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The development of personal autonomy in young schoolchildren. Comparative study: Romanians / Roma

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Abstract. From an early age, the formation of personal autonomy begins. Closely related to the child's physical and mental development, to his personal development, autonomy plays an important role in the success or failure of learning, especially, in life in general. The present paper aims to conduct a comparative study between the level of autonomy of Roma and Romanian students as a general objective, and the study hypotheses aim to compare the personal autonomy of 42 children aged 8 to 9 years, 21 of them Roma and 21 Romanians. On the same sample was made the comparison of the personal autonomy of the Roma and Romanian boys, of the boys towards the girls and the purchase of the personal autonomy from the perspective of the teacher and of the parents. The tool used was the Personal Autonomy Screening in the PEDa Questionnaire (SCAP-P and SCAP-E), the age-appropriate variants of the participants. The scores obtained by the students were processed using the SPSS statistical program. The results of the study showed that, among the group of participants, there are no significant differences between the level of personal autonomy in terms of ethnicity or gender. Parents and teachers' assessments also showed strong correlations, indicating good knowledge of children by both parents and teachers. This may be due to the introduction in the compulsory education of the preparatory class and the discipline Personal development, which, through the learning activities, empowers the child to make certain decisions and to make his own judgments.

Keywords. Personal autonomy, comparative study, Roma and Romanian children



1. Theoretical notions regarding the valorization of personal development activities in building autonomy in young schoolchildren

1.1. The first years of school

In the Romanian educational system, primary education represents the second link, after preschool. The two basic functions of primary education are the provision of basic training (writing, reading, mathematical calculation) by including in an organized and coordinated education system in a scientific manner and the development of some components of the human personality, respecting the particularities of the child, c individualizing education and promoting formative education.

The beginning of schooling brings multiple challenges and changes in the child's world. Everything that happens in terms of the child's development from this point will bear the imprint of this new factor.

In this stage (Crețu, 2008) new dimensions are added to self-identity, the child appropriating the status and roles of a student, school learning becomes the main organizer of the mental development process and exerts decisive influences for all subsequent transformations, more objective relationships are established with the world, the school being the one that takes the child into the realm of the intelligible, the rational, the rigors of knowledge, etc. The basic skills for writing, reading and counting are formed in early schooling and even now the voluntary and conscious nature of all psychobehavioral manifestations is growing.

Regarding the lifestyle, nutritionists recommend a varied diet, which includes 3 substantial meals and 2 snacks. Appetite is slightly disturbed at the beginning of schooling and in stressful moments, but is satisfactory otherwise (Crețu, 2009). Although the need for sleep decreases, problems such as refusal to go to sleep, insomnia and daytime sleepiness may occur. These can be caused by the fact that the parents of many children allow them to go to bed when they want (Papalia et al., 2010, p.258).

All the changes that take place in the child's life influence in a decisive way the formation of his personality. Even if the foundations of the personality are laid since preschool, the new school status with the related demands and the ability to judge and reason are reflected both in the inner organization of the personality and in terms of external behavior. The conception of the world and life begins to take shape as a result of the development of logical thinking, and this fact changes the optics of the surrounding reality (Golu, Zlate, Verza, 1993). The self-image has new sources of clarification on the one hand represented by the school result and on the other hand by the daily confrontation and comparison in various situations with those of the same age. I can advance especially the spiritual self, which is confirmed mainly through school performance, and the social self, which relies on a wider and more persistent group life over time. The individual characteristics of the personality tend to be highlighted more and more in the behavior of the schoolboy. Therefore, confrontations and even conflicts with his peers can make him turn to himself from time to time, ask himself questions, and sometimes be confused about his being. All this will contribute to the development of the self-image in its three planes: the physical, the spiritual and the social self.



1.2. Personal development

The school environment is the place where the child learns about himself within specific group activities and socialization experiences. Based on findings that suggest potential relationships between educational contexts and identity development, Davidson (1996), in a study of high school students, explores identity formation and shaping in schools using students' perspectives on race, gender, and academic engagement. Through this study, it reveals how identity and academic engagement are influenced not only by societal and cultural forces, but also by ordinary, day-to-day interactions and practices in educational settings. Finally, it appears that the school environment and the interpersonal relationships that evolve within the school influence the formation and construction of identity as a process of personal development (Grotevant, 1992). Accordingly, how a student engages in school activities may also be associated with identity-related self-perceptions. In a review of the literature on extracurricular participation and adolescent development, Holland and Andre (1987) generally find that such participation correlates with higher levels of self-esteem, involvement in political activity/ social status in young adulthood, educational aspirations and achievements, and feelings of control over one's life, among others.

Considering the above, we can say that personal development begins with the formation of the ego.

Given the proven importance of personal development, it was decided at the governmental level to introduce a school discipline in the curricular area of Romanian education. Personal development is a relatively new discipline, it was introduced in the Framework Plan in our country with the establishment of the preparatory class, in 2013. The framework plan for the preparatory class allocates 2 hours to this discipline, and the one for the first and second class - one hour each per week.

The curriculum is developed following the curriculum design model centered on competences (structured ensembles of knowledge, skills and attitudes developed through learning, which allow solving specific problems in a field or general problems, in various contexts). According to the National Curriculum, within the Personal Development discipline learning activities are carried out to develop the child's ability to self-knowledge and the ability to express his interests, skills, personal experiences in a positive manner. The general purpose of all these activities is the acquisition of self-confidence, the children's well-being, their preparation for life and the future.

The first general competence is "Manifestation of interest in self-knowledge and positive attitude towards oneself and towards others". Two specific competences derive from this. In the preparatory class, the students must identify some personal traits, in the first grade, to present some elementary personal traits in various contexts, and the second grade student must establish similarities and differences between himself and others, according to simple criteria. The second competence is, in the preparatory class, the identification of simple personal hygiene objects and activities, in the first class - the identification of personal hygiene rules and in the second class - the observance of personal hygiene rules. The program also proposes learning activities to form the respective skills.

The second general competence aims at the appropriate expression of emotions in the interaction with children and familiar adults. And here the specific skills follow the logical path from simple to complex. If the student from the preparatory class must recognize the basic



emotions in simple, familiar situations, in the second grade he must be able to express his basic emotions in various situations. Also, if in the preparatory class, the child must identify communication rules in the school activity, in the first grade he must transmit simple verbal and non-verbal messages about his own life experiences, and in the second grade, the student must be able to use elements of active listening. The third specific competence forms necessary skills and accepted behaviors in relationships with others.

In the period of early schooling, the basic characteristic of age is emotional impressionability, sensitivity to what is colorful, unusual or bright (Golovei&Gorea, 2013). In young schoolchildren, moral feelings are strong, and failures in institutional activity, adaptation problems can generate problems such as instability and emotional imbalance. Aggressiveness, shyness, vulnerability that may appear have the character of compensation and defense, however, these emotional reactions can be overcome if, through communication, emotional decentering develops (Saranciuc-Gordea, 2021). In order to communicate about emotions and to be able to do so, the student must know them. Thus, learning activities such as "describing emotions experienced in favorite games" from the curriculum for the Personal Development discipline are a first step towards perceived self-efficacy. Also, to be able to communicate about emotions in particular, the student must know how to communicate in general, respect communication rules, be able to present a personal experience. During this period, the vocabulary of the young schoolchild doubles, and through the interdisciplinary nature of the organization of primary education, the merging and interpenetration of notions from the Personal Development discipline with those from the other disciplines that make up the Framework Plan is ensured.

The last general competence is "using the skills and attitudes specific to learning in a school context". The specific skills go from identifying some routines in the school activity to creating a daily program, from applying simple techniques that support learning to highlighting the importance of learning for one's own person, so that in the second grade, the child is able to present the conditions that favor or hinder learning.

Specific competence 3.3 considers hobbies and trades. Sorin Cristea (2012, p. 97) defines the pedagogical concept of career education through the prism of the general contents of education and the general directions of education development. Dandara and Cotruța (2017) conclude that the process of training the skills, abilities and competences necessary for the management of one's own educational and professional path and for personal development must start even from the period of early schooling. The child must be taught to make decisions related to the right types of learning and work, and the teaching staff must constantly adapt to the demands of society and find the right methods of intervention and assistance.

The learning contents were designed in such a way as to capitalize on the life experiences of the students and to be permanently related to the stage of development in which they are.

The methodological suggestions from the School Program for the Personal Development discipline urge the teaching staff to carry out integrated activities or to diversify extracurricular activities, precisely because the fields of the program offer a generous space in which the valorization of students' experiences underpins the authenticity of learning. At the same time, it is desired to develop group cohesion, optimize self-image and develop self-confidence. The attitude of the teaching staff and the methods used by them are what can create a secure, encouraging climate, in which "labels" can be avoided. Due to the practical-applicative character of this



discipline, active-participative methods are preferable to traditional ones, with students being directly involved in activities and solving tasks, working individually, in teams or face-to-face.

Even if the Personal Development discipline is only studied until the second grade, being then replaced by Civic Education up to the 4th grade and then Leadership, the process of personal development takes place throughout life. These, personal development and continuous learning, are dependent on each other and intertwine. Lifelong learning encourages individuals to create personal development plans that help achieve goals, bring opportunities for self-improvement, thus directly contributing to one's well-being (Jackson, 2013). The student's awareness of his own goals, but also of the ways, means, and circumstances by which these goals can be achieved, is the core around which continuous learning and personal development are formed. The lifelong learning process encourages and enables individuals to see and appreciate themselves as a whole person, encouraging and helping them to become what they want to become. These fundamental objectives create a causal link between an individual's active participation in lifelong learning and personal development, but also personal well-being (Jackson, 2013).

Learning and development are therefore continuous. However, the beginning of schooling brings with it, as I have shown previously, a series of changes on all levels of physical and mental development.

1.3 Autonomy

The specialized literature attributes several dimensions to the construct of autonomy:

- attitudinal autonomy which is closely related to goal setting (Markus, Wurf, 1987), decision making (Frank et al., 1988), self-confidence (Bandura, 1977), personal goals (Allen et al., 1994).

- cognitive autonomy which could be defined as the ability to make decisions without taking too much account of social validation, the ability to reason independently (Zimmer-Gembeck, 2001). This could also be called autonomy in thinking.

- emotional autonomy - "liberation from the pressing need to be approved and to receive reassurance" (McBride, 1900)

- behavioral autonomy which implies "self-management, regulation of one's own behavior and acting according to one's own decisions" (Zimmer-Gembeck, 2001).

- functional autonomy refers to "the ability to develop strategies to achieve set goals" (Noom, Dekovic, Meeus, 2001)

- the autonomy of values, which implies "independent attitudes and beliefs, related to spirituality, politics and morals" (Russell and Bakken, 2002).

Over time, various researches have been carried out that highlighted the relationships between personal autonomy and age (M.J. Noom, M. Dekovic and W. Meeus 2001; L. Steinberg and S.B. Silverberg, 1986, apud Fleming, 2005; Graf, 2003), between personal autonomy and identity formation (Fleming, 2005), between health and autonomy (Chou, 2000).

Philosophy and psychology have given autonomy numerous definitions and the term has been related to intentionality, freedom, decision, responsibility, choice, independence, etc.

In many cases, autonomy was overlapped with independence, totally or partially. Good (1959) defined autonomy as "the relative independence of an individual in guiding or regulating his own behavior". Autonomous means "independent, not controlled by others or external forces" (The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 2000). Popescu-Neveanu (1978)



defined independence as a characteristic of those who prefer autonomy "based on a system of well-defined personal attitudes".

On the other hand, Feltham and Dryden (1993) approached the two concepts by defining them separately: "autonomy implies the ability to think and act alone", and "independence implies almost a need to be separated from others".

In other cases, autonomy has been defined as a personality trait that:
- differentiates a person from the others as a general orientation in his relations with the environment (physical and social) (Ryan, Deci, 2000).

- expresses a degree of freedom and capacity for easy deliberation that cannot be influenced (Șchiopu, 1997).

- it is formed in ontogenesis and "is expressed through attitudes and behaviors that are based on laws, norms and own values" (Berar, Albu, 2006).

Numerous interventions have been designed and implemented to help children acquire an appropriate set of social-emotional skills that enable them to exhibit appropriate behavior (including prosociality) and prevent the development of problem behavior (Catalano et al., 2002). Most interventions apply a cognitive-behavioral approach (Bandura, 1978; Crick & Dodge, 1994) and aim to bring about behavior change by teaching coping skills. Teaching children how to demonstrate social-emotional skills can lead to limited behavioral change because it means imposing an external view on the child's behavior. According to self-determination theory, psychological growth and well-being require the fulfillment of three basic needs: competence, relatedness, and autonomy. Research has also shown that the effect of autonomy support on prosocial behavior is mediated by basic need satisfaction (Gagné & Deci, 2005; Kindap-Tepe & Aktas, 2019). This means that people not only need to feel respected, understood and cared for and learn the tools and skills to change behaviour, but they also need to personally value and support the behaviour, which defines autonomy (Ryan et al., 2008).

The present work aims to compare the level of personal autonomy in two groups of young schoolchildren: some of Roma ethnicity, the others Romanian.

2. Roma Ethnicity

2.1 Brief history

In the absence of exact data regarding when and how the Roma arrived in the European space, the researchers took the first mentions in the documents of the various countries. The lack of a written history is caused by the fact that the written language was not accessible to common people, let alone to nomads. For hundreds of years, it was believed that the Roma came from North Africa, being called egyptiacos, pharaons (Transylvania), gypsy (England) or gypsies (Spain). All these meant Egyptians (Petcut, Grigore, Sandu, 2003). In Italy, you can find gypsies, gypsies, gypsies, tsiganes in France, gypsies and gypsies in Wallachia and Moldova.

Săraru (1998) explains that the ancestors of the Roma would have migrated in different directions - those who constitute today the "lom" or "northern" branch, would have gone N-W through Cauaz to the Balkan Peninsula and from here to all of Europe. On the other hand, the "dom" or "south-west" branch went to North Africa, from where they would have crossed the Mediterranean to Spain, and most of them, the "rrom" or "west" branch would have reached in



the Byzantine Empire. They settled there for several hundred years, after which they would have gone further to Central and Western Europe.

The Roma minority arrived in Europe from India between the 6th and 11th centuries (Kenrick & Taylor, 1998). But, according to Gheorghe Sărău, documentary evidence shows that the Roma arrived in European countries after the 1300s.

The results of the 1930 census show that 1.5% of the country's population declare themselves Gypsies. In 1933, the General Association of Gypsies from Romania was founded, and a year later the newspapers *Glasul romilor* in Bucharest and *O rom* in Craiova appeared.

The Second World War brings with it abuses against the Roma. Hitler imprisoned them in concentration camps, extermination camps and ghettos, along with the Jews, in 1941. In Romania, Ion Antonescu decided that the Roma should be deported to Transnistria. The communist regime forcibly moved several thousand Roma families to the outskirts of towns or villages in Bărăgan, including Fetești, wanting to remove them from the big cities. The Roma no longer appeared in official documents, no longer having the right to be represented as an ethnic minority (Petcut et al., 2003). Even if an attempt was made to educate Roma children, there was a high level of school dropouts, few managing to complete the primary cycle, due to nomadic habits.

Only after 1989, the Roma were recognized by law as a national minority, they had the right to enter public and political life.

2.2 Roma and inclusive education

Under the impact of joining the EU, the Romanian government undertook a series of educational actions for Roma in the mid-2000s. These programs - previously initiated and carried out by various NGOs, international organizations and state institutions - aim to guarantee equal access to education by penalizing segregation, teaching Roma language and culture, hiring mediators, predestined places in schools and universities for Roma students (Sarău, 2012).

However, the Roma still face the problem of social labelling. As I have shown above, the Roma lived and still do, on the outskirts of the cities, in gypsies, and this fact only accentuated the isolation of the Roma from the rest of society. Marginalization can be defined as the effect of the processes through which the access to the economic, political, educational and communication resources of some communities is drastically limited (Ferrel, Neulau, 1996). This marginalization is directly proportional to anomie and implies discrimination, isolation, labeling. According to the theory of social labeling, society applies a label to those individuals considered criminals, and they are only the product of society. In other words, deviance is produced by the very mechanisms created to define and especially sanction it.

In Romania, according to Amnesty International's Annual Report, 2020/2021, the European Commission found that Roma continued to face discrimination and segregation, including in the field of education, employment, access to housing and forced evictions. During the state of emergency, NGOs and the media reported several cases of illegal use of force and allegations of ill-treatment of Roma by the police.

Human rights groups and NGOs have expressed concern that Roma are being scapegoated during the pandemic and beyond. They denounced the "increase in hate speech and racism" targeting Roma in the mass media and social media, especially by opinion leaders and public figures. Romania's equality body, the National Council for Combating Discrimination, criticized



a local newspaper, a member of Parliament, a former president and a university professor for discriminatory statements against Roma.

The scandals that often end up in the hospital shake the community and divide it. The Romanian community is often frightened by violent acts. And the "labels", some faces, others whispered, exist without a doubt. Another interesting aspect in this community is self-labeling, which is used as an excuse for various deviant behaviors.

"That's how we gypsies are, we talk loudly!"

"That's the gypsy tradition, we get married young!"

"Gypsies don't go to kindergarten!"

An applied research carried out in the Dobrogea region (Rus&Sandu, 2011) investigated the communication style of 7 ethnic groups. From here it emerged that a large part of the participants use blaming as a communication style, most of them being Roma.

3. Research methodology

3.1. Objectives

General objective: Identifying the possible difference between the autonomy of Romanian and Roma students.

Specific objectives

3.1.1 Identifying the differences between the level of autonomy of Romanian and Roma students.

3.1.2 Identifying the differences between the level of autonomy of students from the perspective of parents and teachers.

3.2. Hypotheses

3.2.1 It is assumed that there is a difference between the level of autonomy of Roma students compared to Romanian students.

3.2.2 It is assumed that there are differences in the development of autonomy according to gender.

3.2.3 It is assumed that there are differences between the evaluation of the parents and that of the teaching staff on the dimension of autonomy.

3.3 Study participants

42 children between the ages of 8 and 9, from Fetești municipality, Ialomița county, participated in this study. They come from the urban environment. 21 of them are of Roma ethnicity, and the others are Romanian. They study at the "Radu Vodă" Secondary School. The students of this school belong to disadvantaged social categories, very few parents have a job. Of the 400 students of the school, over 60% benefit from a social scholarship. The parents gave their informed consent for the children's participation in the present study, they were fully informed about the purpose and objectives of the research, it was explained to them that they were not subject to any risk, the children's names were not mentioned either in the research or in the centralizing table of the data. This informed consent was obtained because it is a requirement without which no research involving human subjects would be carried out under ethical conditions (Alexa-Stratulat, Neagu, Neagu, Alexa, & Ioan, 2018).



3.4. Research tools

The PEDa (Personal Autonomy Competence Screening) is an instrument for assessing personal autonomy competences, designed for three age ranges: 3-4 years, 4-5 years and 5-7 years. For each interval there are separate scales with two versions - one for parents and one for educators:

1. SCAP-P 5/7 is for parents and has 4 items (Appendix 2)
2. SCAP-E 5/7 for educators includes 4 items (Appendix 3)

Depending on who they are addressed to, the items describe measurable and observable behaviors that children should display at their respective ages. In this work, the scales for the age category 5-7 years were used. With the help of this screening, it is possible to identify children who have problems in the development of personal autonomy and for whom psycho-educational or psychiatric intervention measures must be taken, those who have insufficiently consolidated personal autonomy and need remedial psycho-educational measures and children who have the autonomy well developed staff. According to the test manual (p.15), screening is a means for achieving an effective psycho-educational intervention.

3.5. Data analysis and processing

After scoring and centralizing the data, they were processed in the SPSS statistical program.

3.5.1 Hypothesis 1

The first step was to calculate the starting statistical indices and the normality of the distribution of the scores.

Table 1 Calculation of normality of SCAP-E score distribution

		Tests of Normality					
		Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Ethnicity	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
SCAP Teacher	Roma	.335	21	.000	.802	21	.001
	Romanian	.275	21	.000	.817	21	.001

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

Because the materiality threshold is less than 0.05, the distributions of the two variables do not comply with normality. The following histograms represent the distribution of the scores obtained in the SCAP-E questionnaire.

From their analysis on the Roma group, we see the scores are between 0 and 20, most of them being between 17 and 20, the minimum that can be obtained in this questionnaire being 0, and the maximum 20. On the group of Romanian students, the scores are between 12 and 20, most around 19.

This hypothesis was verified by comparing the results of the SCAP-E screening, considering the ethnic variable, with the help of the Mann-Whitney Test, because, as has been demonstrated, the distribution of the scores does not meet the condition of normality.



Table 2 Average of the ranks calculated for the Scap-teacher variable.

		Ranks		
	Ethnicity	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
SCAP Teacher	Roma	21	20.10	422.00
	Romanian	21	22.90	481.00
	Total	42		

Table 3 The Mann-Whitney Scap-Teacher Test
Test Statistics^a

	SCAP Teacher
Mann-Whitney U	191.000
Wilcoxon W	422.000
Z	-.759
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.448

a. Grouping Variable: etnie

The difference in significance being .488, exceeds the materiality threshold $p=.05$ to be validated. Therefore, on the group of participants there are no significant differences in the level of autonomy depending on ethnicity. The hypothesis is therefore refuted.

This hypothesis was based on practical experience. About a decade and a half ago, in each class of the school participating in the study there were no more than 5.6 roma students. They came on foot to classes, unaccompanied, even though Gypsy is located in an outskirts of the neighborhood. It could also be seen how the children were used to crossing the street, getting dressed, buying their own package from the shops. The same could not be said about the Romanian students, who rarely came unaccompanied, were helped by their parents to undress, the school bag and the package were prepared by my mother. As Roma graduates became parents, things began to change, with today's Roma students no longer having the same autonomy as they were 15 years ago. There are rare cases in which children come on foot or unaccompanied to school, at least until the third grade. Another cause of this change could be the frequent scandals between Roma families. In contrast, among the Romanian population, many parents are abroad, the children remaining in the care of their grandparents. A large part of them also come from single-parent families. These could be reasons why, at the moment, the level of autonomy is high among the sample of Romanian students.

In conclusion, on the sampled lot there are no significant differences in the level of autonomy depending on ethnicity.

3.5.2. *Hypothesis 2* - It is presumed that there are differences in the development of autonomy by gender.

It was analyzed the normality of the distribution of scores according to gender.

Table 4 Normality of the distribution of scores by gender
Tests of Normality

	Gender	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
SCAP Teacher	Male	.283	30	.000	.844	30	.000
	Female	.279	12	.011	.813	12	.013

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction



The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test shows that the distributions do not comply with normality.

We observed that boys' scores are between 6 and 20, most around 18, and girls' scores are between 15 and 20, with most still hovering around maximums. The Mann-Whitney test was applied to compare the results.

Table 5. Average Scap-E ranks by gender

		Ranks			
	Gender	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	
SCAP Teacher	Male	30	18.60	558.00	
	Female	12	28.75	345.00	
	Total	42			

Tabel 6. *Mann-Whitney Test - Scap-T gender*

Test Statistics ^a	
	scap_invalidator
Mann-Whitney U	93.000
Wilcoxon W	558.000
Z	-2.477
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.013
Exact Sig. [2*(1-tailed Sig.)]	.015 ^b

a. Grouping Variable: gen

b. Not corrected for ties.

Since the materiality threshold is 0.013, it can be concluded that there are significant differences in the level of autonomy in girls versus boys. Average ranks show a difference of about 10 points between the two categories, and histograms show that girls' scores are more towards the maximum than boys' scores.

Given the mentality and traditions of lukewarm Roma, it can be said that the Roma girls in the study fit into this theory. From practical experience we can say that Roma women have a status that detracts from their autonomy. They are only allowed to walk one step behind the husband, they are not allowed to move on their own, they clamber in the rear seats of the car.

Becoming autonomous was a more stressful experience for girls than for boys shows a study (Beyers and Goossen, 1999; Lamborn and Steinberg, 1993), and the influence of peers on behavior in early adolescence depends on the gender of the adolescent and the latter modulates identification with group and delinquent behavior (Kiesner et al., 2002 and 2003). So, the literature abounds with studies that research the differences between girls and boys from a psychological and behavioral point of view. Regarding autonomy, Monica Albu (2007) conducted research that proved that the autonomy of girls is higher than that of boys in the age range of 14-25 years. Manuela Fleming (2005) also studied the differences between girls and boys in terms of autonomy. It concluded that, up to the age of 15, the responses of male and female participants were comparable in terms of autonomy.

Confirmation of the hypothesis that there are differences between the level of autonomy of girls compared to that of boys, at the age at which the participants in this study are located, is therefore not consistent with the existing studies.



However, the particularities of the sampled lot must be considered.

The need for this analysis came from the experience in the classroom and in the neighborhood school where the study was conducted. In the Lukewarm Roma community, traditions are more rigorously observed than in other communities, meaning various household tasks, especially for girls, and extremely early marriages. The girls are allowed to take care of the younger children in the family, they help to prepare the food, to carry out cleaning activities. This led us to assume that girls might have more autonomy than boys, which is statistically confirmed.

We remind you, however, that the sample was disproportionate, with only 12 girls participating in the present research out of the total of 42 subjects, so the results cannot be extrapolated to the entire population.

3.5.3 Hypothesis 3 It is presumed that there are differences between the evaluation of parents and that of the teacher on the autonomy dimension.

The starting indexes of the SCAP-E scores can be reviewed in Table 1 so it is calculated those of the SCAP-P scores that indicate the assessment made by the parents.

Table 3.16 SCAP - P normality test
Tests of Normality

	Ethnicity	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
SCAP Parent	Roma	.166	21	.135	.888	21	.021
	Romanian	.171	21	.111	.919	21	.084

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

Even in the case of the scores recorded in the evaluation of autonomy carried out by the parents, the distribution is not parametric.

The analysis of the two histograms shows that the Roma parents evaluated their children with scores between 7 and 20 (this being the maximum possible). Comparing the average of this evaluation – 15.81 – with the average of the scores obtained at the evaluation made by the teacher – 17 – we can say that, compared to the teacher, the Roma parents consider that the autonomy of the children is lower. In the case of Romanians, the average of the scores from the evaluation made by the teacher is 17.9, and the one from the evaluation made by the parent is 16.67, significantly lower. In order to verify whether these differences are also statistically relevant, the hypothesis was analyzed using the Mann-Whitney-U test.

Tabel 6. Average of the ranks calculated for the variable Scap-teacher and Scap - parent.

Ranks				
	Ethnicity	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
SCAP Parent	Roma	21	20.81	437.00
	Romanian	21	22.19	466.00
	Total	42		
SCAP Teacher	Roma	21	20.10	422.00
	Romanian	21	22.90	481.00
	Total	42		



Tabel 7. Mann-Whitney test for Scap-teacher și Scap-parent

Test Statistics ^a		
	SCAP Parent	SCAP Teacher
Mann-Whitney U	206.000	191.000
Wilcoxon W	437.000	422.000
Z	-.368	-.759
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.713	.448

a. Grouping Variable: Ethnicity

There are no significant differences on the group of participants, so the hypothesis is refuted. The family is the basis of social life and the main vector of transmission of culture, practically through the inevitable parent-child relationship, presenting the most significant factor of development for their autonomy and responsibility. Along with the family environment, the school is the most influential social institution in the process of personal formation in the first years of life, whose challenge in a democratic society is to provide a quality education for social progress and well-being. For this reason, intercultural education is seen as a responsibility that is shared by both media. The connection between family and school can be permanently improved in order for the teaching-learning process to be an efficient one, especially in today's society where certain intercultural skills and competences must be achieved. In a school such as the one where the present study was carried out, such skills are of major importance, because for certain parents from disadvantaged social categories, the school may seem like an "unknown space" (Hatos&Săveanu, 2009). In a case study it was revealed that some parents see the school that on "an unknown territory, an unfamiliar environment" from which they feel the need to defend themselves through verbal aggressiveness (Tîrcă, Zăbrăuți case study, in Fleck and Rughiniș, 2008, p. 150).

Verbal aggression is often characteristic of a part of the studied group. But through the experience of over 10 years of working with Roma parents, we have come to the conclusion that this aggressiveness can be improved, using assertive communication and shaping the discourse according to the person with whom the dialogue is held.

Machen, Wilson and Notary (2005) have shown that parental involvement can help improve the quality of public-school systems and that engaged parents can provide a lot of opportunities for their children, thus facilitating their school success. According to these authors, in the educational systems of many countries it has become important to encourage collaboration between parents and schools. For their part, López and Tedesco (2002) state that the family must guarantee economic conditions that allow children to attend classes on a daily basis, and must also prepare them from birth so that they are able to actively participate in school and learning. The mentioned training implies the existence of a variety of resources from the family, among which are noted the economic resources, the availability of time for the supervision of the study of children, their ability to promote participation in cultural activities and their ability to provide affection and stability. This presupposes the ability of the family to meet both material and non-material requirements. First, it involves being able to sustain the growing spending associated with education. Secondly, it involves supporting their motivation for studying and maintaining conditions of stability in the operation of the home. Many times, the families to which the children participating in this study belong do not have adequate material resources to ensure the minimum of school supplies and materials. The purchase of auxiliaries is impossible, there are



children who do not have notebooks, pens, watercolors, etc. Here they support government programs that offer school supplies at the beginning of the school year to students from disadvantaged families, social scholarships, vouchers. In addition to financial aid, these programmes also have a role that the legislature probably did not take into account. In order to obtain the necessary file, the parents contact the school, especially in the case of small, neighborhood schools, where the teacher in the class also has this duty to take over various documents from the parents for the secretariat or accounting department. Parents, especially mothers of Roma ethnicity, do not know how to read. So, during the submission of the applications for the mentioned programs, they come to the school several times to ask for clarifications and guidance. This is an opportunity for communication, for networking, even if it is non-standardized and inconspicuous.

The pandemic situation and online education have facilitated this process. Initially, the children needed guidance to access the educational platforms, a large part of the educational process moved to the home, so, the parents also attended classes. The meetings were also held in this environment, so the participation was more numerous, communication groups were created, and the messages reached the recipients faster and clearer, whether we are talking about teachers or parents. The relationship between school and family has become more than ever a partnership. Therefore, refuting the hypothesis that there are differences between the evaluation of parents and that of the teacher on the autonomy dimension comes as a natural consequence. The communication relationship established between the two actors involved made it possible to assess the children's autonomy in a similar way.

Conclusions

The data processing in the SPSS program showed that there are no significant differences in the level of autonomy depending on the ethnicity on the group of participants. This hypothesis was based on practical experience, as a result of which it was found that, over time, the autonomy of Roma students has decreased because they are no longer allowed to take certain actions, they no longer come to school unaccompanied, they are bought a package and they are dressed by their parents. On the other hand, the level of autonomy of Romanian students has increased, who for various reasons find themselves in a position to act independently. These changes led to the result obtained, namely that on the sampled lot there are no significant differences in the level of autonomy depending on the ethnicity.

Confirmation of the hypothesis that there are differences between the level of autonomy of girls and boys at the age at which participants in this study are located is not consistent with existing studies. The environment from which the study participants come has an important role to play here. The need for this analysis came from the experience in the classroom and in the neighborhood school where the study was conducted. In the Lukewarm Roma community, traditions are more rigorously observed than in other communities. The girls are allowed to take care of the younger children in the family, help prepare food, carry out cleaning activities and get married very early. This led us to assume that they might have more autonomy than that of the boys. We remind you, however, that the sample was disproportionate, with only 12 girls participating in the present research out of the total of 42 subjects, so the results cannot be extrapolated to the entire population.



Also, in the study was compared the level of autonomy from the perspective of the teacher and from the perspective of the parents. School is an essential context of socialization, offering a place for learning and experiences that, in the right circumstances, nuance and broaden the area of personal knowledge acquired in the family environment (Tschorne, Villalta & Torrente, 1992). For this reason, the work of parents and education professionals must be carried out as a partnership. The level of education of parents, schools from disadvantaged backgrounds (rural or Roma) are aspects that can hinder the collaboration between school and family (Margaritoiu&Eftimie, 2011). Therefore, the objective of this research, which is to identify possible differences between the parents' perception of the children's personal autonomy and the perception of the teachers, is justified. The fact that on the studied sample the evaluation of the parents does not differ significantly from that of the teachers can be explained by a well-built relationship between the two entities, a relationship that often underlies the school success. The authors of this study are aware that the sample was small and that the extrapolation of the results must be done with reservations. The use of longitudinal studies to explore the development of autonomy over time can also prove useful in trying to better understand the structure of autonomy and improve an individual's performance. We could conclude by saying that, despite the fact that not all hypotheses have been confirmed, the objectives set at the beginning of the research have been achieved.

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