

CONSTRUCTION AND APPLICATION OF INSTRUMENT FOR MEASUREMENT OF THE ATTITUDE TOWARD SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS

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Abstract

This research has an aim to determine the status of the school psychologists in the primary schools in Republic of Macedonia, confirmed through the explorations of the attitude of the teachers and other expert personnel regarding the school psychologist. For the need of this research, an instrument for measurement of the attitude toward the school psychologist (SSP) is constructed. The main conclusions drawn from the field work, statistical evaluations and analysis are that a large percent of the subjects (73%) have negative attitude toward the school psychologists and there is a lack of basic information regarding their status, role and tasks. These results are very significant because it is more than necessary to reveal and maybe to change some essential requirements about the working tasks, the demands, the duties and engagements of the school psychologists.

Key words: *instrument for measurement of the attitude, school psychologist, working atmosphere.*

Introduction

The necessity of research in the sphere of human relations within the community is a permanent need. The relation, cooperation, the working atmosphere, friendship, mutual help, as well as the respect for the expertise, competence, the ability of adaptation and many other, are one of the many aspects of the problem so-called human relations. Their character in large extent will influence the attempts for successfully solving the ongoing and the foreseen working tasks.

In order to confirm the existing relations, as well as to determine the intended relations and attitudes, it would be the most adequate and most appropriate to deal with the relation "collective - school psychologist" at first. Taking into account that more than 30 years the school psychologists work at schools, it is understandable the interest to locate more closely their stand and the status which are built through the past 3 decades.

In that context, it is more than necessary to reveal and maybe to change some essential requirements about the working tasks, the demands, the duties and engagements of the school psychologists. Because, indeed it is very unusual and, ultimately, unjustified nowadays, after more than two decades a lot of communities to be pre-occupied by the issue of the need, function and the status of this expert staff.

Previous data about the investigated problem are very superficial and in large extent, very inadequate. The reasons are to be found in the uneven methodology and due to the fact that the members of the research team were focused rather to the status and role of the expert

service in general or they were concentrated exclusively on the status and the role of the expert cooperator - the “school pedagogue”.

However, although little indicative, as a certain base over which this research is built, it is worthy to mention the works of: (Delchev & Adamchevska, 1986), (Murgoska, 1986) and (Georgieva, 1992).

Problem of Research

The problem of this study is the existing lack of knowledge regarding the status and the role of the school psychologists and, from there, the negative attitude towards them. This, however, derives by the fact that until now there is no similar instrument for measuring the attitude toward the school psychologists. Thus, the subject of the research is to determine the actual status of the school psychologists in the primary schools in Republic of Macedonia, confirmed through the examination of the *attitude of the teachers and other expert workers regarding the school psychologist*. Under the term “attitude” is comprehended: The permanent system of positive and negative evaluations, emotions and intention to undertake certain actions pro and con – regarding certain objects.

Methodology of Research

Besides the issues related to the three aspects of the attitude arising from the definition: “The attitudes are evaluative statements, either favorable or unfavorable towards objects, people and events and consist of three components: evaluative, cognitive and behavioral” (Greenberg, J. & Baron, A.R., 1997:49), the research is also oriented toward issues that reflect the existence of prejudice. Although they can be classified in the first group, given the awareness for the already built prejudices and resistance to the occupation, which deals with “lunatics”, that exist in the lay world, it is considered important to determine the percentage of their presence among professionals in the schools.

Thus, for the need of this research an instrument for measurement of the attitude toward the school psychologist (SSP) is constructed.

The instrument represents the classical scale comprising of 24 statements and four offered alternatives of choice (two positive and two negative). After the reading of the completing instruction, the respondent is asked to make his/her choice i.e. to appoint the degree of the own agreement - disagreement with the offered statement. The scoring is standard one, from 1 to 5 points, starting with 1 point for the alternative – “I completely agree”, at the negative statements, in fact opposite for the positive statements. If the respondent did not make any choice it is considered as an undetermined and will be granted 3 points. Thus, the range of the points of the scale is from 24 - 120.

In aim to provide bigger honesty, the instrument is anonymous. (Appendix 1)

By following the required steps and demands which are foreseen in such activity at first are determined several aspects of the “attitude toward the school psychologists”. It was taken into consideration the determination of the term “attitude” which is represented above. By that it is thought that the complexness of the attitude toward the school psychologist is comprehended regarding the: cognitive, affective (emotional) and connotative component.

The specified aspects are:

- Regarding the assessment of the status of the school psychologist;
- Regarding the assessment of the need of such personnel;
- Regarding the assessment of the own experience, knowledge, informing of what is this attitude about;

- Regarding the assessment of the readiness for cooperation;
- Statements which reflect the existence of prejudices.

From those specified aspects of the attitude, by using various sources and personal experience, 75 statements were formulated, after which were given to several psychologists, pedagogues and teachers for evaluation. From this valuation of the content of statements in the preliminary version of the scale 50 statements were incorporated. According to the propositions made by the author Bukvic (Bukvic, 1986: 97), when preparing a scale for measuring attitudes, the author(s) needs to begin with the phase in which they collect as many questions regarding the aspects of the attitude (preferably double of the envisaged final number of questions). The sources used in the formulation of the statements in the first phase are subjects who are familiar with the research problem: 15 staff psychologists, 7 unemployed psychologists, 10 teachers, 5 teachers and 2 university professors from the Institute of Psychology, Skopje).

The preliminary version of the instrument was introduced to 10 primary schools which have employed psychologists, and it was accomplished in 6 schools with total number of 70 respondents, with the following structure of school employees: 7 teachers from primary schools, 7 teachers from subject training education and one expert cooperator – pedagogue from each school.

After the receiving of each completed questionnaire the discriminative power was estimated of each of the 50 statements. A total of 31 statements whose t - value was between 3.57 –6.67, all significant at level 0.001 were chosen.

The integrated instrument was offered to another 7 primary schools with employed psychologists, and new 75 respondents answered the questionnaire. Once again the analysis of the discrimination power of each statement was undertaken, and after that, 24 statements were chosen which entered in the final version of the instrument. The calculated values of the t - test regarding the statements are from 5.79 – 13.21, all significant at level 0.01. This final version was offered to another 10 schools, while it was performed in 7 primary schools, and the total number of 96 respondents. In the following tables the resumed data about the sample of the research is given.

Table 1. Numerical presentation of the comprised subjects by schools in the three phases of the instrument construction.

Phases	I		II		III		Total:	
	Schools	Subjects	Schools	Subjects	Schools	Subjects	Schools	Subjects
Offered	10	150	12	180	10	150	32	480
Accepted	6	70	7	75	7	96	20	241
%	-4	46.67%	-5	41.67%	-3	64.00%	-12	50.21%

Table 2. Representation of the schools in which the instrument was offered and applied by municipalities.

Municipality	Schools in towns		Schools in villages		Phase		
	Offer	Entrance	Offer	Entrance	I	II	III
Bitola	6	6	2	2	*	*	*
Ohrid	2	1	/	/	*	*	
Resen	1	1	/	/		*	
Prilep	4	/	1	1	*	*	*
Kavadarci	1	1	/	/		*	
Negotino	1	1	/	/			*
Strumica	/	/	2	2		*	*
Berovo	1	1	/	/		*	
Radovish	1	/	/	/	*		
Skopje	5	/	1	1		*	*
Struga	1	/	/	/			*
Veles	1	1	1	1			*
Kumanovo	1	1	/	/			*
Total:	25	13	7	7	4	8	8

By the Roulon pattern the values of certainty was estimated, this value was $r_{xx} = 0.99$. Such high value was expected due to the type of the instrument and point out that the statements are homogeneous in the estimation of the attitude toward the school psychologist.

From the previously mentioned method it could be concluded that during the choice of the statements for the preliminary version a conclusion arise about the content validity of the scale.

After the application of such developed instrument, an in depth analysis of the results from the questionnaire was undertaken in which the stress was put on the following activities:

- A comparison of the scores of the respondents from each school separately;
- Determination of the representation of the claims regarding each of the five previously set aspects;
- A comparison of the representation of the statements among the three groups of respondents estimated by dividing of the scores on the quartile scale;
- A comparison of the average scores of the respondents regarding the criteria such as "location of the school" (a school in town – a school in rural community).

In order to process the data gathered, the criterion of t-test for analysis of significance of differences was applied.

Results of Research

Due to the specificity of the researched problem and regarding the individual presumptions during the research, can be concluded that the presentation of the collected data has been made very correctly, precisely and in a very selective manner. In the following text the collected data and the comparisons that are not involved in the personal domain and which present no individual information for the certain persons involved in this research are presented.

Table 3. Statistical parameters based on the results of groups of respondents from schools in town – village.

Statistical parameters	Schools in village	Schools in town
M	103.81	88.04
SD	19.45	25.05
Sx	1.97	2.10
	DM 15.77	
	Sdx 2.88	
	t 5.48	
Significant on level 0.01		

The comparison of the average scores collected among the separate groups of examinees from town-village schools shows a certain statistical significant difference in favor of the groups of examinees who work in rural schools ($t = 5.48$). It is worth to mention that the distribution of scores around the arithmetic mean again is in favor of the group of respondents from the rural schools which shows greater homogeneity regarding the respondent's attitude.

Also, very indicative is the analysis of the scores of the group of respondents with the lowest achieved scores – to the first quartile. The analysis is made regarding the above mentioned five aspects of the attitude toward the school psychologist in order to determine the individual representations of the choices for each aspect. Such analysis contributes precisely to locate the reasons for the choice that has been made.

In addition, there is a table with the above mentioned representations of the choice of the five aspects.

Table 4. Percent presentation of the choice, separately regarding the aspect made by the respondents with lowest scores.

ASPECTS	1		2		3		4		5	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
The status of the psychologist	80	30	112	38	7	2	38	13	50	17
The need of psychologist	161	39	128	31	13	3	47	11	64	15
The deficiency of information	54	31	74	42	5	3	16	9	28	16
The readiness for cooperation	31	26	52	44	1	1	13	11	21	18
Prejudice	134	32	163	39	11	3	47	11	58	15

- 73% from the respondents whose attitude toward the school psychologist is negative has no enough information for the status, role and working assignments of the psychologist and about psychology at whole as a science;
- 70% from those respondents are disposed to cooperate with psychologist, but under the certain circumstances;
- 68% from those respondents did not concede the equal status of the school psychologist to that of the pedagogue;
- 71% of those respondents made their choice based over the preconceptions;

From the conducted research and its results, several questions and problems for future investigation arise, such as the following issues:

- To resolve the dilemma of whether it is about the existence of certain difficulties in communicating, or about still newly established communication channels and links;
- To affirm the necessity of establishing a separate strategy and policy for the treatment of specific issues of common interest, treatment of gifted and talented children, treatment of children with problems, treatment of children with special needs, by specifying the competencies, communication links and holders of information;
- The school psychologists must be actively directed towards some greater opening to the system (guidelines for individual access, newsletters, flyers, brochures, presentations, workshops);
- The mutual goals of the employees in the education system, especially from school psychologists;
- The passion of practicing the profession;
- The care for the own status;
- The vanity, and unreal expectations;
- The readiness for cooperation.

Discussion

All previous empirical researches related to the professional, pedagogical -psychological or developmental service in schools, had not a single central point of interest, i.e., they were widely posed and treated the problems regarding “the need, conditions, the development and perspectives of this service”. Also, from the review of published literature in the professional journals and magazines, issued in the territories of the former state, whose part was the Republic of Macedonia, too, can be concluded that these developmental - structural problems of the profile “professional service - professional worker school psychologist”, were uniquely treated for various reasons, among which the most important is related to the empowerment and development of the necessary professional personnel (associated with the opening of special high-school institutions that enable specific profiles of pedagogues and psychologists), but not only that, but also, because of the existence of different general orientations associated with the definition of the function, scope and general mission of these services. For example, “counseling”, orientation of professional services in Slovenia, compared with, the “developmental – pedagogical”, in the other states of the Federation, including the Republic of Macedonia (Trnavac, 1989, p. 97), with notice that, in that historical development, the professional service in Macedonia appears later and seems that gradually and quite difficult have positioned itself in the educational system, which actually show the data from several extensive empirical researches (Angelovski; Smilevski, 1986, p.7-9) and (Georgieva, 1992, p. 23-24).

It seems that the problems and the open issues are described in the aforementioned researches in our country do not differ at all, from those observed in the reports from similar studies of this problem realized in the neighboring countries that implemented this organizational innovation. Quite expectedly, in these countries it is actualized the interest and it is reviewed the situation regarding the normative - statutory, formal-legal issues of the positioning of the service, then the program - contents, and the issues related with the description and specification of jobs etc. In that past period emerge several individual research projects of fellow practitioners who pose a slightly different perspective turning the interest to the problems related with the dimension of the real self - analysis. Of course, here in particular should be emphasized the consideration about “the initiative of the professional workers” (Horvat, 1987, p. 37). Here, the problem of the initiative is related with the question of the “preparedness for active participation in the work and continuous training of the professional profiles”, from which the pedagogical-psychological service is comprised.

Aware of the fact that all employees in these services are still only the first generation of

such profiles, quite justifiably raises the concern and skepticism about the actual development of the profession. Namely, it is the clearer the fact that, if coupled with the other factors of the system, it is not provided a positive participation of this service in the educational process, then surely will emerge a lack of ideas, engagement or routine engagement in an ostensibly free time space within of work engagement, which slowly and imperceptibly begins to fill in with some other chores, mostly administrative, managerial, which ultimately will increase the risk of reducing the impact of these professional experts in the organization and will lead to gradual extinction of the profession. Indeed, already are known cases of the practice of not filling the vacant position “school psychologist” in the case of retirement, relocate to a new job, etc.

What is especially in the focus of interest is despite the above mentioned issues opened in the current researches is “the ignorance of the possibilities offered by the professional staff” and especially “the intensity of prejudice” associated with it and its work. This problem hereby called “concern about the own status and profession”, certain researchers located as relevant to the situation back in 1986 and called it “a problem in the development of the pedagogical-psychological services arising from their own expert workers” (Angelovski, Smilevski, 1986, p. 2).

Having in mind the few recurring empirical researches related with the development, the situation and the perspectives of the pedagogical-psychological service in our state, organized and guided by relevant organized structures (National Institute for the improvement of education in Macedonia, 1986 and Inter-Municipal Institute for improvement of the preschool and primary education in Skopje, 1991), as well as, the several reports from individual researches (pedagogues), can be concluded that the detected difficulties, almost without change, appear in all of them. Besides the successful overcoming of the open issues related to the normative, statutory and legal regulation of the profile (the standards and working conditions of the pedagogical-psychological services), as well as, the issues of the contain determination of the specifics and the description of jobs, the sensitive issues in the area of the interpersonal relations and professional engagement (the collaboration, professional communication, trust, respect for expertise and competence, etc.) remained unchanged (Angelovski, Smilevski, 1986) and (Georgieva, 1992) (Petrovski, 1979).

What is also noted as constant and is confirmed in this research, and which indicates the “unwillingness for scientific and analytical approach to problem solving”, is data that is received and commented back in 1986 and which states that: “the tasks from a purely analytical - research nature are under-represented among psychologists” (Angelovski, Smilevski, 1986, p. 13), on behalf of “the informational - instructive tasks that dominate and often come down to talk with students and parents”. Why is this so? Probably not because of insufficient empowerment, but rather because of the demands and expectations of the environment that still has a distorted image of the profession and its specific orientation that is exhausted by the “advisory conversation” which is considered unjustified as unilateral act, not a prelude to long-term process counseling, which - as is provided somewhere (Mortensen, Schmuller, 1973, p. 173), other necessary conditions, knowledge, organizational climate, willingness for cooperation, etc.

The thing that is special and unique in this research is the goal set out: to concentrate on the analysis of already detected problem of “resistance and lack of cooperation” (Angelevski, Smilevski, 1986, p. 14 - 15 and Georgieva, 1992, p. 24-25), established in direct survey of professional workers - psychologists. In this case, that noticed resistance of which the psychologists are complaining, was analyzed from the opposite side of their associates in order to find out “why?”, constructing the instrument for measuring of the attitudes, which in any case is superior to ordinary survey on which rested the previous mentioned studies. The initial idea of speaking in this way about “the attitude toward school psychologist” and given the opportunity for it to be specified by the several aspects embedded in the instrument, has shown

to be entirely justified. It seems that for the first time in this study is correctly analyzed the issue of the resistance and approximately are determined the percentages of its occurrence.

One of the most relevant issues that were tackled in the theoretical analysis and which has full justification to be set and discussed is the issue about the “ownership of the problem”, which is mentioned by various authors (Smilevski et.al, 2007). It seems that in the education system in Macedonia are still insufficiently established the formal structures of communication links between its particular determinants, which in themselves would consist of certain details about the communication process, with formalized carriers of information. Namely, it is known that the quality performance of any human activity, profession presupposes theoretical knowledge, practical work experience, but also a formally determined particular area of activity. Such a functional coupling between the theoretical and practical seems to be most effectively accomplished through shared and accepted values on which should rest every organization, so the educational organizations, too. Of all organizational values, among some authors are rightly distinguished the MR-mutual respect; MT - mutual trust and OC - organizational commitment (Holistic model of HRM, Smilevski et.al. 2007), which should be seen as three main pillars, but as well as goals for responsible leadership that would streamline building the success and quality in their organization.

In this regard as the most appropriate organizational structure seems the one that separates the development - pedagogical functions from the educational tasks, management and administration (Korcmaros, 1989, p. 20).

The real picture of where the place is and what is the opinion about psychologists was an unjustifiably postponed need for a long time. In order to set the goal and the direction of further development it must certainly be known a starting position. The need for research in the area of the organizational communication, interpersonal relationships in schools is imperative. From what is the communication, will greatly depend on every effort to successfully address the current and future problems in the organization.

Conclusions

This study is an attempt to define the attitude toward the school psychologist through a valid instrument created for that purpose and to use those results as a base to set the future general directions for acting.

After the field work, statistical evaluations and analysis, as well as, after the interpretation of the results various conclusions derived.

The reasons and purposes for which the professional service was introduced in schools are related with professional-developmental, educational-pedagogical, pedagogical-psychological issues, with clearly defined areas of professional activity for which there are formal legal documents (confirmed by the researches), but it is likely that there is proper practice and their real revival. (71% of the respondents would not cooperate with the school psychologist).

There is a certain resistance existing toward the implementation of such researches, indispose for cooperation and huge dispersal of the examinees involved in this research. The motives of such occurrences can be only assumed.

It can be noticed that a certain percent of the subjects (30-35%) with negative attitude toward the school psychologist which is not built over the prejudice - a fact which is worth to draw the public attention.

Also, there is a lack of basic information regarding the status, role, tasks, importance and possibilities offered by psychology as a science. But, also, there is certain mistrust in the justifiability of practicing the science method in solving the problems that we are faced with, even coming from the colleagues psychologists. Their most frequent annotations are: it is very risky, the scale is too long, the statements are not suitable, self-negation acting which, of course,

do not correspond to reality and do not take into consideration the technology of performance of this type of measure instrument which itself implicate a certain conclusion.

This kind of researches, in large extent, are risky and by a certain part they penetrate into the very sensitive area of the personality where we inevitable face with someone's "self concept", someone's "image of his/her own". That is why the authors restrained from enunciating of more detailed and complete information and comparison of collected data. It can be supposed that here lies the reason of the above mentioned resistance and indisposing for cooperation.

The future work of each school psychologist, as it was till nowadays and in each profession, which create its own criteria, should be in accordance with his/her personal convictions, knowledge, possibilities and needs. While on the own manner he/she could manifest own individuality, initiatives, capability thus adapting to the reality which may not be suitable, for what we are guilty in large extent, because it is obvious that the critical edge is not reached yet in which the greater number of psychologist would have need and desire of set and solve the mutual problems.

The respondents from town schools had lower average scores on the SSP comparing to those from rural schools. It means that the attitude of the respondents from the town schools is more negative from the employees from the rural schools who has better positive attitude toward the school psychologist. It does not automatically mean a greater and more liberal field for work and acting, but rather it is a result of influence of many other factors. Also, it is important to mention that regarding the readiness for cooperation, the psychologists coming from rural schools are more alert for cooperation. One of the factors for such condition maybe is the less engagement regarding the number of pupils and teachers, number of news and projects which is distinctive for the schools in rural communities. But, of course it is worth to mention some other factors which were not taken into consideration in this research because it could disturb the anonymity and thus, the honesty of the respondents during the answering of the questionnaire.

The result of the research is an instrument which is not perfect, especially regarding the discriminative character due to the large number of statements. The imperfection means challenge for further work by many other colleagues.

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Appendix 1. Instrument for measurement of the attitude toward the school psychologist (SSP).

In addition you will find a certain number of statements which represent opinions to what you will agree or disagree. Beside each statement four (X) signs are offered which express different degrees of agreement or disagreement. You are asked to mark the degree of your agreement or disagreement with each statement, by marking only one (X) which expresses your choice. Read carefully each statement but, do not lose too much time on thinking. Answer each claim. There are no “correct” or “incorrect” answers. All answers express your personal opinion and are considered to be correct. Your answers will be utilized only in science purposes and that is why they are anonymous. Answer as you really feel like.

	STATEMENTS	Totally agree	Partially agree	Partially disagree	Totally disagree
1	The role of psychologists in schools is negligible				
2	The cooperation with psychologist is related with the noticed his/her contribution				
3	If there was a need of psychologist every school would employee such personnel				
4	It is clear what school psychologist should work				
5	Psychologist only know how to perform testing				
6	At school all are satisfied with the work of psychologist				
7	Psychologist should be reconciled with the fact that they are no needed in schools				
8	Although they are employed in schools they are only needed in health care system				
9	Howsoever they want be equal to pedagogues they will never accomplish that				
10	The cooperation with psychologist derives only from curiosity				
11	When psychologist interferes in teachers work it become complicated with no effect				
12	Always newly suggested innovations coming from psychologist should be taken with reserve				
13	The nature of training-education process did not allows equality between pedagogue and psychologist				
14	Only one psychologist is enough for all schools in the municipality				
15.	The pedagogue has a great support from teachers because his work is more valuable for improvement of training-education process				
16	Schools will loose nothing if they give freedom to psychologists to participate equally in planning and organizing of the training-education process				
17	The duty of the expert service of school is not performed entirely with out psychologists				
18	The funds spent on psychologists work could be utilized more reasonable				
19	It would be better to rather vote for teacher than for psychologist to perform leader position, regardless the qualities of both				
20	The modern school is consist of more computers rather than more psychologist at service				
21	If the psychologist have a leading word in the service it would be bad for the general atmosphere in the school				
22	School psychologist should be satisfied by having job at whole				
23	Due to many mutual relations with training-education process, psychology has a great contribution in the discoveries important for its modernization				
24	This test is also only one useless psychology hassle				

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