

DIDACTIC STRATEGIES, CLASS MANAGEMENT PRACTICES AND LEARNING PERFORMANCES IN THE HIGH SCHOOL ECONOMIC EDUCATION. A CRITICAL REALISM PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT. There are two main classical fields of research which have been trying for decades to give explanations of the class molesting problems or the low performances of pupils in learning. One is the educational psychology and the other is the pedagogy. The educational psychologists put at the center (among other factors) the human centric aspects such as cognitive processes, emotions or behavioral aspects involved in educational processes such as learning, memory, cognition, or attention. On the other hand, the pedagogy-oriented researchers, put at the center the didactic strategies used by the teacher, the formal planning, the projection of lessons, or the evaluation done in educational contexts. In this paper, I argue that in many cases, there are important contextual aspects which are not considered as seriously as they should. Put simple, for instance, if the adolescents are not interested in the discipline because the discipline taught is not a baccalaureate discipline the interest in learning and the learning achieved by the adolescents will be poor, no matter what didactic strategy, or class management practice the professor uses. In this line of thinking, in this paper, I try to investigate through a case study research strategy, the contextual aspects responsible for the class problems and for the low performances in economic learning, giving the context a central role. Based on the four contextual causes of problems

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identified in the paper, I proposed four practical solutions/short term solutions applicable in the classroom, in order to improve the immediate attractiveness of the educational context.

Key words: *didactic strategies; class management; performance in learning; high school economic education.*

1. Introduction

Modern education can be seen as a set of activities devoted to the formation of new generations of citizens, through the dissemination of knowledge, development of abilities and behaviors, assimilation of values and cultural norms inherited in time by one particular society (Ionescu *et al.*, 1995). Although the education has to achieve some specific finalities, in many cases, this fact is not as simple as is desired by the teachers. In many cases, the teachers have developed formal planning, projects of lessons, have drawn operational objectives and sketched didactic strategies suitable for application (Albulescu and Albulescu, 1999; Ionescu and Bocos, 2009/2017) and despite all this planning the result from the teaching-learning activities could be disappointing.

In this paper, I try to examine through a case study research strategy why some high schools perform poorer (under average) in economic education, despite all the planning mentioned above. I do so, through taking into account the learning experience of 81 adolescents and the general context in which this study was conducted. More specifically, I search for the causal explanations of problems in the classroom and in consequence, low performances in learning, trying to penetrate the empirical surface to deep structures. The search for a causal explanation, rather than generalizable patterns, requires moving beyond what can be observed to why the observed events have occurred (Piekkari and Welch, 2018).

In this line of thinking, the paper brings some original contributions with respect to the following domains. First, I looked at the social phenomena from other/a different philosophical position. The relationship

between the didactic strategies, class management practices and learning performances are well enough understood within the scientific literature from a positivistic point of view. It means, there are developed scientific theories framework, models, regarding the didactic strategies, class management practices which all are assumed that work in all the situations. What I bring into discussion is the *main importance of the context* in determining the performance in learning. Particularly, in medium and low performers high schools.

Second, the paper is original regarding the fact that is an action research paper. Action research is a method of introducing into the practice some tools/procedures/solutions derived from existing theories and checking the discrepancies between the existing theories and empirical data and drawing conclusions which aim to refine/improve the existent theories (Bhattacharjee, 2012). Until now, there is a lot of scientific knowledge within the fields of educational psychology and pedagogy. But what is missing here, at least at the author awareness, is how the existing theories are actually applied into the practices and if these theories, in specific environments, have an impact in improving the learning performances. As we are going to see in this paper it seems that in the problematic contexts the performance in learning will be poor, no matter what advanced class management practices, or didactic strategies are implemented by the docent. This fact comes in contradiction with what we are already know in the present moment regarding the topic of our study.

Third, the research method is new regarding the fact that uses complementarily deductive research and inductive research. It means, the author has started with a deductive research (identifying and describing the discrepancies between the existent theories and the data in the reality) and continued with an inductive research (based on the discrepancies identified, the author developed assumptions in the form of lessons learnt which aim to refine/improve the exiting theories). It aims to refine the existent theories not through a theory testing approach, neither through a pure theoretical paper but through a theory building approach.

In this rationale, overall, from a research life-cycle perspective (Bhattacharjee, 2012; Carlile and Christenses, 2004; Eisenhardt, 1989) adopting a Critical Realism (CR) philosophical position (Bhaskar, 1998;

Ragin, 1992, 1997) I have elaborated an article which aims to refine/improve the theories in the field of educational psychology and pedagogy. Through a single case study, based on empirical qualitative and quantitative data analysis, collected through observations, interviews, discussions, and secondary data analysis I found some explanations for the problems and the lack of interest of the adolescents regarding the economic education, within the specific context. I investigated the learning performances in the high school economic education in a medium performer high school.

Drawing upon the existent theories in the field of educational psychology, pedagogy and managerial economics the paper may be important for several reasons: (1) it can help the practice of economic pedagogy at the high school level be improved, (2) the paper develops some lessons learnt which can be transferred - not generalized - to other similar contexts; (3) the paper brings into discussion the need of considering building an appropriate educational context first, before considering other factors of learning, in medium and low performers high schools, (4) it makes a call for prioritizing the introduction of social and emotional interventions (SEL – Social and Emotional Learning) in medium and low performers high schools, (5) it develops practical solutions, applicable in the classroom, in order to improve the immediate attractiveness of the educational context.

The rest of the paper continues as follows. I will begin by discussing the main contributions within the literature review section, contributions which may have an impact or are related with the topic adopted in this paper. Next, I will present the research methodology I have chosen for this paper and I will continue with the empirical part. The paper ends through discussing the practical implications for the economic pedagogy at the high school level and the main limits and possible future avenues for research.

2. Literature review

There is a scientific fact stating that the attention of high school pupils, class disturbing, and peer molesting are some of the most important problems facing the teachers and schools in the modern academic

environment (Mih, 2010/2018). Normally, the high schools within which these problems occur more often are characterized by lower levels of learning performances such as: lower semester and annual grades; lower grades at the baccalaureate exam; lower chances regarding university admissions and so on. These facts are easily observable through consulting specialized data bases in Romania such as *Admitere liceu* (www.admitereliceu.ro, 2020). The psychological and pedagogical schools have tried for decades to identify the determinants of the problems such as those mentioned above in order to increase the performance of the educational process as a whole.

Along the time, one stream of researchers tried to seek explanations regarding the problems in schools and the poor performance of children in learning activities from a psychological orientation (Piaget, 1965; Vygotski, 1971). Despite the fact that there are now well-established theories explaining, for instance, the cognitive development of children (Piaget, 1965; 1973), behavioral theories developed by Pavlov, Watson, Skinner, Thorndike (David, 2000) applied to the educational fields, decades of research in the cognitive educational psychology field developed by Sternberg, Atkinson, Shiffrin (Mih, 2010/2018) – many times the contextual aspects are playing a secondary role in the scholars' explanation regarding the performance of adolescents in high school. The contextual aspects, in many cases, are integrated into psychological or pedagogical explanations but are not view such as the main cause in determining the poor learning or the problems occurring in high school.

For instance, in the classical theory of cognitive development Jean Piaget (1965; 1973) considered the contextual aspects impacting the cognitive development of children. Starting with behavioral observations the swiss professor integrated child's abilities with their environment and found some cognitive operational structures characterizing each child along developmental stages in his cognitive development process. Even though the Piaget's theory takes the environment into account in explaining the operational cognitive structures development along ontogenically stages, the theory does not put at the center the context.

One practical implication for education resulting from Piaget's theory is the fact that the type of didactic instruction should be aligned with the level of maturation of the kid's cognitive operational structures

(Mih, 2010/2018). Despite the fact that I align with this idea, one can see in everyday teaching that because of some contextual factors (e.g. the discipline's importance in the high school curriculum, the school's importance in the adolescent's family and in his social relationships) the same adolescents from more favorable contexts will obtain better performances no matter the didactic strategy is used by the docent. Therefore, the relationship between the adequate didactic strategy (which should be aligned with the kids' level of cognitive development as professor Piaget stated) and the performance is influenced by the context (moderated, or at the extreme even mediated). In short, the context it seems to be the main cause/determinant of learning performances, at least in medium and low performers educational contexts.²

In this line of thinking, in this paper, I examine some of the contextual factors (such as the importance's of the discipline in the high school curriculum, or the importance of the discipline for the future career of the high school adolescent) in order to better explain the performance of the adolescents in high school economic education. More specifically, from a critical realist perspective I try to seek some credible and transferable explanations (Welch and Piekkari, 2017) regarding the performance of adolescents in economic education in Romania, giving the contextual factors a *central role* in explaining the performance in learning.

Another stream of researchers is giving the didactic strategy used by the professor a central role in explaining the problems and the poor performance of adolescents in high school. Some authors argue that the didactic strategy used by the docent can be one source of this kind of problems (Albulescu and Albulescu, 1999; Bocoş and Jucan, 2008). For instance, the authors in this orientation argue that the adolescents are non-attentive and class disturbing in the situations when the teacher uses expositive didactic methods such as exposure, lectures and didactic talks. The supporters of this theory argue that the teachers should abandon the expositive methods and instead replace the lectures with some more adequate active-participative didactic methods. For instance, academic

² The concept context in this paper refers to the general, institutional (the educational organization's context) and classroom specific contexts (Cerghit, 2002). Each component of the context it is divided in many other subcomponents which influences the performance in learning.

heuristic debates, didactic dialogue, case studies etc. This orientation, however, may be even more pronounced among teachers in practice. The idea is, in this orientation, that the problem with the adolescents not paying attention, disturbing the class, molesting their colleagues is the expositive strategy per se. Through replacing the lectures and exposures with case studies, heuristic conversations and didactic dialogues – the supporters argue – the problems will be resolved. In this orientation, the proponents put at the center the didactic strategy used by the docent as the source of the problems in class management.

What I do in this paper is to question this orientation and I argue that there are possible contextual factors which can better explain the performance of adolescents in economic education in high school, rather than the didactic strategy used by the docent. In this rationale, my suppositions are aligned with the socio-constructivism paradigm of learning (Vygotski, 1971). What I did in this paper is to investigate some specific contextual factors explaining the problem in schools and the performance of adolescents in the high school economic education from a vygotskian theory of learning. The idea is that the performance of pupils in the high school and the problems they make in the classroom cannot be explained correctly without giving the context a major role. As the cognitive development of children cannot be explained without taking in consideration the culture and social relationships of the children (Vygotski, 1971) the same with the performance in learning in the high school. The class molesting problems, the lack of attention, the skipping classes and the poor performances are the result of social and cultural aspects rather than to be a result of the didactic strategy.

I actually make a call for combining active-participative didactic strategies with lectures and other traditional approaches rather than totally abandoning the expositive oriented didactic strategies³. More specifically, I argue that the didactic strategy per se is not the cause of the adolescents' problematic behavior instead there are other factors. The relationship between the didactic strategy per se, no matter its orientation, is influenced (moderated, or even mediated) by some situational/contextual

³ Lehene (2019) also makes a call for continuing using expositive and active-participative didactic strategies in university level management education, rather than totally abandoning the cultivation of the informative dimension of education.

variables. It means, it is necessarily a certain contextual climate in order to exist a relationship between the didactic strategy and the performance in learning. In turn, each didactic strategy has its advantages and its disadvantages (Albulescu and Albulescu, 1999). I argue that both are necessarily for a proper economic education in high school. But, the performance of the adolescents in high school economic education, particularly in medium and low performers high schools is determined mainly by the context (some situational/contextual variables), and not the didactic strategy.

In the next paragraphs, we are going to see how the reality looks like in a medium performer high school, from the perspective of an action research. We are going to see which are the discrepancies/anomalies between the existing theories (didactic strategies and class management) and the empirical data, within the specific context.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Philosophical position

The present paper seeks to offer an explanation regarding the determinants of the problems in class and the poor learning performances of the adolescents in the high school economic education from a critical realism philosophical perspective. Critical realism (CR) is a modern paradigm which seeks to offer plausible explanations for a social phenomenon taking the context into account (Welch *et al.*, 2011). The critical realism allows the researchers to develop a causal explanation of a social phenomenon, through a holistic approach, considering the breadth of the organizational and social factors having a causal role in the explanation of the phenomenon (Bhaskar, 1998; Ragin, 1997, 1992; Wynn and Williams, 2012). In this case, the CR takes into the account, for instance, the emotions and attentional abilities of the adolescents (Goleman, 1995/2006), their cognitive distortions and unconscious information processing (David, 2006), and all the adolescent experiences happening within and outside the class, but which influence the activities within the class.

According to Welch *et al.* (2011) critical realism was developed as an alternative to the classical positivism and interpretative philosophical positions, combining components of both in order to develop new knowledge. Through evidence from a single site, we try to offer a credible, transferable, dependable and confirmable theory (Welch and Piekkari, 2017) regarding the problems occurring in the high schools in economic education. Within the research methodology literature, the studies conducted in the critical realism tradition are broadly known such as “contextualized explanations” (Welch *et al.*, 2011). What I specifically do in this paper I search for the explanations for causes and importantly, the contextual conditions under which the causes occur. (The cause being the low performance in learning in medium and low performers high schools, regarding the economic education.)

From a research life-cycle perspective this paper is theory refinement/improvement oriented. Although there may exist also scholars not accepting that one theory may be also refined with other scientific methods, beyond the utilization of statistical tests, there are now some papers published in world-class journals, which have demonstrated how a theory can be tested/refined with other methods. For instance, case studies (Gilbert, 2005; Szulanski and Jensen, 2006; 2011). In this line of thinking, through observations and interview-based methods (such as daily conversations and observations of adolescents’ cognitions, emotions and behaviors in class) I developed some assumptions in the form of lesson learnt for transfer to other similar cases or contexts.

Aligned with the philosophical position adopted in this paper the output resulting from the paper are assumptions in the form of lessons learnt which can be transferred with careful considerations to other similar contexts (Welch *et al.*, 2011; Welch and Piekkari, 2017). More specifically, the critical realists, despite the fact that they align with the positivists at ontological level (there is a truth), they assume that there is not possible to fully understand this truth, aligning with the interpretivists at the epistemological level. Therefore, giving this philosophical base, the generalization from the scientific theories built in the CR tradition is limited (Piekkari and Welch, 2018; Wynn and Williams, 2012). To be contrasted this assumption with the interpretivist philosophical positions which even assume that the generalization is not possible. All the truth is time and context bound (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Stake, 1995 *apud*

Welch *et al.*, 2011). In this line of thinking, the lessons learnt from this paper, according the CR, could be transferred - not generalized - to other medium and low performers high school, in the domain of economic education.

3.2 Methods

The main research strategy adopted in this paper is the case study. I chose a single case study design with three embedded units of analysis. The single case studies have some advantages in comparison with multiple case studies and with statistical/quantitative studies. According to Yin (1984/2014) the single case study is an appropriate research design under several circumstances: critical, unusual, common, revelatory, or longitudinal social phenomena all fit better with the in-depth and rich descriptions pursued through single case studies. The main advantage of this research strategy results from its nature: the in-depth analysis of the social phenomena, focusing on many constructs and variables (not only few), taking the context into account and, very important, considering the personal characteristics of the subjects involved in the study (Dyer and Wilkins, 1991; Ragin, 1997).

Data sources

Observations. The author carefully observed the behavior and registered the subjective experience of 81 high school pupils during six intensive months. The adolescents were involved in educational activities related to the economic high school education in the site mentioned above. As a direct teacher (with a daily meeting with the older adolescents – 11th and 12th grades and a two-day meeting a week with younger adolescents – 9th grade) the author was able to find some explanations of the class problems (why the adolescents make problems in class) and for the lower performances in economic learning (why the adolescents do not learn as they should). The observations were coded by the teacher regarding the following scheme: the cognitive pattern [rational/irrational (David, 2006)]; the emotions displayed during the learning activities in

class [functional/dysfunctional – Goleman, 1995/2006]], and the behavior displayed during the learning activities in class [adaptive/nonadaptive (David, 2000)]. Table 1.

Table 1. Description of the methods implemented

The case: AM technological high school	Hours of observation (400 hours)	Number of adolescents observed (81)
IX grade	60	31
XI grade	160	27
XII grade	180	23
Methods		
• Informal structured interviews		43
• Secondary data analysis (classbook; secondary analysis of the formal tests, power point presentations elaboration, comparative analysis; regulatory documents)		81 (minus absents)
• Daily observations of adolescents' behavior		81 (minus absents)
• Informal discussions regarding adolescents' future		81 (minus absents)

(Source: author's own elaboration)

Interviews. All the older adolescents present to the class in one day (eleventh and twelfth grades) were asked to complete an informal document regarding some aspects of interest, for the purpose of understanding their motivation behind the engagement / lack of engagement in the teaching-learning activities. Were pursued three main dimensions: (1) social and economic status, (2) their future career, (3) what they like to do in life – pleasant life, good life, meaningful life (David, 2000). According the existent knowledge in the educational psychology literature these dimensions were focused such as the main motivation for the engagement/lack of engagement in the educational activities conducted at school. Table 2.

Table 2. Informal structured interviews

Questions adolescents needed to answer
Where are you from (rural or urban area)?
What was your level of scholar performance last year (annual mean)?
What do you want to do after the high school?
What do you want to do on long term (your career)?
What are your hobbies? What do you like to do in your life?

(Source: author's own elaboration)

Secondary source and other data. Regulatory documents were examined such as The Standard for the Professional Development, Year Planning, Curriculum for Technological Education and class related archives such as the classbook, the tests given for formative evaluation along the year, the power point presentations, and the comparative analysis between two companies. In this line of thinking, the classbook was investigated in order to check the grades obtained by the adolescents in relation with the disciplines taught. The formal tests, power point presentations and the comparative analysis were analyzed for consistency in writing and the development of adolescents intellectual working abilities (capacity of argumentation, capacity of analyzing and synthesizing data, critical thinking, capacity of elaboration).

In this category I classify also various informal discussions conducted with the adolescents along the year with the purpose of calming and leading the class toward a functional educational climate. In this line of thinking, I coded these interactions such as functional (happened few times) or dysfunctional (happened many times). Table 1.

Data analysis

First, I developed some theoretical constructs (not variables – Bhattacharjee, 2012) and the underlying assumptions and logic linking the constructs from the existent literature, around which I developed the theoretical framework. Then, I synthesized the collected data and based

on the pattern matching analytical technique (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin 1984/2014) I continuously iterate back and forth between the proposed theoretical framework (which captures the existent theories in the pedagogy and educational psychology literature) and empirical data. Based on the discrepancies identified between the theory and data I search for explanations of the discrepancies. Yin (1984/2014) calls this analytical strategy *Relying on theoretical propositions*. Each unit of analysis (in our case, each class) provided empirical evidence showing anomalies/discrepancies between the preexisting theories and data.

In this line of thinking, the theoretical constructs around which I develop this paper are adopted from the pedagogy literature. I refer to a didactic strategy to an integrated/holistic approach composed from teaching methods, didactic tools, resources and procedures, forms of didactic activity organization; all combined together, in order to help the teacher to conduct the class to achieve its stated learning objectives (Ionescu and Bocoş 2009/2017). According to Albulescu and Albulescu (1999) the didactic strategies can be classified in two main categories: expositive (lectures, demonstration, explanation) and active-participative (heuristic conversation, didactic dialog, case studies, elaboration of projects, discovery-oriented learning, problematization).

In this paper, when I refer to the learning performances, we refer to an observed alteration in the subject's behavior due to the educational actions applied by the teacher (Mih, 2010/2018). The performance in learning was monitored according to the operational learning objectives theory (Bloom, 1971 *apud* Albulescu and Albulescu, 1999). Therefore, during six intensive months I monitored the advances in learning of the adolescents in our sample in the following domains: cognitive informative (the assimilation of new knowledge), cognitive formative (the development of analyzing and synthesizing abilities, critical thinking, elaboration of projects), affective (the attitude and emotions displayed toward the economic education) and psychomotor abilities (the elaboration of power point presentations and public speaking).

Finally, I refer to the class management practices implemented by the teacher to the specific behavioral interventions developed by the psychologists – such as the *Verbal Prompting*, *Premack Principle*, *Contingency Contract*, *Skinner's Model for Behavioral Control* (reinforcements and

punishments), *Gradual Strengthening* – in order to manage the class by keeping the adolescents in the appropriate emotional state (David, 2000; Mih, 2010/2018). Table 3.

Table 3. Description of the constructs

What didactic strategies and methods were implemented	Expositive: Lectures, heuristic conversations, academic debates, didactic dialogues Formative: Power point presentations elaborations Comparative analysis between companies Economic analysis of firm resources and competences	
What class management practices were implemented	Verbal Prompting, Premack Principle, Contingency Contract, Skinner’s Model for Behavioral Control (reinforcements and punishments) Gradual Strengthening	
How was the performance in learning assessed	Pure cognitive (assimilation of economic principles, theories and concepts) Cognitive formative (ability to elaborate projects and power point presentations) Affective-attitudinal (attitude and emotions displayed toward the economic education) Psychomotor-actional (elaboration of power point presentations and public speaking)	As expected/as stated at the beginning Below the standards set Above the standards set Minimum grade 8: yes Professor subjective appreciation: yes or no Minimum grade 8: yes

(Source: author’s own elaboration based on the cited references)

3.3 Specific advantages of using this methodology

The theory life cycle starts with some researchers having some ideas, developing a research plan, gathering the data, inducing theory from data and then testing the theory with statistical tests and methods, closing

temporarily the circle of life cycle theory. The theory is then accepted temporarily within the scientific community until new contradictory findings or until some new advancements refine the existent framework (Bhattacharjee, 2012; Carlile and Christenses, 2004; Eisenhardt, 1989). This paper is addressed to theory refinement. It means, currently there are educational psychology and pedagogy well established theories regarding the improvement of the education system as a whole, but they are developed such as generalist frameworks. In order to refine an established theoretical framework, there are possible two strategies: 1) improving with a pure theoretical paper (which then should be pursued through a research-oriented strategy) or 2) improving with a research-oriented paper. The theory refinement with a research-oriented paper is suitable to be improved with two strategies: 2.1) theory building or 2.2) theory testing. This paper is theory improvement/refinement oriented, but not with a theory testing approach, rather, with a theory building approach (2.1). In short, I aim to incrementally refine the existent knowledge regarding the class management theory, respectively the didactic strategies and the relationship of these theories with the learning performances through a theory building approach, not theory testing. The goal is to build theory, not to test the theory (Eisenhardt and Grabner, 2007).

The main advantage of using this methodology is that through a single case study with an embedded design the author provides some propositions in order to refine (incremental advancement) the existent theories in the field of educational psychology and pedagogy. First, in comparison with the pure theoretical advance of the theory this paper is grounded in empirical data, in the sense of the grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Starting with observations of adolescents' behaviors, informal discussions, secondary data analysis the author was able to penetrate under the surface and identify some patterns regarding the poor performance in learning. Second, in comparison with a theory testing approach – statistical theory testing in order to advance/refine the existent theories – using a single case study with an embedded design the author was able to take into considerations the broader system within which the case was embedded and all the experience of the adolescents in the educational context.

4. Observations, data analysis, and lessons learnt for theory improvement

AM is a state funded high school in the city of Cluj-Napoca, Romania. Cluj-Napoca is the fourth city in Romania by number of inhabitants, after the capital Bucharest, Iasi and Timisoara with a population of 323.108 inhabitants (National Institute of Statistics, 2020). The city is an economic hub and a cultural center with an intercultural population. The city has the largest number of students in Romania. Every year thousands of foreign and Romanian students come to the Cluj for studies. The city is characterized by a cosmopolite and university-oriented culture (Wikipedia, 2020).

The site is a medium performer technological high school in Romania. It was founded in the 1980's due to the anticipation of the local engineers of the explosion of the new emerging technologies such as personal computers, information technology services and the development of modern electronics devices. With a 50 years history, AM occupies now a traditional, leading position in Romania in its industry education orientation (*www.admitereliceu.ro*, 2020). The high school has passed from 80's to our days through various reforms, 'flirting' between two major scientific fields: engineering and economics. If in the burgeoning period the focus of the high school was on engineering disciplines, in our days the economic specialization represents an important educational component in order to try to assure the survival of the high school.

According to the Institute for Educational Sciences in Romania - IES (2020) AM is a technological high school institution, offering high-school educational programs in both fields: engineering and economics. Judging after the performances obtained in the last years, AM is a medium-lower performing high school depending criteria such as pupils' baccalaureate exams, admission criteria and the participation in Olympics. According to the specialized website *www.admitereliceu.ro* (2020) AM is situated in top 350 high schools in Romania, with an average admission exam note 7.50, 6,52 baccalaureate's mean, and 78 % baccalaureate's successful mean (*www.admitereliceu.ro*, 2020).

The economics and business education in Romania start formally at the high school level (IES, 2020). There are now three broad economic related specializations, at the high school level, the pupils can choose in order to enter into the field for the first time and get contact with the economic and business objective laws, principles and concepts. They are called: public alimentation and tourism, economic-administrative-post services, commerce and services (Ministry of Education in Romania, 2020). The main purpose of the high school economic education is to introduce the pupils for the first time to the economic and business disciplines such as firm's administration, marketing, accountancy, service quality, marketing policies, negotiation and contracting, financial analysis etc. Beyond these economic disciplines, in Romania, the pupils in high school also study in their 10th grade Education for Entrepreneurship and Economy, respectively Applied Economy in their 11th and 12th grades.

Within the tables 4, 5 and 6 there is presented the summary of the results of the educational activities conducted within the three classes/grades in our case site. Based on the discrepancies/anomalies observed between the preexisting theories and the empirical data, the author next is going to discuss some explanations regarding those poor results in learning. According the CR position, the author tries to go deeper than the observed evidence and portray the main causes of the problems, within this context, considering the breadth of the social linkages the case was embedded and the characteristics of the adolescents.

As one can see in the tables above the results were poor despite the formal planning at the beginning of the scholar year. Particularly, regarding the informative dimension of education. Because of the problematic emotions and behaviors discussed next, the assimilation of economic principles, theories, concepts, objective laws were seriously hampered. The lack of interest and the disengagement conducted to a hard implementation of the lectures, heuristic conversations and didactic dialogues. For instance, if the teacher asked some questions in order to problematize the topic of the lesson many times nobody wanted to participate at the conversation. (Normally, the same two, three kids were participating.)

On the formative dimension, the results obtained are aligned according the stated objectives (for the cognitive-formative and psychomotor domains). But even here, because of the problematic emotions and behaviors

discussed next, the implementation of the power point presentations, for instance, was very hard. The goal was to help the adolescents to build their analytical and synthesis skills, to cultivate their elaboration abilities and critical thinking and to improve their public speaking abilities. For all the objectives, we can assume that they were attained (according the grades obtained by the adolescents in the classbook). On the other hand, the affective-attitudinal objective (improving adolescents' perception and cultivating a positive attitude toward economic disciplines) was not attained, giving the low interest and disengagement manifested by adolescents the entire period of observation.

Table 4. Tabulation of the adolescent's responses within the interview

Question	Responses grouping (N =43)	
Where are you from?	Urban	14
	Rural/Neighborhood	29
What was your level of scholar performance last year (annual mean)?	Above nine	16
	Above eight	22
	Less than eight	5
What do you want to do after the high school?	University	24
	University (specialization economics)	11
	Other activities	
	Undecided	7
What do you want to do on long term (your career)?		1
	Economic related professions	12
	Other professions	
	Undecided	21
		10

(Source: author's own elaboration)

Table 5. Results of the educational activities after six months

Dimension of education	Educational activities	Results
Operational objectives related to the informative dimension	Didactic strategies and methods implemented: lectures, heuristic conversations, didactic dialogues, collective academic debates Many behavioral interventions needed to be implemented: Verbal Prompting, Skinner's Model for Behavioral Control (reinforcements and punishments) Gradual Strengthening	Much below the standards set at the beginning of the scholar year
Operational objectives related to the formative dimension	Didactic strategies and methods implemented: projects elaboration, comparative/economic analysis, power point elaborations Many behavioral interventions needed to be implemented: Verbal Prompting, Premack Principle, Contingency Contract, Skinner's Model for Behavioral Control (reinforcements and punishments) Gradual Strengthening	As stated at the beginning of the scholar year (for the cognitive-formative and psychomotor domains). Below the standards set at the beginning of the scholar year for the affective-attitudinal domain

(Source: author's own elaboration)

In the table 6 I have synthesized the main problems encountered during the period of observation. These problems conducted to the poor performances in learning as discussed above.

Table 6. The main problems observed

Patterns observed among adolescents	Class and problems observed
Patterns of dysfunctional emotions displayed during the economic class	<p>IX grade Boredom Nervousness Impatience Euphoria/exaggerated enthusiasm Shyness</p> <p>XI grade Boredom Impatience Distrust Mental fatigue</p> <p>XII grade Boredom Nervousness Impatience Euphoria/exaggerated enthusiasm Shyness Distrust Mental fatigue</p>
Patterns of maladaptive behaviors displayed during the economic class	<p>IX grade Playing different games on their smartphones Speaking with the peer repeatedly, totally ignoring the professor Walkaround the class repeatedly</p>

Patterns observed among adolescents	Class and problems observed
	<p>XI grade</p> <p>Playing different games on their smartphones</p> <p>Speaking with the peer repeatedly, totally ignoring the professor</p> <p>Skipping classes often</p>
	<p>XII grade</p> <p>Listen to music</p> <p>Playing different games on their smartphones</p> <p>Speaking with the peer repeatedly, totally ignoring the professor</p> <p>Walkaround the class repeatedly</p> <p>Making the assignments to other disciplines</p> <p>Eating repeatedly during the class</p> <p>Skipping classes often</p>

Note. In this paper the notions functional/dysfunctional emotions and adaptive/maladaptive behaviors are evaluated according the functional/pragmatic criteria: help or hamper the class to attain its planned objectives or favor/disfavor a positive educational climate (processing after David, 2000, 2006).
 (Source: author’s own elaboration)

As one can see in the table 6 there were a lot of problems in the classes the author taught. Since the author is not a clinical psychologist the cognitive domain will not be assessed in this paper, although some irrational cognitive patterns were identified (e.g. global evaluation by the adolescents of their peers/teachers) [David, 2006]. However, the displayed emotions and behaviors during the economic class were observed and can be described, from a managerial economist perspective, with some psychology related training, in order to give some empirical based advices to accredited psychologists, educational policy makers and economic educators.

The most important problem (the main problem) which led to the poor performances in economic learning was the disengagement and the lack of interest displayed by the adolescents toward the economic disciplines taught by the professor. This lack of interest was observed in the displayed emotions and behaviors during the period of observation. The adolescents were listening to music during the class, doing their homework for other disciplines, playing on their smartphones, speaking continuously to each other totally ignoring the professor and many more problematic behaviors. This lack of interest and disengagement conducted to poor performances in economic learning (table 3 and 4). At the base of this lack of interest and disengagement stood some causes, which will be discussed next in patterns.

What were the patterns of causes which led to poor performances?

A lack of importance of the discipline for the adolescent's future/future career

The first main cause (main pattern) regarding the problems in the class and in consequence the poor performance in learning is a lack of importance of the discipline for the adolescent's future, or for his/her future career. Because of the early stage in their life and the problematic stage the adolescents face regarding their cognitive, social and cultural development during the high school period, many of the adolescents enrolled in technological and economic oriented specializations are there because some other factors, rather than their consciousness election per se. As an example, the author of the paper asked the adolescents one day: „How many of them are there because their election?“. It means, how many of the adolescents are enrolled in high school economic education because they implicitly wanted this. At this question, many of them have said that there have been other factors regarding their election of the economic specialization. For instance, many of them said “we were assigned here” and for this reason they are here and not because it was their own election.

The author also wanted to find answer to the next question: “Ok, so you are here because some other factors, but now that you are here, how many of you want to follow and keep studying in the economics or business universities?” In our case site, we asked 43 older adolescents in 11th and 12th grades what trajectory they want to pursue in their career. I wanted to know how many of them want to pursue a career in economics. From the 43 pupils interviewed, only 11 have explicitly said that they want to pursue a career in economics (Table 4). In this line of thinking, in these circumstances, the idea I develop in this paper is that no matter what didactic strategy the teacher uses the motivation for learning in adolescents could be absent. Even if we use the most modern tools and didactic methods the adolescents who are not interested in one discipline (as in our case the pupils explicitly remembered the teacher this fact several times) they will not learn and will make a lot of problems in the class, such as peer and class molesting, listen to music during the class, skipping classes and so on.

Additionally, for the older adolescents (11th and 12th grade) this assumption is more likely to be supported by data and facts. We have a window of opportunity to model the behavior of younger adolescents (9th and 10th grades) and attract them to a wanted trajectory but for older adolescents (11th and 12th grades) the importance of the discipline for their future career, we argue, will impact the motivation and the involvement in learning, no matter what didactic strategy the teacher is using or the practices of class management applied.

The conclusion is that in our case site, many adolescents in the economic specialization they want to pursue other careers in their lives and do not want to become economists. In this line of thinking, we argue that the importance of the economic disciplines for their future career election, as it is perceived by the adolescents, may impact the performance in learning. And I referring here not only to adolescent his/her perception. Parents or even peer teacher may reinforce this assumption with negative consequences for we as economic educators. The same is also true for the class management practices implemented by the teacher during the class. One can use the *contingency contract technique* or the *verbal prompting practice* in order to try to control the behavior of the adolescents, keeping them motivated and attentive to the class discussions, but the situation is

going to ask for more interventions in comparison with the case the adolescents perceiving the discipline as being important for their future career. We will spend more time in trying to control the behavior of the adolescents rather than on the lesson per se. (As it was the case in our case site.) Probably, the behavioral control practices will work even if the adolescents have no interest in the discipline but will require more resources such as time and effort for the situation in which they perceive the discipline as not being so important for their future career as other disciplines.

The inappropriate class leadership style

The second main cause identified by the author through examining the whole educational context, in search for explanation of the poor performance in learning, is the inappropriate leadership style of the class. Some classical theories, regarding the class management practices, have stated that the teachers should avoid the dictatorial role in order to produce positive results in learning. For instance, the model developed by Gordon (1981) - *apud* Mih (2010/2018). What I argue in this paper is the fact that this orientation can have also one flip side. For instance, in the case the teacher is excessively tolerant and avoids using the authoritarian style, the adolescents may do not take seriously the teacher and may perceive the tolerance displayed by the docent such as a lack of importance of the discipline. Pedagogical literature suggests, that naturally, some teachers may be oriented toward tolerance and others toward exigency (Stan, 2000). I argue that the problems occur at the point the teacher may slip in each one of these directions. On the one hand, if the teacher is too tolerant, as we have discussed above, the adolescents may perceive the discipline as not being important. On the other hand, if the teacher is excessively authoritarian/dictatorial he/she may push away and chase away the adolescents from his disciplines. Sliding in any direction can be a sign of dysfunctionality. The assumption developed in this paper, based on the empirical evidence, is that being tolerant, balanced with some aspects of authority, may enhance the learning achieved, may signal the pupils that the class and the discipline are important, and may contribute to maintaining a learning favorable climate atmosphere.

As an empirical example, to support the assumption above, the author was too tolerant with a 9th grade during an entire month. As an output, the class was continuously excessively noisy, the kids were not following the professor and the lesson, and they were speaking to each other continuously during the entire lesson. As an experiment, in one class, the teacher investigated the kids which were speaking and molesting the class and graded the kids (not officially) with the lowest grades because they did not know the answers to the questions raised by the docent. As a result, following the kid's examination and grading them with the lowest grade the class was very calm, attentive and the lesson could be continued in normal conditions.

At the same class, in one day, the author asked the pupils to work in teams and complete some tasks regarding the activities done by employees in the firm's departments (marketing, hr, production). The class was again excessively noisy. Of course, from 30 pupils only two, or three, did the task assigned to them. The rest of the class, they were playing on their smartphones, they were eating, they were doing totally other things in comparison with what the teacher told them to do. Even in the situation when the teacher walked around the room and told each pupil personally to do the task assigned, they were not even taking into account the professor and were continuing with what they were doing.

Another example, from the same class. This time we discuss an empirical example regarding the failure of an active-participative didactic strategy. At the beginning of the semester, the younger adolescents were assigned a task to realize a power point presentation regarding one company they know, love and use its products. The structure of the presentation was flexible in order the task to do not be very difficult. Regarding the specific task, 75% of the adolescents did rather good the task. The problem was that the pupils which do not need to present their work, they interpreted their peer's presentations such as a relaxation time. As an estimation, I would say that from 30 pupils in the entire class just five were normally attentive to their colleagues. The rest of them they are playing on their smartphone, sleep, eat, listen to music, sing and so on. Like in the kindergarten, even though they are now 16 years old.

The lesson learnt is that an exaggeration of the tolerating style may have negative consequences such as the lack of interest from the adolescent's part, the perception of the discipline as not being important and the development of a noninterest toward school in general. From another angle, the assumption developed above is the same with that discussed in the management theory regarding the leadership style. As in the management theory where is argued that there no exist a best leadership style and each leadership style is best suited in some specific circumstances (Goleman, 2000; Popa *et al.*, 2013), the same occurs in teaching. The best teaching style depends on the situation. There is no best teaching style. It all depends on the situation, the pupils in the class and the classroom atmosphere/climate. In some specific circumstances the professor should be tolerant and in some circumstances he/she should be authoritative.

Regarding the refinement of the extant theoretical framework, based on the pattern matching technique, I can say that in order that a didactic strategy to help the teacher to lead the class to achieves its operational objectives there is an important moderating, or even mediating variable, which I call *the teaching leadership style*. I define a *teacher's teaching leadership style* the ability one teacher possesses, which allow him/her to lead the pupils/students and the classroom as a whole in the direction that the operational objectives to be accomplished. One can see that in order the adolescents learn the scientific content and achieve greater results in learning, there is probably no direct correlation between the didactic strategy and the adolescents' learning performance. The effectiveness and efficiency of the didactic strategy no matter its orientation – expositive or active-participative – is moderated or even mediated by the teacher's teaching leadership style.

As in the previous discussion, the same is also true for the class management practices. The teaching leadership style moderates or mediates the relationship between a class management practice, such as the verbal prompting, and the learning performance. In the case the teaching leadership style is appropriate the verbal prompting (or other class management practice) will determine higher performances in learning. By contracts, if the teaching leadership style is not appropriate the verbal prompting will not be likely to produce positive performances in learning, or at least will require additional resources such as extra time and extra effort in order to produce better educational results.

A lack of importance in adolescent's general perception regarding school's importance for his/her life

The third main cause identified by the author through the pattern matching technique, regarding the problems in the classroom and in consequence the poor performance in economic learning is the influence of the family and the social relationships where the adolescent is involved and their perception regarding the importance of education. Studies reveal that adolescents pertaining to a higher-level socio-economic status family may experience more favorable educational situations in comparison with those pertaining to medium or lower-level socio-economic status (Mih, 2010/2018).

Overall, there is a perception regarding the lack of importance of the school within families characterized by poor socio-economic status. We can observe these facts in the discussions of the people on the street, in the daily life or during the practice of teaching. All these social groups where the adolescent is involved, implicitly or explicitly, unconscious or conscious, influence his/her perception, attitude and motivation regarding the importance of the school for his/her life. As a consequence, I would say that no matter what type of didactic strategy the teacher uses, if the adolescent comes to the school with the belief that the school is not important, if the parents and in his group of friends and social relationships there is a general view that the school is not important for life, the learning performance of the adolescent – no matter the didactic strategy or class management practices implemented – would be very poor.

As an example to support the assumption above, in our case site, we asked 43 older adolescents (11th and 12th grade) where they come from, since some of them were normally arriving late at the beginning of the class. From 43 pupils, 29 adolescents told the author that they came at school from the surroundings of Cluj-Napoca. We cannot judge automatically the fact that someone lives in one village that he or she has a lower socio-economic status compared with someone living in the city but we can make some assumptions after discussing with them a specific period of time and after several discussions with the head teacher of the class. Many of the problems which are described above and those that follow to be discussed next, are caused by the perception of the lack of importance of the school for life by the adolescents and the social groups he/she is involved (family, friends, neighbors).

The pattern observed in our case site is that the adolescents who value the school were alert, attentive, proactive during the class discussions, they were involved in class tasks, no matter what type of didactic strategy the professor used. By contrast, the adolescents who do not value the school arrived late to the class, they were not paying attention, spoke with their colleagues the entire lesson, listen to music, skip classes, disturb the class and so on. In our case site, the author used combinations of active-participative didactic strategies such as case studies, heuristic conversation, exercises/application of knowledge, didactic dialogue etc. and expositive oriented teaching strategies such as lectures, exposures, explanations. No matter what type of didactic strategy the author used there were again and again the same students participating.

The author used the problematization, heuristic conversation, didactic dialogue and the result was the same: participated two, three pupils. Those who value the school. The other played on their phones, did their homework for other disciplines, listen to music, talk to each other about other topics and so on. And the biggest problem is that this situation is not a particular situation, rather is the normative, happening every day.

The conclusion is that there are other factors influencing the learning achieved, beyond the didactic strategy use by the docent, being expositive or active-participative oriented, or the class management practice implemented. The effectiveness of the didactic strategy applied by the teacher no matter its orientation – informative or formative – is moderated, or even mediated by the adolescent's perception regarding school's importance for his/her life. The same is also true, for the class management practices. We can try to control the behavior of the adolescents in the class, but this does not mean that the problems will not be arising again. If the adolescents are not interested in school, tomorrow will do the same, and the day after tomorrow and so on. We will spend more time trying to control their behavior rather than teaching and transmitting them some scientific knowledge.

A lack of importance in the adolescent's perception regarding the importance of the discipline in the high school curriculum

The fourth main cause of the problems in classroom and the low performance in economic learning is the perception of the adolescents regarding the fact that the economic modules/disciplines are not important in the overall high school curriculum. Currently, in Romania the high school pupils after finishing their 12th grade have to pass a final exam called Bacalaureate. In order to be eligible for continuing their studies at the university level the adolescents need to pass the exam. The exam consists in oral and writing tests in multiple disciplines. Because the adolescents do not need necessarily to be assessed in their final exam regarding their knowledge, abilities and attitudes gained from economic related disciplines, in many cases, many of them during the high school do not take these courses as serious as they should. The rationale for the pupils in this situation is that they want to study more seriously and devote more attentional resources to the disciplines which are included in the curriculum for the bacalaureate exam. As a direct consequence, as the pupils perceive the economic related disciplines as being less important – since they are not bacalaureate disciplines – they pay less attention during the classes, they skip classes, listen to music during the class, eat, watch videos online and so on. There is an entire portfolio of dysfunctional behaviors in classes which are perceived by the pupils as being less important because they are not disciplines required for the bacalaureate.

As an empirical example, to support the assumption above, in one day, the author was holding a class in Negotiation and Contracting at a 12th grade. After the introductory moment, at the point the teacher was starting to talk to the class one student asked with loud voice she's colleague, totally ignoring the professor: "Do you have the homework for the literature class?" In another day, in the same context, other adolescent was asking his colleague "Do you know what we have to prepare for today for the math class?". Other adolescents were rounding the class for additional personal problems such as transportation, weekend parties and so on. And these are just few problems the adolescents make in classes which they explicitly said many times: "*I don't care these disciplines!*" No matter what didactic strategy the teacher uses if the

adolescents do not care the economic related disciplines the results of the learning will be completely nullified. The idea is that if the pupils in high school perceive the economic related disciplines as not being important or being less important, no matter what didactic strategy the teacher uses, the adolescents will be non-attentive and will continue making a lot of problems.

The empirical evidence in this case underlines the fact that no matter what didactic strategy the teacher uses if the discipline is being perceived as being not or less importance for the adolescents the result will be a very low economic learning performance. And from the class management practices perspective, the same is true. If the adolescents perceive that the discipline is not being important the impact of the behavioral interventions will be weakened or at least will need additional resources such as time and effort in order to control the adolescents' behavior.

Theoretical model/framework refinement: the learning performance depends on the context first, in medium and low performers high schools

Next, I am going to summarize the findings discussed above which all *deviate/contradict* more or less from the existent theories in the field of educational psychology and pedagogy.

First, in medium and low performers high schools, not in general, in the case the adolescents are not interested in the disciplines are taught, because the disciplines/modules do not fit with their career/future, the performance will be poor, no matter the didactic strategy, or class management practices are implemented by the teacher.

Second, in medium and low performers high schools, not in general, in the case the adolescents are not interested in the disciplines/modules are taught, because they perceive that the school is not important for the success in life, the performance in learning will be poor, no matter what the didactic strategy, or class management practices are implemented by the teacher.

Third, in medium and low performers high schools, not in general, in the case the adolescents are not interested in the disciplines are taught, because the disciplines/modules are not being perceived as being important in the scholar curriculum, the performance will be poor, no matter the didactic strategy, or class management practices are implemented by the teacher.

Fourth, in medium and low performers high schools, not in general, the teaching leadership style do have an influence in creating a positive climate favoring learning, which in turn influences the performance in learning (the classroom climate is a contextual construct). The adequate leadership style it depends on the context (situational leadership, not always democratic).

Overall, the findings tell us that in medium and low performers high schools there should be considered building a favorable prolearning context first. According the evidence in this study the context and its appropriateness for learning should be considered before the didactic strategies, class management practices or the transmission of the scientific content, in order to improve the learning performances in medium and low performers high schools. In the case the context does not favor the learning, the performance in learning will be poor, no matter the other constructs.

5. Lessons learnt and specific implications for similar high school contexts

5.1 Implications for economic teachers involved in medium and low performers high schools

There are several important contributions our paper seeks to bring for the pedagogy literature and for the practice of economic pedagogy at the high school level. The implications are mainly developed in order to help the practice of economic teaching at the high school level be improved. As we have seen in our case there are some lessons learnt which can be transferred to other similar sites with careful consideration. Next, we are going to discuss these implications and the practical solutions, applicable in the classroom, in order to improve the immediate attractiveness of the educational context.

The first important implication is the fact that the teachers involved in high school economic education, as a first step, should be aware regarding the “perceived importance” of the economic disciplines/modules taught in high school, as they are perceived by the adolescents, probably their parents and in some cases probably peer teachers. If the economic teachers are not aware of the importance of the economic disciplines as being perceived by the adolescents, they will not be able to find appropriate solutions.

In this rationale, the teachers involved in the high school economic education should start promoting and awakening the adolescents regarding the importance of the economic and business disciplines for the *contemporary* society development. The main modality any economic teacher has, in order to correctly influence the adolescents, their parents or any peer teacher is concrete data from research. For instance, as an example, in Scimago Journal Rank (2020) among the first 50 journals according to their ranks, ten are economics, management or business-related journals. The presence of the economic and business journals in the first quartile of this database denotes the fact that the economy is a very important subject for both: research and teaching. The adolescents enrolled in high school economic education should be aware of this fact.

Even if the classical orientation among teachers, parents and adolescents is that in the high school the focus is on math, literature, languages, chemistry, biology and the disciplines so called of being of “primary importance”, they should not forget that we live in a market economy and the entire global or national world functions according to the economic objective laws. Therefore, the assumption among adolescents, their parents or peer teachers that the economic related disciplines are not or less important has no rationale. No matter the domain in which the adolescents will work in their life, they will work in organizations, functioning according to the economic principles and objective laws. Through promoting, giving more information in order to awake the adolescents regarding the importance of the economic related disciplines for contemporary society development not all the pupils enrolled in high school economic education will become economists but probably a much higher percentage of them will start reconsidering the economic education and will pay more attention, not skipping classes and a greater percentage of them will start considering an economist career.

The second important implication for the educational practice is that as the evidence in our case site suggests many of the adolescents in the medium and low performers high schools are displaying behavioral problems and are not paying attention on economic classes because *they have no interest* in the disciplines and in pursuing a career in economics. What the teachers in high school economic education can do is to reinforce and keep motivating the adolescents through presenting them the various options and advantages a such career will have for themselves. For instance, the author of the paper presented in various occasions the various options the adolescents have if they want to pursue an economic career (e.g. to become an accountant, to work in a bank or in finance, to become a statistician or a manager, to work in marketing etc.) and the advantages of a such career. Is particularly important to speak positively and with enthusiasm regarding the economic career. A such reinforcement/ approach applied various times along the year probably will attract or make more curious the adolescents regarding the economic career, with better chances to create and maintain a positive learning climate and better chances to increase the learning performances of the adolescents.

The third practical implication for the economic pedagogy at the high school level is resulting from the relationship between the teaching leadership style, the classroom climate and the learning performance. As the evidence in our case site suggests, the modality the teacher conducts his/her pupils during the class in order to accomplish lesson's objectives is an important moderator, or importantly, even mediator, between the didactic strategy used/class management practice implemented by the docent and the learning performance. The implication is that the teachers involved in the high school economic education, particularly in medium and lower performers high schools, should not be willing to tolerate to many behavioral problems. A style more akin to tolerance with some elements of authoritarianism I would say that is acceptable. This practical implication is more important in the economic education than in other disciplines since as we have seen in our case, in the classical view the economic education is not so important (the adolescents told the author many times that they are not interested in these disciplines). The teachers in the high school economic education should be aware

regarding their teaching leadership style and its influence on the adolescents. On the one hand, as I have told, an exaggeration of the tolerating style and the lack of enthusiasm is not appropriate in economic education since accentuates the lack of importance of the discipline in the eyes of the adolescents. On the other hand, an exaggeration of the authoritarian style will keep away and move away the adolescents from the economics education.

The fourth practical implication. The evidence in our case suggests the fact that the relationship between the didactic strategy/class management practices implemented by the teacher and the learning performance is positively or negatively moderated by the adolescent's perception regarding the importance of the school for his/her life. What the teachers in medium or low performers high schools can do is to elaborate some specific actions in order to try to increase the attractiveness of the school by the pupils' part. They can do this through several discussions regarding the importance of the school for people life, explaining them how the world function, the existent levels of education, future career they can choose etc. The next practical implication for the high school economic pedagogy practice is linked with this assumption.

I argue that the role of the economic teacher in high school should be view different than his role in university. In this line of thinking, the economic teacher in high school should assume a role more akin to a *tutor*, rather than strictly speaking a professor transmitting the knowledge embedded in the society. In high school, in comparison with university, the adolescents' level of cognitive development requires a tutor, a "second" mother or father, metaphorically speaking. In this line of thinking, the transmission of economic knowledge, principles and theories in high school should be as important as is the tutorial role of the economic professor. Often, the pupils search for a tutor or counseling support in disciplines which are perceived as not being so important. In this line of thinking, the practical implication is that the economic teachers in high schools should view this challenge (the tutorial role) such as an opportunity to orient and attract the pupils toward university level economic and business education.

5.2 Implications at the educational policy level

The conclusions derived from this study may have some implications at the educational policy level. Particularly, for building an educational context which favors higher learning performances. As we have seen in our study, building an appropriate educational context is more important than the didactic strategy or the class management practices used by the teacher, in medium and low performers high schools. There are some social, cultural and emotional interventions required in order that the teaching and education achieve their objectives in medium and low performers high schools. Next, I am going to discuss these implications.

The first practical implication at the educational policy level is the fact that the economic formation is important at the high school level in order to introduce the adolescents for the first time to the economic and business theories and familiarize/attract them with/to a possible economic career. The economic education is very important in the contemporary context and there should be developed direct interventions at the educational policy level/macro level to promote the importance and the attractiveness of the economic education among adolescents in high schools.

The second type of educational policy implication is counseling oriented. I argue that in the primary attention of the medium and/or low performers high schools regulators should be programs and interventions oriented toward growing the level of school's importance among the adolescents, their family and their social relationships and second the transmission of the scientific content per se. Or, at least being as important as the transmission of knowledge. By contrast, as we have seen in our paper, the resources may be wasted without too many benefits. In medium and low performers high schools, the primary importance should be devoted to developing programs such as personal counseling, family mentoring and counseling, parenting, Social and Emotional Learning – SEL (CASEL, 2020; Goleman, 1995/2006). As we have seen in our case, without these special programs we can teach again and again with what type of didactic strategy we want, the content will not be assimilated if the adolescents are not in an appropriate emotional state or if they do not care the school or the discipline. After the

adolescents are perceiving correctly the importance of the school for life development and they are in an appropriate emotional state they will be ready to learn the scientific content.

6. Limits

There are several limits one should consider at the point reading this paper. Firstly, it is important to mention that the approach I have chosen for this paper is a case study, based on qualitative and quantitative analysis of the learning experience of high school pupils, involved in economic education activities. The main limit resulting from a such approach is the fact that one cannot generalize the findings to other contexts, previously testing the assumptions through quantitative/statistical methods. The propositions in order to be suitable for transfer to other contexts should be first tested through the rigorous procedures of the statistical tests. Although the propositions seem to be very logical at the first look, in science we cannot generalize to other contexts without previously assuring ourselves the fact that the findings are not idiosyncratic phenomena (David, 2006). This limit results from a positivistic philosophical orientation.

On the other hand, the main assumptions developed from case studies, aim at analytical generalization, to theories and concepts, not statistical generalization to the number of subjects and population (Yin, 1984/2014). Therefore, the study aims to refine/improve the theories in the educational psychology and pedagogy (analytical generalization) and not aims to provide statistical generalizable assumptions. The output are some theoretical assumptions, which aim to refine the theory in the form of lessons learnt which, according critical realists, can be transferred to other similar contexts with careful considerations (Welch and Piekari, 2017).

Secondly, it is also important to consider the fact that for all the aspects mentioned in the paper there is a higher predisposition to happen in medium and low performers high schools than in higher performers high schools. As I have derived the conclusions based on empirical data from a medium performer high school, probably the context will have a

less influence on the performances in learning in outstanding high schools. It means, in outstanding high schools the relationship between the didactic strategies, respectively class management practices and performances in learning is less influenced by the contextual variables (e.g. all the pupils are interested and motivated to learn; or, they all already have been assigned to the specialization they wanted to pursue).

7. Conclusions

In this paper, through a case study research strategy, I have intended to discuss and analyze the problems encountered in teaching economic modules, in a medium-low performer high school. The problems were identified based on a pattern matching analytical technique, constantly iterating between the existent theories and empirical data, as discrepancies/anomalies between the two. Then, I have discussed the causes of the problems with the main purpose of refining/improving some aspects in the extant theories in the field of educational psychology and pedagogy. The main contributions of the paper, aimed at analytical generalization, not statistical generalization, are derived from a critical realist philosophical position, which assumes that the scientific content is better developed in the situations where the *context* and the implicit characteristics of the actors involved in the study are taken into account.

The first conclusion resulting from the present study is that there are other important factors responsible for the better or poor performances in learning in medium and low performers high schools, beyond the didactic strategies used by the professor or the class management practices implemented. More simple, in the case the adolescents are not interested in the economic discipline since they perceive the economic modules/disciplines as not being important: 1) for their career, 2) not being important in the high school curriculum, or 3) they perceive the school as not being important for their life; no matter what didactic strategy the teacher is using at the class, or class management practice, the performance in learning will be poor. To be contrasted this lesson learnt with the prevailing theory existent within the pedagogy literature which says that there are generic didactic strategies and class management practices

universal applicable. Yes, there are universal, for this reason I call them generic, but the context and building an appropriate educational context should be considered first, particularly/especially in medium and low performers high schools.

The second conclusion is the need to reconsider the adequate teaching leadership style giving the context a central role. The prevailing view within the existent theory is that there should be a democratic leadership style put in place in all the circumstances. Instead, I found that there is a need of a situational leadership style, depending the contextual aspects (e.g. predisposition to study, level of interest and engagement etc.). According this view, in some situations the teacher should be authoritarian, in some situations democratic, and in some situations should be tolerated/permissive. When I refer authoritarian, I do not refer to yelling or treating disrespectfully the pupils. Instead, I am referring to displaying a prosocial/proactive behavior/attitude in order to activate, for instance, the bored adolescents.

The third conclusion, resulting from this study conducted in a critical realism tradition, is that in medium and low performers high schools, the social and emotional learning programs (SEL) should be more important (or at least as important) than the scientific content transmitted to the adolescents (no matter the discipline). These programs, studies tell us (Goleman, 1995/2006), have the main implication in improving the context of the teaching-learning activities, and in consequence, the learning performances. Contrary, as we have seen in our case the performance in learning will be very poor if the kids/adolescents are not prepared for learning, if they are in an inappropriate emotional state, if they are not able to pay attention because they have underdeveloped attentional abilities, if they don't like or value the school. We may think that the problem is the didactic strategy, or the class management practices when in fact the problem is a low level in SEL. As we have seen in our case study.

Overall, as a main conclusion, the findings from this paper make a call for considering the importance of the context (general, school, class, emotional) as a priority, as a first step, in order to improve the performances in learning, in the medium and low performers high schools. By contrary, in the case building an appropriate prolearning

context is not considered first, the performances will be poor no matter the other variables. Based on the four causes of problems identified in the paper, I proposed within the present work four practical solutions/ concrete solutions (short term solutions) applicable in the classroom, in order to improve the immediate attractiveness of the educational context.

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