

IMPLICATIONS OF PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AT THE LEVEL OF EDUCATIONAL ACT

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ABSTRACT

In order to perform in the 21st century society, today's student must manifest as a result of the learning experiences of the school organization specific behaviors and attitudes of a complex set of abilities to adapt to the rapid changes in the labor market, diversity and richness of offers from different areas of interest. These abilities relate to self-knowledge, making decisions for a healthy lifestyle and a harmonious cohabitation. The paper aims to capture the way in which the abilities in the sphere of personal development are perceived and developed by the students in the gymnasium cycle, as well as to present the issue of the integration of personal development in the actual education of students, its implementation being a complex process between opportunities and constraints, based on the articulation of the interventions of all the actors involved. The methodology consisted of the rigorous analysis of the literature and the empirical research, the focus group followed by the questionnaire survey, the main conclusions drawn from the study referring to the low degree of understanding by the students of the role of the personal development activities in the school and to the absence of school culture for the collaborative design and implementation of personal development activities in the school organization.

KEYWORDS: *abilities, curricular approach, personal development, school organization.*

1. INTRODUCTION

More than any other institution, with the exception of the family, the school has the ability to shape and cultivate the abilities, welfare and individual potential of the younger generation. This essential focus of the school, empowering young people to develop their potential as a whole, can be sustained by implementing personal development at the level of the educational act, as Buscaglia L. emphasized "education should be the process that helps everyone and discover uniqueness, teach him how to develop that uniqueness and then show him how to share it"(Buscaglia, 1996). Considered from this perspective, the school organization is the most favorable context for personal development. By the specificity and complexity of social interactions, the school organization strongly shapes the personal development of students, involving processes of managing emotions, values, decision making, cultivating positive attitudes towards oneself, processes of developing harmonious relationships with others in and outside the classroom, a series of life abilities to help them cope with the challenges of everyday life. The school organization proves credibility and viability if it succeeds in developing those abilities that reduce the risks and challenges of contemporary societies. So, by its very nature, this environment should respond to guiding principles that can guarantee the success of focused interventions on personal development.

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2. PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT - A MULTIDIMENSIONAL APPROACH

The concept of personal development cannot be attributed to a single founder, but to a flow of thought, fueled over time by several influences, theories and experimental approaches that can be claimed in the field of *psychology, philosophy and sociology*. A delimitation and definition of the concept of personal development leads us to origins, this concept finding its roots in philosophy, more precisely in ancient philosophy, but also in modern psychology, especially humanistic and positive psychology (Jaotombo, 2009, p. 30).

While the *philosophical perspective* captures the concept of personal development, originally evoked by Aristotle in 383 BC, as being based on a fundamental principle of the human being to develop his virtues and to ensure his well-being (Aristotel, 2007), *the psychological perspective* captures the most definitions of personal development, depending on the different approaches and currents of thought. On the one hand, *humanist psychology* associates personal development with the concept of self-actualization, a process by which the individual's potential develops in concert with self-perception and personal experience (Jaotombo, 2012, pp. 52-53), on the other hand, *positive psychology* describes it as the ability of individuals to experience positive emotions and to develop positive traits (Jaotombo, 2012, pp. 76-78), and *psychoanalytic psychology* associates it with the concept of individualization, an approach that leads the individual to differentiate himself, to define his uniqueness (Jaotombo, 2012, pp. 56-57).

The sociological perspective captures personal development as a phenomenon that is booming in the contemporary social landscape, which is manifested through a wide range of products and services, including "individual consultations, collective courses, workshops, magazines, websites, wellness" products (Requilé, 2008) and takes the form of a communication, socialization way, facilitated by a specific language, with a motivational aspect in which the formulas "how to" or "steps" to "happiness, success, self-knowledge, of their own potential..." have become commonplace, even natural.

Starting in the 1970s, especially from the emergence of human-based trends and humanist psychology, personal development has been integrated and practiced in a number of areas, such as management and education. Viewed from *the perspectives of management sciences*, personal development can be defined as a human resource management action aimed at increasing the abilities of employees but also improving the quality of life and the relational climate at the workplace. Beyond the objective methods and tools used by the manager, different personal development practices emerged, representing a more human and personal approach to the organization, being a first step in its development as performance is measured by the abilities of its employees. Personal development practices are frequently implemented in management, for example, in initial and ongoing training of managers, in the development of management and leadership abilities (Hée, 2006; Whetten & Cameron, 2011).

Starting from the premise that personal development rhymes with self-consciousness, self-esteem, interpersonal abilities, communication abilities, motivational abilities or mobilization abilities (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012) we focus on the core of their formation, to capture *a brief evolution of the concept of personal development introduced into the educational act* both at the curriculum level and in programs implemented and recognized either in specialized articles or in the educational sphere as good practices.

From the point of view of Mitrofan L., personal development has seen a remarkable evolution in the past decades becoming "a true permanent social and educational policy for promoting professional, social and psychological success" (Mitrofan, 2007). Personal development is dynamic, which implies growth, becoming, training, an idea that perfectly resonates with the modern approaches in the field of education in the last decades: a student-centered education and the increase of its abilities by capitalizing on the individual potential as a result of learning experiences. This idea will be developed in the following sections of the paper.

3. PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND NEW EDUCATIONAL PARADIGM

Education should provide rich opportunities and experiences in diverse learning contexts to ensure the full development of the talents and potential of each child. There is a consensus among education and labor market actors on the need to develop abilities in the areas of: socio-emotional development, learning or career management at the students' level, which they can access when they make their way to active life. From this perspective, education is a process of empowerment, continuous and autonomous, which should help students discover and value their potential.

In the UNESCO Report of the International Commission on Education in the 21st Century, a new educational paradigm, based on four pillars: learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together, learning to be, in which the dimensions of the psychic life of the individual are involved: intellectual / academic, professional, social and personal. While learning to know has the emphasis on acquiring knowledge tools and involves learning how to learn, by exercising the power of concentration, memory and thinking, learning to do make the transition from skill to competence and signifying the accumulation of some instrumental abilities, specialization for a profession. To learn the rules of coexistence, to learn to live together, to co-operate with others, to participate in human activities and to enforce the rules that ensure life in the community (Delors, 2000, pp. 69-72) and learn to be, emphasizes the development of man "in the richness of his personality, the complexity of his forms of expression and his various choices - as an individual, family member and community, a citizen and producer, the creator of new techniques or an innovative spirit" (Delors, 2000, pp.77-78).

From *the perspective of personal development education*, the emphasis is on the pillar *to learn to be*, to allow students to develop at the highest psychological, social, emotional and physical potential, in correlation with the pillar *to learn to live together with others* for the development of socio-emotional and interpersonal abilities, learning and career management. Here is the concern of the school and the educational system for the implementation in the educational act of applicative principles to emphasize the uniqueness, individuality, the need for self-knowledge, effective communication, emotion management, confidence in the potential of each student and its positive change ability, the role of self- as well as conditions necessary for personal development, in order to contribute to the realization of the student's personal aspirations and dreams.

4. INTEGRATING PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT IN EDUCATIONAL ACT – INTERNATIONAL GUIDELINES

The concern to identify effective didactic strategies for personal development is not necessarily a recent one, but rather a permanent one. The analysis of the specialized literature shows that so far, many programs and disciplines have been developed around the world to redefine how to approach students' training for life, who have tried to develop different abilities in the sphere of personal development in order to ensure them example: an improvement in academic performance, a diminishing of emotional and conflict issues, an increase in well-being and active involvement in the community.

4.1 International educational practices reflected in curriculum and curricula

The introduction of personal development into the curriculum has been, over time, a priority of many educational departments around the world: Ontario Ministry of Education (1985), Curriculum Council (1998), New South Wales (2002), Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2003), Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (2007), Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (2017), as described in Table 1., personal

development receiving different names, "Personal Management, Life Management and Management personal life" (Goldspink, 2007, p.2).

Table 1. Reflection of the concept of personal development in the curriculum

Country / Issuing institution	Short description / Characteristics
Canada Ontario Ministry of Education and Training	The curriculum for personal development provides students with the opportunity to acquire the necessary knowledge and abilities to manage their private lives so that they are productive, satisfactory and meaningful without too much stress (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1985). Students are taught life abilities, for example, decision-making, setting goals, communication, time management, organization, problem solving, conflict resolution and interpersonal abilities (Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, 1998).
US Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education	The implemented program includes a series of learning experiences for the personal development of students. The main directions of development include: the functions and interdependence of social systems and management abilities and well-being of life. This is part of the five priority axes that make up the curriculum on physical education and health.
Australia, New South Wales (NSW) Board of Studies Sydney	Were developed the curriculum K-6 (1999a), 7-10 (2003) and Stage 6 (1999c) of government schools for Personal Development, Health and Physical Education. The purpose of this school program was to develop in each student the knowledge and understanding, abilities and values, as well as the attitudes necessary to lead a healthy, active and fulfilled life. In this regard, the curriculum provided that students should take a responsible and productive role in society (NSW, 1999a). The personal development program, physical education and health has an important contribution to NSW's primary curriculum, which directly targets the development of the entire personality, incorporates all aspects of human development, welfare, social, mental, physical and spiritual development (NSW, 1999a, 1999c, 2003).
Western Australia Curriculum Council	The National Curriculum launched in 1998 consisted of a comprehensive statement and other statements regarding the expected learning outcomes for all students from the kindergarten until the age of 12. Four of the thirteen learning outcomes specified in the Curriculum are related to personal development: (6) addresses consequences, develops thinking, recognizes opportunities and potential, and is ready to test options; (11) harness and implement practices that promote personal development and well-being; (12) are self-motivated and confident in approaching the learning process and are able to work individually and in collaboration; (13) recognize that everyone has the right to feel valued, while understanding their own rights and obligations and responsible conduct. (Curriculum Council, 1998).

<p>United Kingdom Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment</p>	<p><i>Personal Development and Mutual Understanding Guidance Book (2007)</i> focuses on encouraging each student to become personally, emotionally and socially effective. It also encourages them to lead a healthy, secure and fulfilled life, and to become citizens who are confident, independent and responsible, making informed and responsible choices and decisions throughout their lives, taking place in two stages - key stages - Development:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Personal understanding and health</i>: self-esteem, self-confidence and the way they develop as individuals; managing a series of feelings and emotions as well as the feelings and emotions of others; effective learning strategies; health and well-being; • <i>Mutual understanding in the local community and expanded</i>: initiating, developing and supporting mutually satisfactory relations; human rights and social responsibility; causes of conflict and appropriate responses; valuation and celebration of differences and cultural diversity; the active and significant role played in community life and concern for the environment. <p>(Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment, 2007, http://ccea.org.uk/sites/default/files/docs/curriculum/area_of_learning/pdmu/ks2_statutory_requirements.pdf).</p>
<p>South Australia - <i>Melbourne</i> Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority</p>	<p><i>Curriculum Planning Guide: Personal Development Abilities Strand</i> is supported by the following principles: student-centered approaches and decision-making on program design, deployment and evaluation; experimental learning opportunities; designing a program that is highly relevant to strengths and personal experiences and responds to different needs; programs that focus on strength, confidence and self-worth; learning environments that strengthen ties with the community; designing learning programs that allow students a wide choice of options. (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2017, https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Documents/vcal/currplanguidepersdev.pdf p. 3) Personal development structures are designed to develop: self-awareness, improving health and well-being, commitment to personal goals, social and community awareness, civic and civic responsibility. (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2017, https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Documents/vcal/currplanguidepersdev.pdf, p.12).</p>

Source: adapted from Goldspink (2007), pp. 2- 4;

http://ccea.org.uk/sites/default/files/docs/curriculum/area_of_learning/pdmu/ks2_statutory_requirements.pdf & <https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Documents/vcal/currplanguidepersdev.pdf>

4.2 Curricular approach to personal development in Romania

Compared to the international educational systems where students are often involved in personal development programs in our country, this type of program is still unusual for some teachers and students. The reality of the traditional educational system in Romania is mainly aimed at developing the cognitive dimension of students' personality and neglecting the social, emotional and personal aspect. Referring to the implementation of personal development, Professor Popescu

M. emphasized that the Romanian school should include those "disciplines that, beyond the cognitive input, bring organic coherence to the expression of personality", the school becomes "a creative platform of knowledge, integrity and experience "and provide opportunities for students to develop " the language of their own personality"(Popescu, 2015).

In order to support the student's personal development, personal potential, personal talents and abilities, aimed at improving the quality of life and adapting to the current society, a number of government experts and professional associations have developed documents centered on promoting these types of abilities and personal development, starting with the early stages of education.

At pre-school level, referring to personal development, in 2008, the Ministry of Education, Research and Youth, together with the Project Management Unit for Preuniversity Education, propose a curriculum for early education (3-6/7 years) in force and present. It stipulates among other things that the purpose of pre-school education is the development by each child of their own identity, autonomy, positive self-image, ability to interact with those around them, coordinates that can be found in the Fundamental Principles on early childhood learning and development between birth and 7 years, a public policy document produced by the ministry together with UNICEF Romania (UNICEF, 2007).

After 6/7 years of age, with the child's entry into the school organization, in the national context, personal development was promoted to the formal curriculum through the curricular area Counseling and Guidance, through a modularly designed program: Self-knowledge and Personal Development; Communication and social abilities; Information Management and Learning; Career planning and lifestyle quality. These five modules are found every year (MEC, 2006). Starting with the 2012-2013 school year in the new framework plan for the Fundamental Acquisitions for the preparatory grade, 1st and 2nd grades, the Personal Development discipline, which is part of the curricular area Counseling and Guidance, was introduced. Fundamental acquisitions included the following areas of development: Emotional Development, Social Development, Specific Issues of Small School Teaching, Exploring Career (MEN, 2013). The goals of the Personal Development Program were to gain the self-confidence and well-being of students by: expressing interest in self- knowledge and positive attitude towards oneself, applying communication and interpersonal abilities in different situations, and expressing emotions appropriately, exploring / career development and building / maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

At the gymnasium level, the Counseling and Personal Development discipline is included in the framework plan for gymnasium education as a common discipline in the curricular area Counseling and Guidance, allotted 1 hour per week in each of the 5th and 8th grades. The curriculum ensures continuity with the issues addressed in Counseling and Personal Development, in the preparatory class and in the 1st and 2nd grades and contributes to the development of the abilities of the gymnasium student's training profile, such as the competence to learn to learn, by appreciating personal qualities for self-knowledge and career choice, the spirit of initiative and entrepreneurship; social and civic abilities, through the availability of civic participation and to valorize diversity. For grades V-VIII, the curriculum envisioned in February 2017 also provides general competencies:

- adopting positive attitudes towards oneself and a healthy and balanced lifestyle;
- harmonious relationship with others in school and extracurricular contexts;
- reflection on the motivation and effectiveness of strategies for progress in learning;
- making decisions about continuing education and career by capitalizing on information about self, education and occupations (MEN, 2017).

At the content level, topics related to self-knowledge and a healthy and balanced lifestyle (example self-perception and self-evaluation of personal resources, strategies for adaptation to stress, biological rhythm, developmental specificity), socio-emotional development (management

self- control and self-regulation, assertive communication, group co-operation, participation in class, school and community life, responsiveness to diversity), learning management (effective management of motivation, time and effort for learning in various contexts) careers (making personal decisions about education, career and lifestyle, building a personal education and career plan).

5. RESEARCH ON STUDENTS' PERCEPTION ON PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS IMPLEMENTED IN THE SCHOOL ORGANIZATION

In order to carry out the research, the analysis of the specialized literature, of the legislative documents from the international and national space was used, the focus group followed by the questionnaire survey was applied. The onset of research was marked by a qualitative tapping of what is to be measured, a delimitation of the concept of personal development with reference to the context of the school organization. Following the study of the School Program for Counseling and Personal Development for V-VIII grades and research in the literature, a questionnaire was designed with objective and subjective items on the importance and contribution of personal development activities in the formation of students' personality. The purpose of the research was to analyze the students' perspective on the usefulness of the personal development programs of the school organization, the research objectives being:

- Relieving students' perception of the importance of the personal development activities carried out in the school organization;
- Evaluating students' experiences and perspectives on personal development in the school organization.

The focus group discussion aimed at identifying the level of knowledge of the concept of personal development, the extent to which students are familiar with this term both at the theoretical and practical level as presented in the curriculum, the implications in the context of the school organization. Live analysis, corroborating participants' points of view and data collection through group interaction on the proposed topic facilitated the application of the structured questionnaire on 7 components related to:

- basic abilities for personal development;
- the topic approached within the personal development programs in the school organization;
- duration and frequency;
- teachers who initiate and coordinate this type of activity;
- improved abilities by implementing personal development programs / activities in the school organization;
- the impact of these programs on improving abilities in the sphere of personal development.

The questionnaire was distributed to 31 students, with an average age of 14.6 years, of which 61% were girls and 39% were boys. In terms of the level of education attended, the respondents are students in the 8th grade, the school year 2018-2019, who study in school units in Târgoviște town, Dâmbovița county. Interviewers were the authors of this paper, and the answers to these questions were analyzed and interpreted in the following sections.

5.1 Results and discussions

The research was carried out by investigating several aspects relevant to the proposed purpose and the research objectives were:

- Relieving students' perception of the importance of the personal development activities carried out in the school organization;
- Evaluating students' experiences and perspectives on personal development in the school organization.

So in the first stage of the focus group, the purpose of the research and the context of its development were explained. The main conclusion was that most participants are confused about the meaning of the term *personal development*. As a result, the concept of personal development was presented, its detailed definition in relation to the educational perspective, with emphasis on the content domains and the themes approached in the counseling and development program for the 8th grade. In the second stage of the research, the questionnaire was elaborated and structured on 7 sections as below.

1. The first section of the questionnaire asked respondents to hierarchize from a given set of 10 abilities, the first 5 that they consider fundamental for their adaptation to everyday life. Below is the distribution of the number of mentions for each ability individually. As can be seen in Figure 1, which shows the cumulative percentages of mentioning important abilities for an effective adaptation from the students' perspective, the ability that was chosen with the highest frequency was self-perception (15.8%), followed by decision-making (11.9%), self-regulated learning and emotional abilities with an equal value of 10.9% and interpersonal abilities (9.9%). While at the same time the least mentioned abilities by students, we can see that the last three places are occupied with resilience (6.9%), self-control, and civic abilities with the same value of 7.9%.

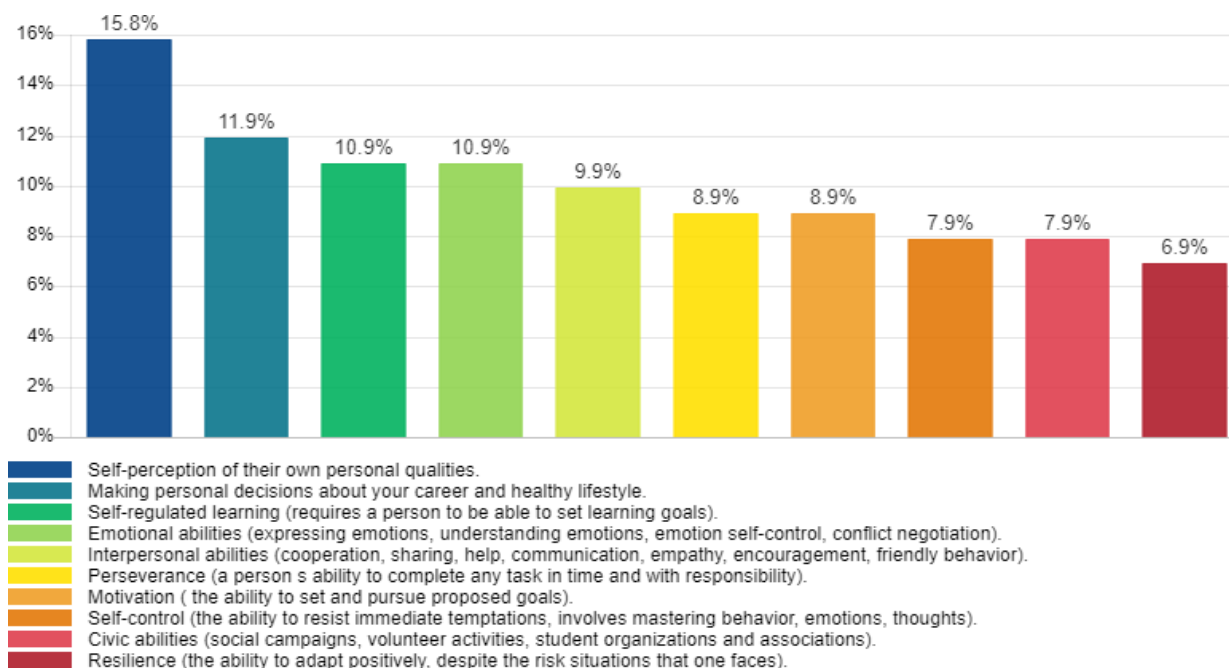


Figure 1. Students' perception of basic abilities

Source: authors

2. Regarding the degree of involvement of students in personal development programs, 87% of respondents stated that they participated in this school year, 2018-2019, in personal development programs organized in school, while 13% did not participate.
3. Respondents participating in the personal development programs stated that the number of programs organized in the school year 2018-2019 ranged from 1 to 4, as shown in Figure 2 observing that 44% of the respondents participated in 2 programs, 32% participated in 1 program and 16% in 3 programs, respectively 8% in 4 programs.

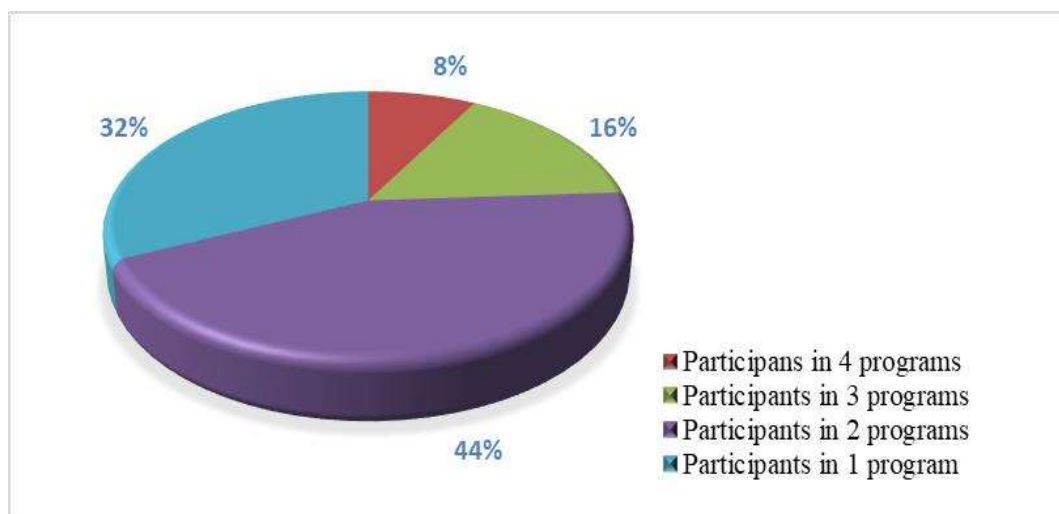


Figure 2. Distribution of respondents according to the number of participations in personal development programs

Source: authors

4. In the fourth section of the questionnaire respondents were asked to specify their personal development activities/ programs that they consider to have a great impact in improving the abilities to adapt to everyday life. By listing examples of programs / activities with a high degree of impact on students' perception, it was also possible to delimit the themes addressed by the content areas presented in the School program for Counseling and Personal Development for 8th grade, as follows:

- ✓ Self-knowledge and healthy and balanced lifestyle entitled: *Who am I?, My qualities, I am independent or not?*;
- ✓ Socio-emotional development: *I know how to manage my emotions, Bullying*;
- ✓ Management of learning and career: *Meeting with a personality from the community, What are my models?, I am now, I over 4 years old, my Plan for the Future.*

In addition, it should be noted that in some situations these personal development activities are part of the extracurricular educational programs developed and endorsed at national level in partnership with competent institutions. Respondents listed the following activities in this case: National Competition *My anti-drug message* in partnership with the National Drug Agency organized to prevent drug use and promote a healthy lifestyle and the National Contest *How I choose correctly the school* organized by the County Resource Center Dâmbovița Educational Assistance in order to develop the career planning capacity of 8th grade students.

5. The fifth section of the questionnaire captures another feature of the personal development programs / activities implemented in the school year 2018-2019, the average duration of the course. According to respondents' answers, the average duration varied between 1-4 hours for 65.4%, 5-8 hours for 23.1%, and 8-10 hours for 11.5%.
6. Regarding the organizers of the activities in these programs and their distribution, it can be seen in Figure 3. that the main coordinator of the activities in the personal development programs was a teacher other than the master class (38.7% of cases), followed by school counselor, expert of the Dâmbovița County Resource and Educational Assistance Center (35.5% of the cases) and the master class (25.8% of the cases). From informal discussions with students this other teacher is depending on the subject of the activity, either the

biology or the Romanian teacher, but also the religious education. An important role in organizing this form of activity, as mentioned by 23 of the respondents, is played by the teacher counselor for the Students' Council.

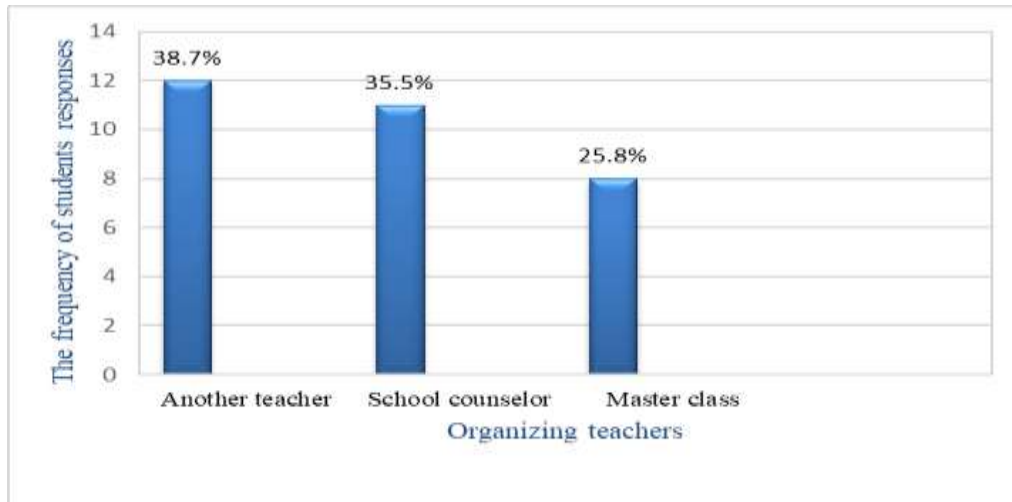


Figure 3. Perceptions of respondents about teachers involved in personal development activities

Source: authors

- The last aspect investigated concerns the hierarchy of abilities that students perceive to be improved as they go through the personal development programs conducted in school, the result of which is shown in Figure 4.

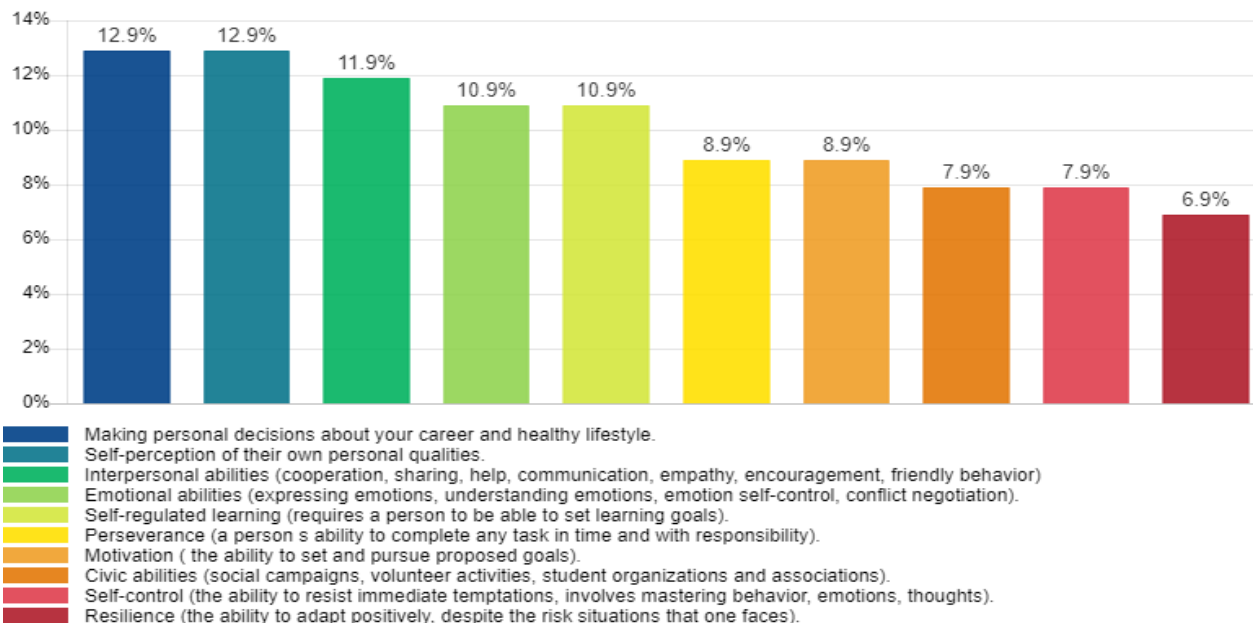


Figure 4. Improved abilities through the implementation of personal development programs / activities

Source: authors

By comparing this hierarchy of abilities considered to be improved through the development of personal development programs implemented in the school organization with the hierarchy of abilities perceived as important by students to adapt to everyday life, it is first of all found that the abilities in the lower part of the two hierarchies coincide to a large extent. More specifically, in both cases less emphasis is given to resilience, civic abilities, self-control. This can be explained either by the fact that a lesser emphasis on these abilities by the school made the students to perceive them as less important either the abilities targeted by the programs were selected on the basis of an investigation prior importance of the importance given to students by various abilities. Also, analyzing the abilities of the first half of the two hierarchies, we find that decision-making, self-perception, interpersonal abilities are, in turn, in a way agreed by the two parties (school and students) referring to the psychological stage the students' development but also at the time of the analysis, the transition to high school, the preparation for the exam, with the emphasis on the decisions of choosing the new school, with projection to a potential profession, but also the emotional implications of this passage.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The research has revealed a low or very low understanding by students about the role of personal development in school, and 13% of respondents did not participate in personal development activities. From the perspective of fundamental abilities, students agree that self-perception, decision-making, self-regulation, and emotional abilities are important, that resilience, self-control, civic abilities are less important for academic and personal success.

At the level of the school organization it is observed that the personal development activities are coordinated by a teacher other than the master class, although the activities of the latter are expressly provided for educational support, counseling and professional orientation of students. An important role in personal school development activities are carried out by the school counselor but also by the teacher counselor of the Students' Council. There is also a poor articulation of teachers' interventions, an absence of culture in the development and collaborative implementation of personal development activities.

Following research, in order to streamline our personal development activities/programs in our educational system, we consider that the following proposals would be appropriate:

- Developing a predetermined official strategy at national level by taking on established international curriculum models and adapting them to the specifics of Romanian education;
- Creating a real educational partnership with all educational actors (parents, local community, NGOs) in the initiatives aimed at the personal development of the students;
- Developing at the level of the school organization, flexible personal development programs that can be permanently adapted to the needs of students and the school community.

In the future, we propose the in-depth research of the issue of personal development through the realization of a double perspective on the phenomenon implemented in the educational act through studies on the identification of the school counselors' perspective, the masters class and / or the educational managers on the development programs implemented in the school organization. Research could become a starting point for analyzing and evaluating the involvement of actors in the education system in meeting the real needs for personal development of students.

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