with students, or there are teachers who refuse or are reluctant to adopt the new work strategies aiming at integrating and involving all students in the activities, new teaching work (in small groups) and relation-setting at the group level;

- Students do not feel integrated and responsible, thus motivated, which would offer them the possibility to be more persevering and consequently to master certain aspects of the classroom activities.

2. In Question 6 “Are you allowed to express your own opinions and take initiative?” we remark a closeness of answers’ weight, which leads us to the following interpretation:

- If we consider the weight of each individual answer, we may remark that the answer with the most important weight (36.67%) is that stating that students are not allowed to express their opinions and to take initiative. Students appreciate in fact that they are not understood by teachers and in fact their suggestions would not count; they are not aware that they actually express their individual satisfactions and not their objective needs, teachers mediate between the group needs and the goals to reach; teachers attempt at keeping a rigorous control, teachers who are reluctant to other people’s opinions, including those of students, are teachers resisting change who do not adopt a consulting, democratic style.

3.2.3. What is really important for students is that teachers first of all communicate with them, understand them, but also that they understand the teachers’ explanations grace to the latter’s pedagogic talent they prove in the classroom.

3. CONCLUSIONS & ACKNOWLEDGMENT

At the level of the class, we witness, in different contexts, different manifestations of the authoritative, democratic and *laissez-faire* teachers’ leadership styles. We may not claim that one style is predominant in all aspects, because after the analysis of the teacher-student relations, when it comes to the criterion “degree of control” we may draw the following conclusion: by choosing answer c) to questions 4 and 6 the students show they feel constrained by teachers’ authority (the authoritative style), and they would wish to feel the cohesion of the teacher-students group, to feel encouraged and motivated to participate in future actions, to have some



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control over their actions. We may affirm that this perception, at the level of students' personality, is found also at the level of individuals and groups of any social organisation.

As regards the criterion "level of satisfaction" towards the activity performed, the conclusion is that the answers to questions 1,2,3,5 definitely, but also answers to questions 4 and 6 to a medium extent lead us to conclude that teachers adopt a democratic style by co-operating with students, by objective assessment, communication developed, students' involvement. At the same time, if we analyse the answers to questions 4 and 6, i.e. that to a low extent they feel integrated in activity and to high extent they express their opinions, we may draw the conclusion that there are teachers who do not get involved, are not interested in changing anything, are indifferent to everything, are content to be left to do their job teaching, the style adopted by them being "*laissez-faire*".

As for the identification of students' perceptions about teacher-student relations developed in the classroom, on the whole we found that students manifest the tendency to appreciate the relations developed so far.

The analysis of the characteristics of the "ideal teacher" in students' opinion lead us to

the following conclusion: the way a teacher conduct his or her relations with them is the most important element, as the most relevant attributes of the ideal teacher are in their perspective communication, indulgence, friendly attitude, fairness or patience in the teacher/student relationship. Thus, the portrait of the ideal teacher in the students' vision is focused on the teachers' communication and relationing skills, on his or her attitude (patience, calmness) but also on the quality of explanations and teaching (pedagogic talent).

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