

**Babeş-Bolyai University Cluj-Napoca**  
**Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences**

**DOCTORAL THESIS**

**ACHIEVEMENT EMOTIONS AND SELF-REGULATED  
LEARNING. DYNAMICS AND EFFECTS ON 8TH GRADERS  
PERFORMANCE**

**-SUMMARY-**

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Keywords: achievement emotions, self-regulated learning, motivational regulation, learning diaries, academic performance

The challenges that the new social and historical conditions pose affect the basic frameworks of our professional activity and of our daily lives. Once society comuted the accents from industrial production to producing information, the essential force of the 21st century had become the intelectual capital of the individuals (Sahin, 2009). The new paradigm forces the

educational agents to a reconceptualisation of their roles and their usual teaching and evaluations practices.

“*The new learners*” must acquire more than disciplinary content; they have to put their knowledge and skills to use and this makes necessary to develop critical thinking, to apply the knowledge to new situations, to analyze new information. Also, they must collaborate with others, communicate efficiently, acquire problem-solving and decisional skills.

Within this context, learning skills become vital. The *Partnership for 21 st Century Skills* (2008) states that learning skills can be divided into three main categories: information and communication, thinking and problem-solving skills and interpersonal and self-directedness skills.

Our research subscribes to the 21st century skills paradigm because we intend to develop in an integrative manner self-regulated learning skills, as an important prerequisite for acquiring autonomy in learning and for the self-directedness of the behaviors that can sustain academic and professional performance.

We argue that our research can make an important contribution to the accurate understanding of the educational realities of secondary students and to clearly set the factors that can predict and sustain their academic performance.

Our intervention wants to become an instrument that can facilitate and enhance secondary students’ performance while developing the necessary skills for life-long learning and for acquiring autonomy in learning. This intervention can also create the premises for positive emotional experiences related to learning and schooling.

To achieve this goal, our study corroborates data from two major streams in educational research: self-regulated learning (that highlights the importance of cognitive/metacognitive factors, and motivational/metamotivational factors respectively) and the line of research that studies the emotional factors related to learning, self-regulation and performance. Integrating these two lines of research in our theoretical and methodological research represents one element of novelty that our study raises.

Our research assumes an unitary, integrative approach to self-regulated learning by analyzing and developing important cognitive, metacognitive and motivational elements of

learning and also approaches the emotional aspects related to individual study or participating in class.

Regarding emotions in academic settings, the most important contribution to the literature comes from the work of Pekrun and his colleagues (2002, 2006). The control-value theory of achievement emotions (Pekrun, 2006) offers a framework for studying emotions generated by different academic situations (taking part in class, testing situation, individual study), but also their effects on learning and performance.

Achievement emotions are defined within the control-value theory as emotions directly related to achievement activities and their results. Pekrun (2006) states that two major evaluative antecedents are important in generating emotional responses in academic contexts: the subjective control related to learning activities and their outcomes and the subjective value that students assign to these activities and their results. As distal determinants of achievement emotions, Pekrun identifies factors as achievement goals, personality factors or social and cultural antecedents.

The control-value theory of achievement emotions states that achievement emotions affect cognitive, motivational and regulatory processes that mediate learning and achievement and assumes that their influence manifests on mechanisms as interests and motivation to learn, the use of learning strategies, the use of cognitive resources and self-regulated learning (Pekrun, 2006).

Our research has three distinct studies. We first intent to “diagnose” self-regulated learning skills and the emotions associated with learning in the context of Romanian instruction. For this evaluation we use self-reported instruments that evaluate achievement emotions (Achievement Emotions Questionnaire), the use of cognitive and metacognitive strategies (Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire) ant the use of motivational regulation strategies (Wolters and Aroyo-Benzon, 2010).

Our first study analyzes the relations between learning-related emotions and self-regulated learning strategy use in the context of Romanian instruction. We are also interested in the way academic emotions and strategy use relate to the performance obtained by 8<sup>th</sup> graders on a simulation of a national standardized testing of Romanian skills.

Our research regarding self-regulated learning will then become more specific by using the learning diaries methodology in order to analyze unique, repeated learning states (Schmitz and Wiese, 2006). In the second study of our research we want to test the efficacy of an integrative intervention that aims to develop metacognitive, motivational and emotional regulatory skills that are important for learning and that can sustain the efforts of 8<sup>th</sup> graders in mastering Romanian learning tasks.

Our intervention aims to develop skills than can allow students to use learning strategies that promote the deep processing of information, to activate strategies that can help them regulate their motivational level when faced with difficult or uninteresting tasks and to reduce negative emotions related with learning by modifying the cognitions generated by the task context.

We consider that an integrative approach like the one we propose in this research constitutes an intervention that operates with a level of complexity unexercised until present in the Romanian educational environment.

The data obtained from our first two studies will be completed, in our last study, by specifically analyzing the way academic emotions and self-regulated learning factors evolve during our 5 weeks intervention, allowing to draw a more complex image of the emotional issues related to learning.

The data resulted by implementing our intervention helped us affirmatively answering to a very actual question in educational research: Why studying achievement emotions?

Formulated in a very concisely manner, academic emotions are important because they are associated with different self-regulated learning factors that had been repeatedly identified in educational literature as good predictors of achievement. Learning-related enjoyment, hope or pride are associated with cognitive and metacognitive regulation factors and with time and study environment management. More than that, these positive emotions are associated with all motivational regulation strategies investigated in this study, but also with self-efficacy for learning and effort management in learning tasks.

Even though our study did not identify a direct association between positive emotions and performance on a standardized evaluation, our research showed statistically significant

negative relations between negative emotions (anger, anxiety, shame, hopelessness) and performance on the simulation of the national testing on Romanian competencies. We consider these results as valuable starting points for future research.

Summarizing, our first study showed that our participants are mainly performance oriented, often experience boredom in relation to academic tasks, prefer to action on the external environment of learning, not on the internal one when confronted with difficult or uninteresting tasks and do not consider collaborative learning as a resource for learning.

We also showed that students who experience positive emotions while learning tend to use more cognitive and motivational regulation strategies in order to ensure progress towards their learning goal, and those who frequently experience negative emotions tend to be less willing to allocate effort in learning, use less frequent cognitive strategies and regulatory strategies in learning.

More than that, we showed that even though positive emotions are not associated with academic performance, all the negative emotions measures in this study are negatively associated with performance on a standardized evaluation. This results must be an alarm signal for both parents and teachers and also an element that can orient professionals' efforts to optimize their teaching and evaluation practices. We consider that this result in particular highlights the necessity to systematically address the emotional issues generated by educational contexts and to develop, beside disciplinary competences, motivational and emotional regulation skills.

If our first study identified mainly associations between various self-regulated learning factors and academic emotions, the second study of our research allowed us to state some opinions on the role that emotional regulation could play in the process of regulating the learning activity. The results obtained after implementing our intervention not only showed the success of our program, but argued that assisting students in managing their emotions generated by educational settings has positive effects not only on reducing negative effectively, but also on cognitive and motivational regulatory factors.

Developing cognitive reevaluation skills and stress reduction techniques could enhance the frequency of positive academic emotions and reduce the frequency of negative affect. This mechanism could have influenced the enhanced frequency of metacognitive regulation strategy use and also the use of motivational regulation strategies (i.e. self-consequating). More than that,

the students that had been trained in emotional regulation strategies seem to have a better performance on a national standardized testing. Even in the effect is small, the tendency is worthy of future explorations.

This set of results is, in our opinion, particularly important since it allows to transcend the limitations of correlational research and to draw some inferences on the possible causality between the target variables (although one must keep in mind the limitations of quasi-experimental designs).

In our opinion, faced with the main results of this research, the necessity to address emotional factors related to learning cannot be optional. Both school professionals and parents must pay attention to these aspects and conjugate their efforts in order to harvest emotions' facilitating effects for learning, while limiting their potential obstructiveness.

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