Investigation of Academic optimism of Primary School Teachers. Descriptive Study

Carmen Popa

University of Oradea & Universitatii Street, No.1

ABSTRACT *The present study intends to observe the academic optimism of teachers who work in the Primary Education System, in schools located in Bihor County (N=180), Romania, by presenting their results for the Academic Optimism of Schools Scale, designed by Hoy, W. and his collaborators. The results are presented starting with the descriptive indicators – average, standard deviation, and continuing with the global score of the scale depending on the variables: teaching experience, the grade they teach, graduation studies. Research data show a higher level of academic optimism for teachers having more than 20 years of teaching experience, for those who teach 1st grade and 4th grade and also for the teachers having a master's degree. There were lower values of academic optimism for teachers having between 11 and 20 years of teaching, those who teach multi-age grades and those who gaduated only a pedagogical high school.*

INTRODUCTION

The notion of academic optimism was used for the first time in 2006 by Hoy, Tarter and Woolfolk Hoy [2]. They demonstrated it positively impact student performance. Hoy, Tarter and Woolfolk Hoy [2] state that academic optimism is tightly connected to the shared belief – of the school's faculty, that the teaching/learning activities the pupils attend in school lead to student performance, by common effort ("Academic optimism is the shared belief that a school's faculty can work with students to succeed academically"). These scientists believe schools with high academic optimism are those, whose employers are determined, decided, motivated, who have the ability to overpass the obstacles because they have the support of all people involved in the educational process.

Hoy and DiPaola [1] think a school with high academic optimism is a community/collectivity whose employers believe they can bring changes, believe that pupils can learn and that academic performance can be achieved. Hoy et al. [1, 2] consider the notion of academic optimism is based on cognitive (collective efficacy), affective (faculty trust) and behavioural (academic emphasis) aspects. These constructs (collective efficacy, faculty trust in parents and students and academic emphasis) are intertwined and reinforced by each other: faculty trust in students and parents by collective efficacy and academic emphasis by faculty trust in students and parents.

Academic optimism, although connected to teachers, becomes a school characteristic (Hoy, Tarter, Woolfolk Hoy, [2]; McGuigan şi Hoy, [5]). School managers should also understand the importance of academic optimism and organizational climate for the overall performance of the school. Even though the academic optimism is a relatively new notion in the field of research in education, the effects of faculty trust, of collective efficacy and of academic emphasis on schools have been intensively studied and researched.

Lee and Bryk [4] were the first that underlined the importance of academic emphasis on student perfor-

mance. Hoy, Tarter and Kottkamp [3] also reached the conclusion that academic emphasis is the most important predictive element of the student performance. For all educational levels, from kindergarten to college, student performance is one of the main objectives of all schools. Almost 50 years ago, James S. Coleman demonstrated that the background of the pupil and the socio-economic context greatly influence his/her performance. There were also other researches who tried to identify the factors that influence student performance. But its success can also be attributed to a sum of the interaction of various factors and finding the solution for a guaranteed success is just a utopia.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The main goal of the present study is to unfold the results for academic optimism of primary school teachers in Bihor County, Romania, depending on the following variables: teaching experience, the grade they teach and last graduated school.

It is an investigation study that revealed the level of academic optimism of the subjects, underlining the research results analysed by basic statistical operations.

Thus, we stated the following specific objectives:

O1: Unfolding aspects of academic optimism of pri mary school teachers, depending on the variable: teaching experience

O2: Unfolding aspects of academic optimism of primary school teachers, depending on the variable: the grade they teach

O3: Unfolding aspects of academic optimism of primary school teachers, depending on the variable: the last graduated school

Subjects:
The study was conducted on 178 primary school teachers. Their division according to the teaching experience criterion is presented in Chart 1.

Chart 1
Division of subjects according to teaching experience criterion
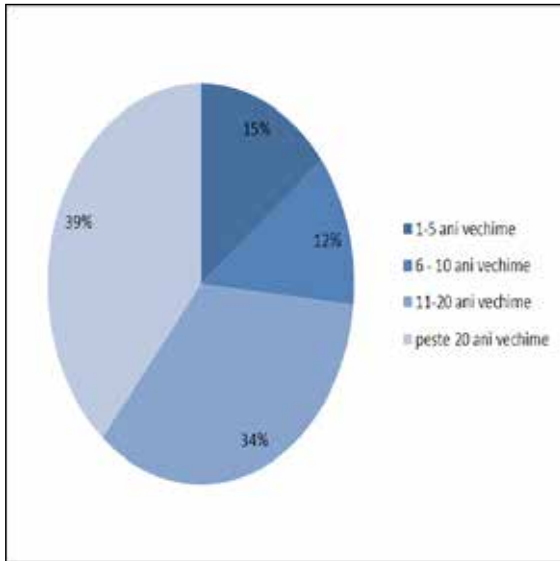

Chart 1 shows a higher division of teachers having a teaching experience of more than 20 years (39%), of those having a teaching experience between 11 and 20 years (34%), while the lowest division is for subjects having between 6-10 years of teaching experience (12%) and between 1 and 5 years (15%).

The division according to the criterion "grade I teach" is presented in Chart 2.

Chart 2
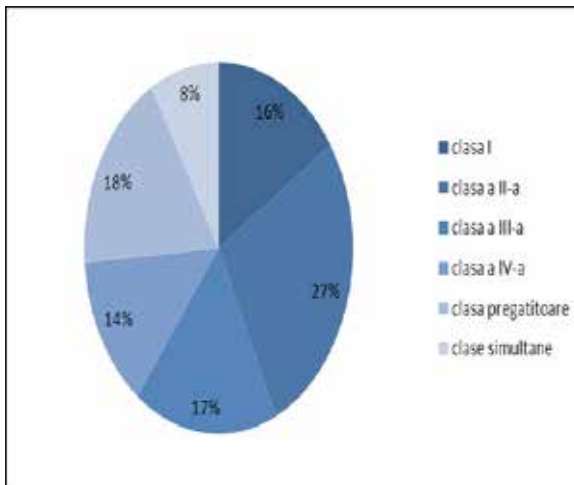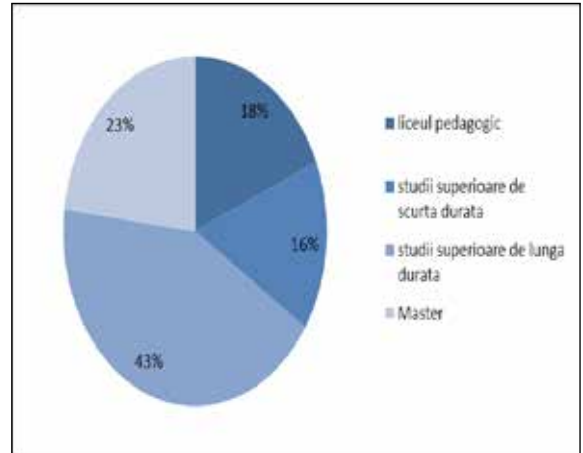**Division of subjects according to "grade I teach" criterion**

Chart 2 shows the highest percentage for 2nd grade teachers (27%) and the lowest for multi-age grade teachers (8%).

The division according to the criterion "last graduated school" is presented in Chart 3.

Chart 3
Division of subjects according to "last graduated school" criterion

The chart reveals the highest value is for graduates of a university study programme, while the lowest is for graduates of a college study programme (16%) and of a pedagogical high school (18%).

Research tool
The tool we used was designed by Hoy, W. and his partners in 2005: Academic Optimism of Schools, having 30 items. The subjects had to fill in their answer on a 6-level Likert Scale, ranging from total disagreement (1) to total agreement (6). We (i.e. the authors of this study) have translated it into Romanian and adapted it for the Romanian people. The global score of the scale was used to analyse the results. The questionnaire was individually conducted and filled in by each and every one of the subjects.

Data analysis. Introductory statistics
Table 1 presents the results for Academic Optimism of Schools depending on teaching experience criterion (O1).
Table 1
Introductory statistics on academic optimism depending on teaching experience

Teaching experience	N	Average	s.d.	Minimum	Maximum
1-5 years of teaching experience	26	4,7432	,76842	3,27	6,00
6 - 10 years of teaching experience	22	4,8978	,67140	3,14	5,96
11-20 years of teaching experience	62	4,6543	,67966	2,35	5,96
more than 20 years of teaching experience	70	4,9311	,58513	3,01	6,00
Total	180	4,8046	,66366	2,35	6,00

The chart shows that:
- The highest average of academic optimism and the lowest standard deviation was for teachers having more than 20 years of teaching experience: a=4,931, s.d.=.585
- A high average is also presented for teachers having between 6 and 10 years of teaching experience: a=4,897, and standard deviation: s.d.=.671
- The lowest average was for teachers having between 11 and 20 years of teaching experience: a=4,654, s.d.=.679, and for those of 1-5 years of teaching expe-

rience: a=4,742, s.d.=.768

Table 2 presents the results for Academic Optimism of Schools depending on "grade I teach" criterion (O2).

Table 2
Introductory statistics on academic optimism depending on "grade I teach"

Grade	N	Average	s.d.
1st grade	28	4,8954	,71989
2nd grade	49	4,7650	,75905
3rd grade	31	4,7349	,75826
4th grade	24	4,8949	,50394
readiness grade	32	4,8063	,61388
multi-age grade	15	4,7164	,40519
Total	179	4,8009	,66825

Data analysis presented in Table no. 2 reveals the higher averages are for teachers of:
4th grade: a=4,894, s.d.=.503;

1st grade: a=4,895, s.d.=.719;

readiness grade: a=4,806, s.d.=.613,

while the lowest averages are for teachers of:

multi-age grade: a=4,716, s.d.=.405;

3rd grade: a=4,734, s.d.=.758;

2nd grade: a=4,765, s.d.=.759.

Table no. 3 presents the results for Academic Optimism of Schools depending on teaching training level – graduated studies (O3).

Table 3
Introductory statistics on academic optimism depending on graduated studies

Teaching training level – graduated studies	N	Average	s.d.	Minimum	Maximum
Pedagogical high school	33	4,6627	,76625	2,35	5,65
College diploma	28	4,8865	,54820	3,79	6,00
University diploma	76	4,7768	,64809	3,12	6,00
Master's degree	41	4,9418	,65414	3,71	5,96
Total	178	4,8109	,66041	2,35	6,00

Data analysis presented in table 3 underlines that academic optimism, depending on teaching training level of the subjects, is higher for teachers having:

a master's degree: a=4,942, s.d.=.654;

a college diploma: a=4,886, s.d.=.548,

while a lower level is for teachers having:

only a pedagogical high school diploma: a=4,662, s.d.=.766;

a university diploma – bachelor's degree: a=4,942, s.d.=.654

CONCLUSIONS

The present study revealed some descriptive aspects of the academic optimism of primary school teachers in Bihor County. Our conclusions are the following:

- academic optimism depending on teaching experience criterion is higher for teachers having more than 20 years of teaching experience. There is also an interesting finding: a lower average was identified for teachers belonging to the group of 11-20 years of teaching experience, a stage that overlaps, up to a certain degree, the middle age crisis;
- academic optimism is higher for teachers of 4th grades (end of primary school level) and for those of readiness grade and 1st grade (beginning of primary school level);
- academic optimism is higher for teachers graduating a Bologna study programme and having a college diploma followed by a master's degree.

Thus, the academic optimism of schools can influence student performance. We believe it is useful to identify the aspects linked to teaching experience and training and grade level of the teachers, factors that can influence their academic optimism. The descriptive study we conducted does not reveal statistically significant results between the averages for Academic Optimism of Schools Scale depending on the three categories of variables of the research, a reason for conducting further comparative studies. Furthermore, after the validation of the research tool, the questionnaire's subscales data would also be analysed.

REFERENCES:

[1] Hoy, W. K., DiPaola, M. (2010). Analyzing school contexts: Influences of principals and teachers in the service of students. Greenwich, CT: Information Age

[2] Hoy, W. K., Tarter, C. J., Woolfolk Hoy, A. (2006). Academic optimism of schools: A force for student achievement. American Educational Research Journal, 43, p. 425 – 446

[3] Hoy, W.K., Tarter, C.J., Kottkamp, R.B. (1991). Open schools, healthy schools, measuring organizational climate. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications

[4] Lee, V. E., Bryk, A. S. (1989). A multilevel model of the social distribution of high school achievement. Sociology of Education, 62, 172-192

[5] McGuigan, L., Hoy, W. K. (2006). Principal leadership: Creating a culture of academic optimism to improve achievement for all students. Leadership & Policy in Schools, 5(3), 203-229