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Teză de abilitare

Domeniul Științe ale Educației

**Adaptarea educațională în tranziții: dovezi empirice,
măsurare și transfer dintr-o perspectivă ecologică.**
*De la debutul școlarității, la parcursul universitar și profesia
didactică*

Abstract

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This habilitation thesis brings together a research programme centred on educational adaptation in contexts of transition and change. Educational adaptation is conceptualised as a dynamic process through which the relationship between the demands of the educational environment and the resources an individual can mobilise is continuously regulated in relation to the support available. From this perspective, difficulties in adaptation cannot be explained solely by individual characteristics or exclusively by contextual factors, but by the way in which the two interact within a particular educational setting. Transitions make this relationship especially visible, as changes in environment, role, or demands require individuals to reorganise both their resources and their ways of responding.

The research programme is organised around three distinct educational ecologies, namely school entry, the university pathway, and the teaching profession. These are not treated as successive stages of a single longitudinal trajectory, but as different educational contexts, each characterised by specific demands, resources, forms of support, and outcomes. The central hypothesis of the thesis is that the mechanism of educational adaptation has a common functional structure across the three ecologies, while the specific content and relative contribution of its components vary according to age, role, and context. Comparison across ecologies is therefore undertaken at the functional level, without assuming that the constructs or the instruments used to assess them are identical.

The proposed conceptual framework integrates the bioecological perspective, the transactional model, and the demands–resources approach. The bioecological perspective provides a framework for locating the sources of demands and support across contexts that differ in their proximity to the individual, whereas the transactional model explains how demands are appraised in relation to the resources available. Within the thesis, the micro, meso, and macro levels serve an organising function by locating the sources of demands and support rather than constituting components of the adaptation mechanism themselves. The integrative model distinguishes among demands, personal resources, support, proximal indicators, and outcomes. Personal resources are functionally organised into cognitive, self-regulatory, relational, and motivational-dispositional resources. This organisation allows different constructs to be related according to the function they perform within the adaptation process and makes it possible to integrate new constructs while preserving the specific features of each educational ecology,

Within the ecology of school entry, the research examined how children's resources and conditions in the proximal environment contribute to their response to the new demands of schooling. The findings indicate that cognitive resources make a consistent contribution to early academic learning outcomes, whereas socioemotional and self-regulatory resources are more closely associated with participation and adjustment to classroom activity. The relevance of these resources varies according to the criterion under consideration and the method of assessment. At the same time, parenting style, parent–child communication, and the organisation of learning activities shape the conditions under which children's resources are mobilised. The findings were translated into practice through socioemotional development programmes, assessment frameworks, and resources for educational practice, supporting the view that adaptation at school entry results from the relationship between the child's resources, environmental demands, and the support available.

Within the university pathway, the research focused on students' adaptation to increased autonomy and to the growing complexity of academic demands. The findings supported the distinction between adaptation and academic performance, as prior school achievement did not directly indicate difficulties in

adjusting to the university environment. The roles of motivation, self-regulation, self-directed learning, engagement, and learning strategies were examined alongside stressors and teaching conditions. Longitudinal findings showed that indicators of adaptation do not follow a uniform pattern of change throughout the first year of study, confirming the multidimensional nature of the phenomenon. Academic support, relationships with peers and teaching staff, tutoring, and the organisation of learning activities constitute proximal conditions that facilitate the mobilisation of students' resources. These findings were translated into the development and validation of instruments for assessing academic maladjustment, online-learning stressors, and dropout intention, as well as into guides and academic support models designed for first-year students.

Within the ecology of the teaching profession, the analysis examined how teachers' personal and professional resources operate in relation to demands generated by school organisations and by changes in the education system. The studies addressed professional motivation and values, locus of control, self-efficacy, work engagement, and job satisfaction in relation to job demands, psychological workload, social support, and organisational conditions. The findings suggest that resources such as self-efficacy and an internal locus of control can support teachers' appraisal of their capacity to act and sustain professional engagement, but they do not eliminate organisational pressures or replace the need for support. More recent studies extend this line of inquiry to contemporary demands associated with inclusion, digitalisation, and the integration of artificial intelligence into teaching. In this ecology, the mechanism of educational adaptation becomes visible through the relationship between professional demands, teachers' resources, and the support available. Research findings have been transferred into professional practice through continuing education programmes, mentoring, methodological frameworks, and curricular resources for teacher development.

A distinct contribution of the research programme concerns the measurement of adaptation. Educational adaptation is not reduced to a single outcome or to a single source of assessment. The studies presented in the thesis draw on cognitive, socioemotional, behavioural, academic, and professional-organisational indicators, while the methodological focus evolved from the use of existing instruments towards the adaptation, development, and validation of instruments for use with Romanian populations. The proposed framework distinguishes proximal indicators, which capture the current state of the relationship between demands and resources, from outcomes that accumulate over time. This distinction is relevant both methodologically and practically. Dropout intention, for example, is treated as a proximal indicator of the current state of adaptation, whereas actual dropout constitutes a subsequent outcome. Such a distinction makes it possible to specify the level at which the effect of an intervention is observed and prevents proximal change from being interpreted as evidence of change in the final outcome.

The research programme also marks a progression from explanation to intervention and transfer. At school entry, the modifiability of selected personal resources was examined through a structured socioemotional development programme, while cooperative learning was investigated as a form of proximal educational support. In the university context, interventions focused on tutoring, guided learning, and learning diaries, and research findings were translated into guides for tutors and models of academic support. In the teaching profession, transfer took the form of continuing professional development, mentoring, and methodological resources. These products do not all have the same level of empirical evaluation. Some have been assessed in terms of their effects, whereas for others the available evidence

concerns their theoretical grounding, development, and implementation. Within the proposed framework, transfer is therefore not regarded solely as practical application. When an intervention targets a component of the mechanism and is followed by the anticipated change in relevant indicators, it may also contribute to testing the proposed mechanism of adaptation.

The general contribution of the thesis lies not in introducing entirely new determinants of adaptation, but in organising existing and empirically investigated factors within a common functional framework. The originality of the approach lies in conceptualising educational adaptation as a relational mechanism, distinguishing personal resources from support provided by the environment, locating the sources of demands and support across ecological levels, and differentiating proximal indicators from subsequent outcomes. The same functional categories can therefore be examined across different educational ecologies without assuming that the transitions themselves are identical or that scores obtained using different instruments are directly comparable. The analysis supports a view of educational adaptation as dynamic, multilevel, and dependent on the outcome under consideration, and shows that the relevance of a particular resource depends on the demand to which the individual is responding, the support available, and the criterion used to assess adaptation.

The main limitations of the research programme concern the predominantly cross-sectional nature of the studies, the small sample sizes in some investigations, the use of different instruments across the three ecologies, and the absence of measurement invariance analyses. These limitations constrain causal inference and direct cross-ecological comparisons and do not allow the existence of a common mechanism to be regarded as fully empirically established. The reciprocity of the person–environment relationship remains a theoretical premise, while the micro, meso, and macro levels have been used as conceptual levels of analysis rather than tested through multilevel statistical modelling. Addressing these limitations requires longitudinal and multi-institutional research, repeated measurements, instruments validated before intervention, and research designs capable of distinguishing the contribution of the individual from that of the activity and the wider context.

The academic pathway presented in the first part of the thesis highlights the continuity between research, university teaching, research training, and the dissemination of scientific findings. The research questions were generated and progressively refined through teaching, tutoring, pedagogical practice, continuing professional development, and research projects, while the findings were reintroduced into educational practice through instruments, programmes, guides, and methodological resources. Project coordination and inter-institutional collaboration supported the transition from research conducted within local teams to studies carried out in broader research networks and disseminated internationally. The development of students' research competence itself became an object of investigation and provides a foundation for extending this work to doctoral education.

The post-habilitation research directions build on questions that remain open in the present thesis and focus on engagement in learning, the relationship between executive functions and self-regulation, and the diversity of children's functioning in relation to the demands of educational activity. These directions will be developed through longitudinal studies, intervention designs, and analyses capable of distinguishing individual capacity from its manifestation in activity and from subsequent educational outcomes. In parallel, the academic development plan aims to consolidate scientific collaboration, strengthen the international visibility and dissemination of research findings, and contribute to the training of future researchers. The

experience gained through research project coordination, the development of research competence, and participation in doctoral guidance and evaluation provides the foundation for taking on doctoral supervision in the field of Educational Sciences and for developing research programmes that further examine and systematically test the framework proposed in this thesis.

Keywords: *educational adaptation, educational transitions, ecological perspective, demands and resources, educational support, measurement, intervention and transfer*