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**PSYCHOSOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF ENGAGEMENT
WITH SCHOOL AMONG ADOLESCENTS**

511.03 – SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

**ABSTRACT
of the PhD thesis in Psychology**

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CONCEPTUAL LANDMARKS OF RESEARCH

The topicality and importance of the research topic. The involvement of students in the instructive-formative activities that the school system carries out in a systematic and organized manner is one of the variables that, in recent decades, has aroused growing interest among researchers, practitioners and decision makers in the field of education. Literature that has dealt with this issue argues and points out that stimulating engagement with school through specific psycho-pedagogical interventions is one of the ways to improve poor educational outcomes, lack of motivation to participate in instructive-formative activities and thorough training, boredom and feelings of alienation among school students of all ages. This conclusion is based on the findings of studies that prove the connection between engagement with school, student outcomes, and attitudes and behaviors that they show in relation to schooling, respectively, regardless of the level of socio-economic development of their families. Also, the constant engagement of students with their own education and training has been listed as one of the protective factors against the undesirable phenomenon of early school drop-out which, in some countries, has reached worrying rates.

Within the context of contemporary economic, social and cultural change, international fora (e.g. the European Union or the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development), governments, education specialists, education system managers and teachers have reported that some adolescents face various schooling difficulties. In recent decades, in some of the countries that are part of the European Union and also in some non-EU countries (for example, the USA), there has been a worrying proliferation of undesirable phenomena in relation to the effectiveness of an education system that must contribute to the economic and social development of a country. We refer to the decrease of students' academic motivation, negative attitudes towards their teachers, classes or rules specific to the organization of an educational institution, underachievement of some students who have cognitive-intellectual potential, school failure, early school drop-out, etc.

The analysis through a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approach of the participation of the young generations in their own education, of their attitude towards school and of their engagement with school represents one of the key approaches, which must be taken into account in an effort to diagnose the factors which contribute to the current condition of education and to resize the policies and practices on which the education system relies, which must best satisfy the current development needs of Romanian society. Through the issues that it addresses from a conceptual, methodological and empirical point of view, this doctoral thesis aims to attain the desideratum to which we referred. We aimed to investigate the universe of social representation (SR) that adolescents today have about school as a social and cultural institution, as well as about their own school activity, by relying on literature tackling their attitude towards school, academic motivation and engagement with school, respectively. We also aimed to determine the factors that may explain the differences between adolescents in terms of the dimensions of their engagement with school, as well as the effects of this field of cognitive, emotional and attitudinal-behavioral variables.

Prior research in the field. Research into the concept of engagement with school and its practical-applicative implications began more than three decades ago.

The usefulness of investigating this area has been argued by the fact that the level of involvement of school students of different ages in their own education and training is an important predictor of indicators of adaptation to developmental tasks, including school achievement and outcomes, attitudes and behaviors of students, ways in which they react to the learning opportunities that school offers, school drop-out, etc.

In the international literature published in English in Australia, Canada, Europe, USA or East Asian countries, authors such as: J. J. Appleton, J. J. Christenson and M. J. Furlong, R. Audas and J. D. Willms, J. Bempechat and D. J. Shernoff, J. Chang and T. N. Le, J. D. Finn and D. A. Rock, J. A. Fredricks, P. C. Blumenfeld and A. H. Paris, C. Furrer and E. A. Skinner, B. J. Hirschfield and J. A. Gasper, S.-f. Lam et al., H. M. Marks, J. A. Reeve, E. A. Skinner (et al., such as M. J. Belmont, J. R. Pitzer), F. H. Veiga, M. T. Wang and J. S. Eccles, etc., had important contributions in terms of conceptual substantiation, measurement, theoretical modeling and stimulating engagement with school among school students of different ages through programs of psychological and educational intervention, and in terms of investigating the explanatory factors and the effects of this cognitive, emotional and attitudinal-behavioral field. In Romania, the interest for this field of research is aroused by papers published by E. Calotă, N. G. Caranfil (et al., such as V. Robu, S. Rusnac), Ș. Popenici and C. Fartușnic, V. Robu (et al., such as A. Sandovici, F. H. Veiga), etc.. In the Republic of Moldova, the researchers' work indirectly focused on the engagement with the instructive-educational process, through dimensions of adolescent development that can be analyzed in relation to their school activity, such as school drop-out (O. Frunze and M. Diță), leisure time (O. Stamatini), involvement and emotional maturity (J. Racu, O. Paladi) or vocational interests (A. Bolboceanu, O. Paladi, I. Racu). Therefore, both in Romania and in the Republic of Moldova, there is a need for more research in the psychosocial and educational dimensions of the engagement with school among children and adolescents.

Our literature review on the research topic addressed in this doctoral thesis materialized in the definition of the following **research general issue**: the need to use scientific methodology to develop and validate a model of predictors of the extent of engagement with school, and tools for measuring the psychosocial and educational dimensions of engagement, in line with the perception and attitudes that adolescents today have towards school.

Purpose of the research. The conceptual, methodological and empirical approaches described in our thesis aimed to determine how adolescents today perceive school activities, by defining the content, structure and organization of SR (as part of the set of beliefs, attitudes and behaviors towards school) and psychosocial determinants and the effects of the engagement with school among high school students.

Research objectives. For this purpose, the following objectives were set out:

- ✓ analysis of theoretical and practical approaches of the research field in order to identify the psychosocial factors contributing to school engagement;
- ✓ determining the content, structure and organization of the social representation of the school activity, as well as the similarities and differences among adolescents in Romania and the Republic of Moldova;
- ✓ developing and validating the model of predictors and the effects of school engagement;

- ✓ adaptation and validation of instruments for measuring the psychosocial and educational dimensions of engagement with school;
- ✓ measuring engagement with school using a consistent sample of high school students from Romania and the Republic of Moldova; in this respect, a standardized measure (recognized in the academic community) was used;
- ✓ interpretation of the psychopedagogical meanings of the results obtained by performing statistical processing on raw data.

Research hypotheses. The theoretical, methodological and practical steps involved the testing of 10 working hypotheses as follows:

1. The conceptual-definitional, descriptive-operational and social dimensions of the social representation of school activity illustrate the universe of adolescents' perception of school.
2. Positive academic self-perception, high expectations that students have about their own educational outcomes, extrinsic and intrinsic academic motivation, high levels of achievement motivation, positive attitude toward school, teachers and classes, learning and school activity in general, social support from teachers and peers, the autonomy that the education system grants to students in the training-education process, the clarity and consistency of school rules and students' positive perception of the quality of the training-education practices are positive predictors of their engagement with school.
3. Amotivation is the negative predictor of the students' engagement with school.
4. High levels of cognitive, emotional, behavioral, agentic and overall engagement with school are positive predictors of students' satisfaction with their school activity.
5. A high level of engagement with school is a positive predictor of students' educational outcomes.

A summary and justification of the research methodology. The quantitative research that we conducted on three samples of Romanian high school students and one sample of students from the Republic of Moldova aimed to define the content, structure and organization of the SR of school activity among adolescents. The free association method ¹ was used to achieve this goal. This technique involves quantitative processing that is easy to manage. The "substitution method" ² was used to reveal the silent zone of the SR of schooling among Romanian adolescents. It facilitates the achievement of educational outcomes that are less dependent on the pressure exerted by the social group to which they belong, especially when representations of socially and culturally sensitive areas are analyzed. Also, this method seemed more suitable given the specificity of the social thinking of adolescents. The evocations mentioned by adolescents based on free association were processed quantitatively according to P. Vergès' suggestions on categorical and prototypical analysis, in order to define the core of the representation of a social object ³. This type of analysis involves the lexicographical determination of the frequency of occurrence of various words in the SR uni-

¹ CURELARU, M. (Coord.), *Reprezentările sociale. Teorie și metode*. Iași: Editura Erola, 2001. ISBN 973-85475-3-9.

² ȘLEAHTIȚCHI, M. *Tratat de analiză structurală a reprezentărilor sociale*. Chișinău: Editura „Știința”, 2016, 224 p. ISBN 978-9975-85-185-5.

³ VERGÈS, P. Evocarea banului. O metodă pentru definirea nucleului central al unei reprezentări. În: M. CURELARU (Coord.), *Reprezentările sociale. Teorie și metode*. Iași: Editura Erola, 2001. ISBN 973-85475-3-9.

verse of a particular field, more precisely the importance that these words play in the events mentioned. In order to determine overall polarity (on the positive-negative axis) of the SR of school activity, A. S. de Rosa's polarity and neutrality indicators ⁴ were used. These indicators are the result of evaluations conducted directly by the subjects and not of those conducted post-hoc by researchers, which may be subjective.

The method of standardized questionnaires filled out by our population of high school students was used to analyze the psychosocial determinants and the effects of engagement with school among Romanian adolescents. The raw data were further processed by several descriptive and multivariate statistical methods (comparative tests, correlational analysis, multivariate regression etc.). The working hypotheses were tested by multiple linear regression analysis.

Summary of the chapters focusing on the investigations carried out and their need to achieve the purpose and objectives of the research. The doctoral thesis is presented in 178 pages of main text. The structure of the thesis includes an introduction, three chapters, conclusions and recommendations, a bibliographic list consisting of 171 sources, 15 tables, 8 figures and 27 annexes.

In the **Introduction**, the actuality and importance of the research topic are argued and the degree of study of the research topic, the purpose, objectives, hypotheses and methodology of the investigations are indicated. Also, a summary of the content of the chapters of the doctoral thesis is presented.

Chapter 1 (“**The issue of engagement with school among adolescents – a review of literature**”) explores the main theoretical landmarks, conceptual approaches and working models that were concerned with the school engagement among students of different ages. Other related concepts (e.g., attitude towards school and motivation in school) are also analyzed, which are relevant for understanding the factors that condition school results and the adaptation to the specific school tasks in general. The dimensions we referred to are approached both from the perspective of conceptual meanings and working models, and by referring to the findings of studies conducted in Romania and in other countries, which aimed to engage in school work,

In **Chapter 2** (“**Methodology for investigating the social representation of school activity and the determinants of engagement with school among adolescents in Romania and the Republic of Moldova**”), it is argued the need to study the perceptions and representation that adolescents have about school activity. The design and methodology of the investigations are presented, aiming at: a) delimiting the universe of social representation of school activity among adolescents from Romania and the Republic of Moldova; b) elaboration and validation of a multidimensional questionnaire for the evaluation of the perception and the attitude towards the school; c) adaptation and validation of tools for investigating psychosocial determinants and the effects of school engagement;

Chapter 3 (“**The results of investigations on social representation and predictors of engagement with school among adolescents**”) presents the findings of studies aimed at: a) delimitation of the central core, peripheral elements and the silent

⁴ DE ROSA, A. S. “The associative network”: A technique for detecting structure, contents, polarity and stereotyping indexes of the semantic fields. In: *European Review of Applied Psychology*, 2002, vol. 52, nr. 3-4, p. 181-200. ISSN 1162-9088.

zone of social representation that Romanian adolescents and those in the Republic of Moldova have it about school activity; b) the comparative analysis of the social representation that adolescents from Romania and the Republic of Moldova have about the field of school activity; c) the predictors and effects of the engagement with school among the Romanian adolescents.

In **General conclusions and recommendations**, the main findings of the investigations are summarized, the novelty and scientific originality of the obtained results are highlighted, as well as the theoretical significance and the applicative value of the doctoral thesis. Several practical recommendations are formulated based on the results of theoretical and applied research. Also, the findings of the studies are analyzed from the perspective of possible methodological limitations and directions for future investigations.

CONTENT OF THE PHD THESIS

Chapter 1 (“The issue of engagement with school among adolescents – a review of literature”) justifies the actuality of the topic that has been in the attention of the researches. Adolescence is recognized as a critical period that marks the transition from childhood to adulthood⁵. Contemporary adolescents are forced to adapt to the pressures generated both by rapid age-specific transformations and by the challenges produced through social changes^{6,7,8}.

During childhood and adolescence, schooling is one of the most important developmental tasks. Through the classroom instructional activities, as well as through the social nature of the learning process, the school context provides adolescent with a wide range of cognitive, emotional and social experiences. These experiences contribute to the maturation of the adolescent self-identity and personality⁹. In the context of the global changes that have affected the world in the last three decades, international forums, government authorities, professionals in the field of education sciences as well as teachers have signaled that contemporary adolescents face more and more difficulties in their schooling^{10,11}. Therefore, the analysis of the developmental characteristics and vulnerabilities of the school population is a reference objective for researchers in the field of education sciences, educational policy-makers, as well as for teachers.

The information collected from the reviewed literature on the issue was structured in three subchapters, which tackle the attitude of students of different ages toward school,

⁵ PAPALIA, D. E., WENDKOS OLDS, S., DUSKIN FELDMAN, R. *Dezvoltarea umană* (trad., ediția a XI-a). București: Editura Trei, 2010, 832 p. ISBN 978-973-707-414-0.

⁶ BOLBOCEANU, A., PALADI, O. Probleme psihologice cu care se confruntă psihologii școlari în instituțiile educaționale. În: *Univers Pedagogic*, 2012, nr. 3, p. 32-37. ISSN 1811-5470.

⁷ TUFEANU, M. Provocări în dezvoltarea adolescenților în contextul schimbărilor sociale de la începutul mileniului al III-lea. În: *Psihologie. Revistă Științifico-Practică*, 2012a, nr. 3, p. 3-15. ISSN 1857-2502.

⁸ RACU, I., BOIANGIU, C. Cercetarea experimentală a dezvoltării intereselor ocupaționale la vârsta adolescentă. În: *Structura și dinamica personalității umane în epoca globalizării: perspective psiho-socio-pedagogice* (26 mai 2017, Bălți, Republica Moldova). Bălți: Universitatea de Stat „Alecu Russo” din Bălți, 2017, p. 19-27. ISBN 978-9975-50-205-4.

⁹ ROESER, R. W., ECCLES, J. S., SAMEROFF, A. J. School as a context of early adolescents' academic and social-emotional development: A summary of research findings. În: *The Elementary School Journal*, 2000, vol. 100, nr. 5, p. 443-471. ISSN 0013-5984.

¹⁰ CARANFIL, N. G. Unele aspecte ale inadaptării adolescenților contemporani la sarcinile școlarității. În: *Psihologie. Revistă Științifico-Practică*, 2017, nr. 3-4, p. 34-43. ISSN 1857-2502, e-ISSN 2537-6276.

¹¹ TUFEANU, M. Academic underachievement of contemporary adolescents: Meanings and causes explanations. În: *Romanian Journal of School Psychology*, 2012b, vol. 5, nr. 10, p. 55-75. ISSN 2248-244X.

their academic motivation and their engagement with school, respectively. Broadly speaking, their attitude toward school and schooling may be seen as a complex psychological set of student evaluations, emotions and action tendencies, which are oriented toward their own school activity and toward school as an institution¹². When assessed globally on a bipolar continuum, attitudes toward school and schooling range from favorable to unfavorable. Numerous studies conducted since the 1980s have shown a positive link between the favorable attitude of students of different ages toward school (in general) or toward various areas of school life and their high-quality learning outcomes, respectively^{13, 14, 15}.

In a very broad sense, motivation includes all intrapsychic forces that lead to goal-oriented behaviors¹⁶. The study of human motivation focuses mainly on the set of factors that influence the initiation, direction, intensity and persistence of behaviors in everyday life. Researchers in the field of education have argued that cognitive and motivational factors interact and influence together the processes of learning and acquiring knowledge, as well as performance achievement in the training-education process occurring in school¹⁷. Students with a motivational optimum tend to exhibit attitudes and use adaptive learning strategies, such as maintaining an intrinsic interest in learning and study, setting clear learning goals and self-monitoring in the learning process¹⁸. În plus, variabilele motivaționale interacționează cu o serie de factori cognitivi, comportamentali și contextuali, condiționând modalitățile în care elevii își reglează comportamentele implicate în procesul învățării în domeniul școlar.

Over the past two decades, a rich body of evidence has been gathered proving that engagement is both a malleable state that may be shaped in school and a strong predictor of learning-oriented behaviors, of test scores and school grades, as well as of the risk of repetition and school drop-out¹⁹. In a manner similar to the tripartite view of school attitudes among students, engagement was conceptualized as a multidimensional meta-construct that includes at least three interconnected dimensions^{20, 21}: cognitive, emotional and behavioral. The cognitive dimension refers to the investments that students make in the learning activities that take place in the classroom, as well as to the self-regulatory

¹² SANDOVICI, A., ROBU, V. Angajamentul în activitatea și viața școlară în rândul adolescenților români. În: *Anuarul Universității „Petre Andrei” din Iași (Fascicula: Asistență Socială, Sociologie, Psihologie)*, 2014, tom 13, p. 69-79. ISSN 2248-1060.

¹³ CHANG, J., LE, T. N. The influence of parents, peer delinquency, and school attitudes on academic achievement in Chinese, Cambodian, Laotian or Mien, and Vietnamese youth. În: *Crime & Delinquency*, 2005, vol. 51, nr. 2, p. 238-264. ISSN 0011-1287.

¹⁴ MOË A. și al. Attitude towards school, motivation, emotions, and academic achievement. În: J. E. LARSON (Ed.), *Educational Psychology. Cognition and Learning, Individual Differences, and Motivation*. New York, NY: Nova Science Publisher, Inc., 2009, p. 259-274. ISBN 978-1606-922-76-7.

¹⁵ SULDO, S. M., SHAFFER, E. J., SHAUNESSY, E. An independent investigation of the validity of the School Attitude Assessment Survey-Revised. În: *Journal of Psychoeducational Assessment*, 2008, vol. 26, nr. 1, p. 69-82. ISSN 0734-2829.

¹⁶ STRICKLAND, B. R. Motivation. În: B. R. STRICKLAND (Executive Editor), *The Gale Encyclopedia of Psychology* (2nd ed.). Farmington Hills, MI: Gale Group, 2001, p. 440-441. ISBN 978-0787-647-86-5.

¹⁷ LINNENBRINK, E. A., PINTRICH, P. R. Motivation as an enabler for academic success. În: *School Psychology Review*, 2002, vol. 31, nr. 3, p. 313-327. e-ISSN 0279-6015.

¹⁸ ALDERMAN, M. K. *Motivation for Achievement: Possibilities for Teaching and Learning*. London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., 2003, 343 p. ISBN 978-0805-860-48-1.

¹⁹ CARANFIL, N. G., ROBU, V. Student engagement with school: Conceptual and applicative dimensions. În: *Romanian Journal of School Psychology*, 2017, vol. 10, nr. 20, p. 92-114. ISSN 2248-244X.

²⁰ APPLETON, J. J., CHRISTENSON, S. L., FURLONG, M. J. Student engagement with school: Critical conceptual and methodological issues of the construct. În: *Psychology in the Schools*, 2008, vol. 45, nr. 5, p. 369-386. ISSN 1520-6807.

²¹ LAM, S.-f. și al. Understanding student engagement with a contextual model. În: S. L. CHRISTENSON, A. L. RESCHLY, C. WYLIE (Eds.), *Handbook of Research on Student Engagement*. New York: Springer, 2012, p. 403-420. ISBN 978-1-4614-2018-7.

processes and strategies that they use in their self-study activity for different school subjects. The affective dimension refers to the emotional responses that students show during classroom instructional process, to their teachers and classmates or to school (as an educational institution)^{22, 23}. The emotional dimension includes the pleasure generated by their involvement in various school and extracurricular activities, boredom, exaltation, sadness, anxiety, the feeling of attachment to teachers, colleagues and school, the feeling of belonging to a particular school. The behavioral dimension includes aspects, such as: the attention that students pay during classes, the observance of rules and regulations imposed by their school, adherence to the rules of their school group, avoiding acts of indiscipline, active involvement in the teaching-learning process and in classroom discussions or during lessons, or participation in extracurricular activities, such as sports competitions. J. Reeve and C. Tseng²⁴ suggested and tested a fourth dimension called agent engagement with school. This refers to the process by which students try to personalize and enrich both the content they learn and the conditions in which the teaching-learning process takes place.

Chapter 1 reviews and explains three working models on which the research work carried out by the author of this doctoral thesis relied:

a) The first model dealt with academic motivation^{25, 26}. It is an extension of the self-determination theory²⁷ according to which human motivation can be described by a continuum on which three levels of personal autonomy can be differentiated in initiating and manifesting behavioral reactions in different developmental contexts: amotivation, extrinsic motivation and intrinsic motivation. *Amotivation* is a person's feeling that they have no control over the events in their life, that they are incompetent and that they have no note-worthy life goals to guide their actions and behaviors. *Extrinsic motivation* is characterized by the fact that a person's actions and behaviors are determined, regulated and guided by certain external factors, such as: fear of punishment, desire to get certain rewards, desire to maintain/increase self-esteem, avoidance of anxiety or of the feeling of guilt, desire to satisfy the needs and observe the values of society as a whole or to broaden their intellectual and relational-social horizon. Deci și Ryan²⁸ further deepened the analysis of extrinsic motivation and distinguished among four subtypes: external regulation, introjection of action or behavior control sources, regulation by identification (internalization of behavior control sources by considering the latter as important for individual purposes), and behavior regulation through integration, respectively (a person feels determined and integrates

²² ПАКУ, Ж. Особенности психологического благополучия и проявления невротизма у подростков. În: *Psihologie. Pedagogie Specială. Asistență Socială* 2020, nr. 4 (61), p. 108-116. ISSN 1857-0224.

²³ ПАКУ, Ж. Особенности уверенности в себе и самоэффективности у старшеклассников. În: *Tradiție și inovare în cercetarea științifică (ediția a 8-a, 12 octombrie 2018, Bălți)*. Bălți: Universitatea de Stat „Alecu Russo” din Bălți, 2018, p. 222-226. ISBN 978-9975-50-235-1.

²⁴ REEVE, J., TSENG, C. Personal agency as a fourth aspect of students' engagement during learning activities. În: *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 2011, vol. 36, nr. 4, p. 257-267. ISSN 0361-476X.

²⁵ VALLERAND, R. J. și al. Construction et validation de l'Échelle de Motivation en Éducation (EME). În: *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science*, 1989, vol. 21, nr. 3, p. 323-349. ISSN 008-400X, e-ISSN 1879-2669.

²⁶ VALLERAND, R. J. și al. The Academic Motivation Scale: A measure of intrinsic, extrinsic, and amotivation in education. În: *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, 1992, vol. 52, nr. 4, p. 1003-1017. ISSN 0013-1644, e-ISSN 1552-3888.

²⁷ DECI, E. L., RYAN, R. M. The “what” and “why” of goals pursuits: Human needs and the self-determination of behavior. În: *Psychological Inquiry*, 2000, vol. 11, nr. 4, p. 227-268. ISSN 1047-840X.

²⁸ *idem*.

the self-regulation of their own behaviors in the image that they have about themselves). *Intrinsic motivation* requires the highest level of behavioral self-regulation and personal autonomy. It relies on the assumption that human individuals choose to behave in a particular way or get deeply involved in certain areas of activity and projects out of a desire to grow, due to innate curiosity and desire for strong cognitive-intellectual and emotional stimulation or for the pleasure they derive from carrying out those activities, which become goals in themselves.

R. J. Vallerand and collaborators^{29,30} separated the concept into three areas, namely:

a) motivation stimulated by a person's thirst for knowledge; it is based on the person's desire to perform an activity for personal pleasure and satisfaction and with a view to learning new things.

b) motivation stimulated by the desire for self-fulfillment; it consists of performing an activity for the satisfaction that the person feels, by doing or creating new things and capitalizing on their own skills and talents.

c) intrinsic motivation activated by the need for physical, cognitive-intellectual or emotional stimulation. In the field of education, the self-determination theory can be applied to stimulate students' interest in learning, their orientation toward putting schooling to good use, as well as to increase their confidence in their own abilities.

b) The second model aims at conceptualizing and measuring the attitude toward school and was suggested by D. B. McCoach and D. Siegle³¹. According to this model, the attitude that a student manifests toward school can be described by five dimensions, namely: academic self-perception, general attitude toward school, attitude toward teachers and classes, goal valuation and learning motivation/self-regulation, respectively. The first dimension refers to the image that a student has about their own school skills. It also includes general beliefs and the level of self-valuation associated with competences in this area of operation. The attitude toward teachers and classes was linked to the problems that a student encounters with school authorities, through their hostile and rude behaviors toward teachers and other school staff members, their poor interest in classes and their lack of motivation for thorough learning. General attitude toward school consists of the interest and feelings that students have toward their school. Research findings show that students who have good grades in school tend to be more interested in learning and more attached to their school. The goals that they set for themselves and the values that they attach to academic achievement mediate the manner in which they engage in task solving and react to requests and challenges. When a student values a school subject in particular, they are more likely to be constantly engaged in task solving, to put more effort into it and to strive to do well their assignments. Intrinsic motivation and self-regulation are two of the characteristics of the process of self-regulated learning. Self-regulation refers to students' thoughts, feelings, actions and behaviors, which are systematically

²⁹ VALLERAND, R. J. și al. Construction et validation de l' Échelle de Motivation en Éducation (EME). În: *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science*, 1989, vol. 21, nr. 3, p. 323-349. ISSN 008-400X, e-ISSN 1879-2669.

³⁰ VALLERAND, R. J. și al. The Academic Motivation Scale: A measure of intrinsic, extrinsic, and amotivation in education. În: *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, 1992, vol. 52, nr. 4, p. 1003-1017. ISSN 0013-1644, e-ISSN 1552-3888.

³¹ McCOACH, D. B., SIEGLE, D. The School Attitude Assessment Survey-Revised: A new instrument to identify academically able students who underachieve. În: *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, 2003, vol. 63, nr. 3, p. 414-429. ISSN 0013-1644, e-ISSN 1552-3888.

directed toward achieving specific school-learning goals and more³². Self-regulation is a consistent predictor of success in school, but students must be intrinsically motivated to use cognitive and metacognitive strategies, as well as to adjust their own cognitions and the effort they put into learning. All the dimensions we referred to can be measured using the *School Attitude Assessment Survey-Revised* tool (SAAS-R)^{33,34}.

c) The third model³⁵ used in this doctoral thesis includes psychosocial determinants and the effects of engagement with activity. This model relies on the theory of ecological systems of human development (U. Bronfenbrenner). Lam et al. identified and described two categories of contextual factors (related to the school climate) that determine student engagement with school: a) factors related to the training-education process that motivates students – the challenges that students face in the teaching-learning process, focus on the meanings and usefulness in real life of the contents that they acquire, stimulation of curiosity, autonomy that teachers grants to their students during their training-education activities, recognition of students' merits and fair and formative assessment of knowledge, respectively; b) factors contributing to the creation of a stimulating social context – social support from teachers, parents and peers, absence of students' aggressive behaviors and absence of victimization through aggressive behaviors of their peers, respectively. Lam et al. also identified a number of individual characteristics of students, which they found to mediate the effects that contextual factors have on engagement with school. These characteristics refer to students' learning goal orientation, self-efficacy in the learning process and students' naming the factors that influence their educational outcomes, respectively (their own skills and efforts versus situational factors). It was assumed that these motivational determinants have a significant impact especially on the efforts that students make during learning activities. Among the effects of their engagement with school, Lam et al. included students' emotional well-being, disciplined behaviors during classes and in the school groups of which they are part, and the quality of their educational outcomes, respectively.

The conceptual and theoretical analysis described in Chapter 1 allowed us to formulate the following RESEARCH PROBLEM: the need to use scientific methodology to develop and validate a model of predictors of the dimensions of engagement with school, as well as tools to measure the psychosocial and educational dimensions of engagement, in line with adolescents' perception of and attitudes toward school.

In line with the issues outlined above, the PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH focused on identifying perceptions, representations, beliefs, motivational orientations, attitudes and behaviors related to school, in order to designed and empirically verify the model of psychosocial determinants and effects of engagement with school among adolescents.

³² SCHUNK, D. H., ZIMMERMAN, B. J. *Self-regulation of Learning and Performance: Issues and Educational Applications*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., 1994, 329 p. ISBN 0-8058-4790-1.

³³ McCOACH, D. B., SIEGLE, D. The School Attitude Assessment Survey-Revised: A new instrument to identify academically able students who underachieve. În: *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, 2003, vol. 63, nr. 3, p. 414-429. ISSN 0013-1644, e-ISSN 1552-3888.

³⁴ SULDO, S. M., SHAFFER, E. J., SHAUNESSY, E. An independent investigation of the validity of the School Attitude Assessment Survey-Revised. În: *Journal of Psychoeducational Assessment*, 2008, vol. 26, nr. 1, p. 69-82. ISSN 0734-2829.

³⁵ LAM, S.-f. și al. Understanding student engagement with a contextual model. În: S. L. CHRISTENSON, A. L. RE-SCHLY, C. WYLIE (Eds.), *Handbook of Research on Student Engagement*. New York: Springer, 2012, p. 403-420. ISBN 978-1-4614-2018-7.

Chapter 2 (“**Methodology for investigating the social representation of school activity and the determinants of engagement with school among adolescents in Romania and the Republic of Moldova**”) presents the general methodological framework that has been capitalized in several investigations aimed at delimiting the content, structure and organization of SR of school activity among adolescents in Romania and the Republic of Moldova, elaboration and preliminary validation of the multifactorial tool called *Perception and Attitude Towards School Questionnaire* (PASQ), adapting and validating the tools for investigating the psychosocial determinants and effects of engagement with school, respectively determining the predictive models for the dimensions of school engagement among Romanian adolescents.

A. Investigating the social representation of school activity among Romanian and Moldovan adolescents

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH. The exploratory investigation we conducted using three samples of Romanian adolescents (high school students) (totaling 2429 participants) and a sample of adolescents from the Republic of Moldova (N = 292) aimed to delimit the content, structure and SR organization of school activity among contemporary adolescents.

The objectives of the investigation aimed at the social representation of school activity among contemporary adolescents were:

1. determining the content, structure and organization of SR of school activity among Romanian and Moldovan adolescents;
2. identifying the content elements of the silent zone of SR of school activity among Romanian adolescents;
3. establishing similarities and differences in the content, structure and organization of SR of school activity among adolescents in the two countries.

WORKING HYPOTHESES:

1. In the SR universe of school activity among contemporary adolescents, the content elements are grouped into three dimensions: a conceptual-definitional dimension that can be related to the internal representation of the purpose and benefits of schooling, a descriptive-operational dimension (related to learning, individual training, acquisitions and evaluation), respectively a social dimension related to the socialization process through the relations of collegiality and friendship that the school environment facilitates.

2. There are differences between adolescents in Romania and those in the Republic of Moldova in terms of content, structure and organization of SR of school activity.

RESEARCH STAGES. The research approach included four interconnected stages implemented between 2017 and 2019, as follows:

1. the research planning stage, which included theoretical documentation, literature review about the content and structure of SR, determination of the raw data collection technique applied to our school population (evocation based on free association), determination of the recruitment pool of possible participants in the research and development of a standardized questionnaire to be administered to high school students;

2. data collection stage involving the school population in nine high schools in Romania and five schools in the Republic of Moldova, respectively, answer protocol validation and database design and development;

3. qualitative and quantitative processing stage of the answers given by high school students from the two countries to the standardized questionnaire designed to analyze the content and structure of the SR of school activity;

4. the stage of analyzing the meanings of the results and their interpretation in the light of the investigation goal and objectives, as well as considering the reality of the Romanian and Moldovan education systems; the results were also compared to the trends noted in the other EU countries, highlighting the implications in connection with the development needs of the Romanian and Moldovan societies, as well as with the specific psychoeducational needs of the current generation of adolescents.

B. Elaboration and validation of the Perception and Attitude Towards School Questionnaire (PASQ)

The content of the social representation of school activity among adolescents in Romania and the Republic of Moldova was capitalized in the conceptual substantiation, elaboration and preliminary validation of a multidimensional questionnaire to assess the perception and attitude of adolescents about school activity. We started from the premise that the tool can be used by school counselors and teachers in order to know the risk factors that contribute to diminishing school motivation and engagement among adolescents. The psychometric properties of the preliminary version of the PASQ were investigated using a sample that included 770 students from Romania.

The OBJECTIVES of the research were:

1. definition of the content of the dimensions that were to be operationalized through the items of the questionnaire; this approach involved the comparative analysis of the content of the core of the SR of school activity taking into account both the findings of the study which aimed to determine the explicit content of the core among Romanian and Moldovan adolescents, and the findings of the study aimed at identifying the silent area among Romanian adolescents;

2. development and fine-tuning of the wording of items 5 to 10 for each of the dimensions of perception of and attitude toward school, respectively;

3. evaluation of the content validity of the preliminary set of items by a group of experts consisting of specialists in the field of education sciences, school counselors and teachers, in order to clarify the psychopedagogical content of the items and to outline a working version of the PASQ tool;

4. administration of the working version to a consistent sample of high school students, in order to estimate the construct/internal validity (by exploratory and exploratory factor analysis); this approach enabled us to choose the relevant items in terms of content in relation to our adolescents' perception of and attitude toward learning, involvement in school activities and opportunities provided by the Romanian education system.

The methodological approach meant to develop the PASQ tool materialized in the definition of a number of 14 dimensions. 5-15 items were formulated for each of these dimensions (seven of them focused on school perception and the other seven on our adolescents' attitude toward this important area of development), which resulted in an initial number of 140 items. The working version resulting from the approach we described above was presented as a qualitative evaluation task to a group of ten

experts, who were asked to analyze the validity of the content. The first revision of the items concerned both the items on which the experts disagreed in terms of their representativeness and clarity of content depending on the dimensions to which they referred or in terms of their redundancy, and the items that were considered perfectible. Further to the analysis of the experts' evaluations, we fully reworded 17 of the items of the initial version of the PASQ tool. Another 21 items were partially reworded either by removing or replacing certain words or phrases, or by changing the word order. 51 of the 140 items included in the original version were removed for several reasons. The remaining items ($k = 89$) were left unchanged in terms of their initial wording because either all experts or most of them agreed that the items reflected the dimensions for which they had been designed, had clear and unambiguous wording and did not create comprehension difficulties to the subjects in the target population.

The second working version of the PASQ tool, which was administered experimentally to analyze the (internal) validity of the construct, included 44 items for the component related to our adolescents' perception of various aspects of school activity and 45 items for the component related to their attitude toward school. Further to the exploratory factor analyses conducted for each of the 14 dimensions served by the 89 items of this version, only 83 items were ultimately used, namely:

A) Component regarding their perception of school and schooling:

- a) *importance of school for their personal growth and future* – 10 items;
- b) *importance given to school learning* – 6 items;
- c) *school perceived as a socialization environment* – 6 items;
- d) *perception of the quality of lessons* – 3 items;
- e) *importance given to self-study* – 3 items;
- f) *perception of the evaluative dimension of school activity* – 5 items;
- g) *perception of the quality of teachers and of the relations with them* – 5 items.

B) Component regarding their attitude toward school:

- a) *orientation toward thorough school study* – 5 items;
- b) *faith in the utility of school for their own future* – 4 items;
- c) *orientation toward acquiring information and knowledge* – 6 items;
- d) *faith in the utility of the knowledge acquired in school* – 3 items;
- e) *orientation toward socialization and friendship relations* – 3 items;
- f) *attitude toward colleagues* – 3 items;
- g) *pleasure of learning, persistence of efforts made for preparing for school* – 5 items;
- h) *interest in study* – 3 items;
- i) *attitude toward homework* – 4 items;
- j) *importance given to educational outcomes* – 5 items;
- k) *attitude toward teachers* – 3 items.

The findings of the (exploratory and confirmatory) factor analyses undertaken are proof of the construct validity of the PASQ tool. The tool developed and validated may be used by school specialists and researchers to diagnose the manner in which contemporary young people relate to school as an institution with an educational-formative role and to the specific school environment and activities that they perform with their teachers, respectively.

C. Psychosocial determinants and effects of the engagement with school among Romanian adolescents

Investigating the factors that explain individual differences in adolescent engagement with school, as well as the effects that this dimension has is an important task for researchers in the field of education sciences nowadays, as the collected data may both mitigate the educational vulnerabilities of young generations and help to increase the productivity of the educational process. The analysis of the theoretical framework led us to the model of predictors of engagement in school activity (see Fig. 1).

The identification of psychological, social and educational variables that can be determinants of the commitment that young Romanians and Moldovans have to school must start not only from the conceptual models presented in the literature and the findings of studies conducted in other cultural contexts, but also from surveying the perceptions and representations that high school students develop in connection with their involvement in their own school life and the performance they achieve, as well as in relation to the role that education in school plays in the development of a person during life. Starting from this premise, we considered that the elements of the central core of the SR of the school activity can be useful in the approach through which aimed at delimiting the psychosocial and educational dimensions that contribute to the commitment of the young generations in relation to their own education.

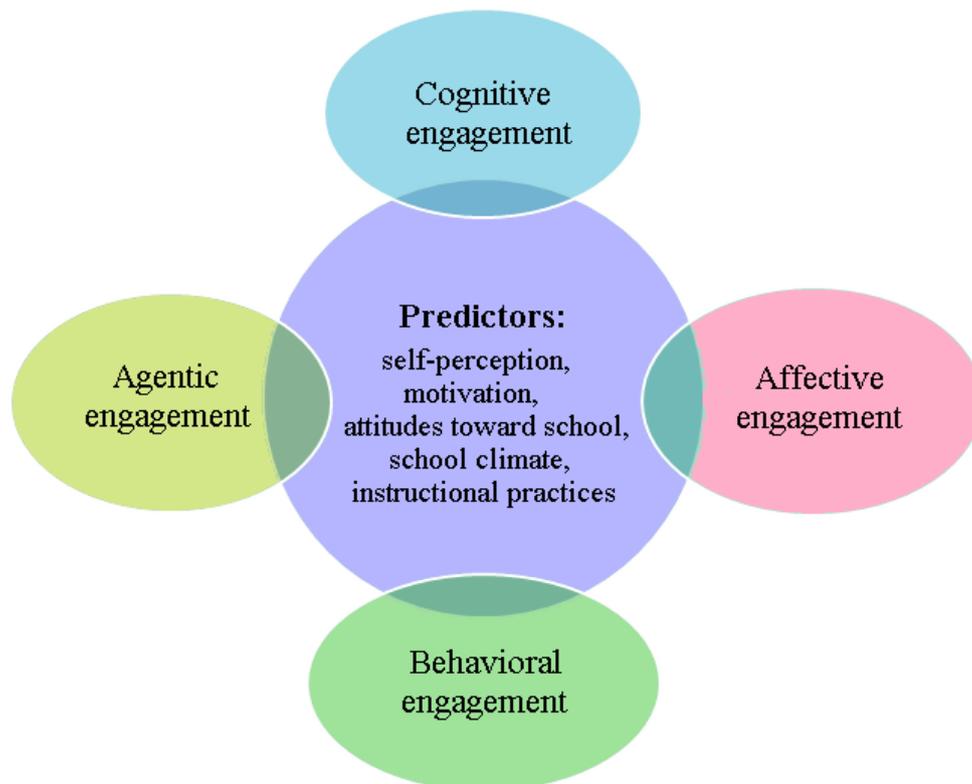


Fig. 1. Model of the predictors of engagement with school (designed by the author)

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH. Using a correlational design, the research aimed to analyze the psychosocial determinants and the effects of engagement with school among Romanian adolescents.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND STAGES. The research stages and objectives were the following:

1. documentation by national and international literature review designed to define the engagement with school coordinates and the variables that have been related to this dimension; through this approach, we aimed to determine the extent to which the research topic has been analyzed and the psychosocial variables that have not yet caught the researchers' attention (possible determinants of engagement);

2. screening of international databases in order to identify well-validated tools from a scientific point of view, which would be used to determine the variables tackled in our research;

3. translation into Romanian of the tools and their adaptation to the local cultural and social context, more precisely to the specificity of the Romanian school system;

4. preparation of the standardized tool protocol to be administered to the older school population (adolescents);

5. definition of the respondent recruitment pool; drafting of applications to get the approval of the principals of the schools identified in the recruitment pool and of the decision makers of Iași and Neamț County Boards of Education for the administration of the questionnaires;

6. administration of standardized questionnaire protocols to 9th to 12th grade students and validation of their answers;

7. development of the raw database using the SPSS application for Windows;

8. performance of descriptive and inferential statistical analyses to check the working hypotheses;

9. analysis and interpretation of the psychopedagogical meaning of the findings of our research, as well as of the practical and applied implications of the findings of our research.

WORKING HYPOTHESES:

1. The positive self-perception that students have in the school field is a positive predictor of the dimensions of engagement with school.

2. The high level of expectation that students have regarding their own school results, respectively the high level of motivation for future achievement are positive predictors of the dimensions of engagement with school.

3. Extrinsic and intrinsic motivations are positive predictors of the dimensions of engagement that students show in school.

4. Lack of motivation is a negative predictor of students' engagement with school.

5. The positive attitudes that students show towards the school they belong to, teachers, learning and towards school activity in general are positive predictors of the dimensions of engagement with school.

6. The positive perception that students have about the school climate is a positive predictor of the dimensions of engagement with school.

7. The positive perception that students have about the quality of instructional practices is a positive predictor of the dimensions of engagement with school.

8. High levels of engagement with school are positive predictors of school satisfaction and student achievement.

The raw data were obtained by processing the valid answers that 534 Romanian high school students (281 girls and 253 boys) gave to a set of standardized questionnaires. The recruitment pool was represented by the school population from five urban and rural high schools. The study was based on a mixed, comparative and correlational design. The method for collecting raw data from the school population was the administration of standardized questionnaires in a sample of high school students. Adolescents who participated in the study completed eight standardized tools that included a total of 152 items (Table 1). Out of these, 144 were closed-ended items (two to seven variants, of which the study participants selected only one, namely the one that suited them).

Chapter 3 (“**The results of investigations on social representation and predictors of engagement with school among adolescents**”) presents the findings of studies aimed at: a) delimitation of the central core, peripheral elements and the silent zone of social representation that Romanian adolescents and those in the Republic of Moldova have it about school activity; b) the comparative analysis of the social representation that adolescents from Romania and the Republic of Moldova have about the field of school activity; c) the highlighting of the motivational, attitudinal-behavioral, social and educational variables that contribute to explaining the differences between Romanian adolescents in terms of the dimensions of engagement with school, respectively the contribution that this cognitive, affective and attitudinal-behavioral field has to school satisfaction and to the school results of high school students.

A. The universe of the social representation of school activity among Romanian adolescents

The Romanian adolescent tended to express a positive attitude toward the issue of school activity. The value of the polarity indicator obtained with the formula suggested by A. S. de Rosa was 0.35, while the value of the neutrality indicator was – 0.75. Friends, colleagues and future were some of the positive words associated with the stimulus word “school”. More than three quarters of our adolescents also had a positive attitude toward the number of hours allocated to self-study for school. These findings suggest that school activity tends to be perceived by adolescents as a beneficial task for building their personal future and, at the same time, as a source of social satisfaction, due to their school friends and to the quality of their classmates.

At the same time, young people seem to be aware that schooling requires involvement and perseverance which translates into the allocation of a consistent time budget devoted to self-study. However, it should be noted that over 57% of the adolescents surveyed gave a negative connotation to the word “homework”, which they associated with the word “school”. This finding reinforces the observation that young people in Romania tend to perceive the field of school activity as a demanding task.

In order to achieve semantic homogenization and to detect the associations more frequently reported by adolescents, we performed a thorough content analysis of the responses that the surveyed participants gave to the free evocation task. Twenty-two of the 188 different associations that adolescents reported starting from the stimulus word “school” have exceeded the minimum threshold of inclusion in the SR universe of school activity. It was set at 5% of the total number of adolescents who answered the questionnaires (N = 43 subjects). Also, the minimum frequency of occurrence of

Table 1. Summary of measures that were administered to Romanian adolescents

Operationalized dimensions	Measures	Sources	No. of items; type of answers	Targeted dimensions (findings of confirmatory factor analyses)	Internal consistency (α coefficient)
Socio-demographic characteristics and other school variables	<i>Questionnaire for socio-demographic characteristics and other school-related variables</i>	Developed by author	13 (closed-ended items, filling in)	Gender, age, grade, type of school, field of study, family status, importance given to school attendance and thorough preparation for school, expectations related to educational outcomes, self-assessment of academic achievement	-
Engagement with school	<i>Student Engagement with School/Four-Dimension Scale (SES/4-DS)</i>	Veiga (2016); Veiga and Robu (2014)	20 (closed-ended items: 1 – <i>strongly disagree</i> ...6 – <i>totally agree</i>)	- cognitive engagement (5 items) - affective engagement (5 items) - behavioral engagement (5 items) - agentic engagement (5 items)	- cognitive engagement – 0.68 - affective engagement – 0.78 - behavioral engagement – 0.74 - agentic engagement – 0.73
Perception of school climate	<i>Perceived School Climate Scale (PSCS)</i>	Brand et al. (2003)	23 (closed-ended items: 1 – <i>never</i> ...5 – <i>always</i>)	- social support from teachers (6 items) - social support from peers (6 items) - autonomy granted in to students in the learning process (5 items) - clarity, consistency and strictness of school rules (6 items)	- social support from teachers – 0.77 - social support from peers – 0.64 - autonomy granted to students in the learning process – 0.66 - clarity, consistency and strictness of school rules – 0.67
Attitude toward school	<i>School Attitude Assessment Scale Survey – Revised (SAAS-R)</i>	McCoach and Siegle (2003)	35 (closed-ended items: 1 – <i>totally disagree</i> ...7 – <i>totally agree</i>)	- academic self-perception (7 items) - attitude toward teachers (7 items) - general attitude toward school (5 items) - goal valuation (6 items) - motivation/self-regulation (10 items)	- academic self-perception – 0.81 - attitude toward teachers – 0.90 - general attitude toward school – 0.91 - goal valuation – 0.87 - motivation/self-regulation – 0.90

Table 1 (continued)

Quality of instructional practices	<i>Motivating Instructional Context Inventory</i> (MICI)	Lam, Pak and Ma (2007)	12 (closed-ended items: 1 – none of my teachers... 5 – all my teachers)	Perception of the quality of instructional practices	0.84
Academic motivation	<i>Academic Motivation Scale – High School</i> (AMS-HS)	Vallerand et al. (1989, 1992)	28 (closed-ended items: 1 – it is not suitable for me at all...7 – it is perfectly suitable for me)	amotivation (4 items) external regulation (4 items) introjected regulation (4 items) identification (4 items) intrinsic motivation - to know (4 items) intrinsic motivation - toward accomplishment (4 items) intrinsic motivation - to experience stimulation (4 items) intrinsic motivation (12 items) extrinsic motivation (12 items)	- amotivation – 0.83 - external regulation – 0.76 - introjected regulation – 0.78 - identification – 0.80 - intrinsic motivation - to know – 0.80 - intrinsic motivation - to experience stimulation – 0.77 - intrinsic motivation - to experience stimulation – 0.72
Achievement motivation	<i>Achievement Motivation Scale – Denver Youth Survey</i> (AMS-DYS)	Institute of Behavioral Science, 1990	13 (closed-ended items: 1 – not at all important... 5 – very important)	Achievement motivation	0.83
Satisfaction with school	<i>Multidimensional Students' Life Satisfaction Scale – School</i> (MSLSS-School)	Huebner (2001)	8 (closed-ended items: 1 – strongly disagree... 5 – strongly agree)	Overall satisfaction with school	0.82

associations eligible to be included in the core was set at 15% of the adolescent sample size, i.e. about 127 subjects. It was found that the words most frequently associated with the word school were: “homework” (30.5%), “colleagues” (28.9%), “grades” (27.9%), “friends” (24.4%), “books” (16.7%), “future” (16.6%), “study hours” (16.4%), “teachers” (15.7%), “tests” (18.8%) and “stress” (15.7%). As concerns the frequency of occurrence in the evocations of our adolescents, all the words listed above were eligible to be included in the core of the SR of school activity

When, in addition to the criterion regarding the frequency of occurrence in the evocations of our adolescents, the mean rank value of the importance that adolescents assigned to each of the words associated with the word “school” was taken into account, the number of eligible associations to be included in the core of the SR of school activity was reduced from ten to seven. Thus, the associations whose mean rank of importance was < 3 were distinguished from the associations whose mean rank of importance was ≥ 3 . This approach enabled us to find that the words “homework”, “colleagues”, “grades”, “friends”, “books”, “future” and “study hours” had both a higher frequency of occurrence in the evocations of our adolescents, and greater importance. Among these words, our adolescents attached the greatest importance to “future”. Other words, such as “teachers” or “tests”, had lower importance attached to them, although the frequency of their occurrence in the evocations of our adolescents was $\geq 15\%$. Also, the words “education”, “learning”, “information and knowledge” and “development”, respectively, had higher importance, but lower frequency of occurrence (5% to 15% of the total number of adolescents who participated in the survey). Words were also identified that had a frequency of occurrence between 5% and 15% (relatively low) and a mean rank of importance < 3 . We refer to “oral assessment”, “school subjects” and “socialization”. Four other words (“boredom”, “chairs”, “notebooks” and “tiredness”) distinguished themselves both by the lower frequency of occurrence and by the lower importance.

B. Comparative analysis of the social representation of school activity among adolescents of Romania and Republic of Moldova

According to the “substitution method” (administered to analyze the silent zone of the SR of school activity), Romanian adolescents (N = 307) reported 181 different associations starting from the stimulus word “school”. The structure of the SR of school activity has changed significantly, although many content elements have remained the same. Thus:

a) the words “study hours”, “friends”, “colleagues”, “future”, “education”, “books” and “homework” disappeared from the core and were replaced by the words “stress”, “boredom” and “exhaustion/tiredness”; the only association that remained constant was the one referring to grades; the dimensions related to stress, boredom and tiredness (exhaustion) were part of either the first or the second area of the peripheral system of the SR of school activity, in both adolescent samples;

b) in the analysis of the SR of school activity using the substitution method, the words referring to the social dimension (“friends” and “colleagues”) lost their central status; the former passed to the peripheral zone III, acquiring an ambiguous status (although it retained its importance, it was more rarely reported by adolescents); the latter occurred in quadrant IV, along with overwork (the second zone of peripheral elements);

c) another word that lost its place in the core was “future”; while this word was both more frequent and of greater importance for the adolescents in the first sample, for the adolescents who completed the task of free evocation under the requirements of the “substitution method”, the field of school activity has not been associated with the same amount of importance in relation to their future;

d) associations with teachers, homework and tests have maintained their ambiguous position in the structure of the SR of school work.

C. Comparative analysis of the social representation of school activity among adolescents of Romania and Republic of Moldova

Simultaneous analysis of the data collected in Romania and in the Republic of Moldova (by means of the “normal method” for the task of free evocation of associations) revealed the following similarities and differences in terms of content, structure and organization of the SR of school activity:

a) the core included associations with the words “future”, “information and knowledge”, and “friends” in both countries; the first word had the highest importance in the universe of evocations of the Romanian and Moldovan adolescents starting from the stimulus word “school”; Moldovan adolescents attached more importance to information and knowledge than their Romanian counterparts; on the other hand, it was the other way round for the word “friends”;

b) the other core value elements were different; thus, Romanians mentioned education, study hours, grades and colleagues, while Moldovans highlighted “development”; the two words bore greater importance in the structural configuration of the SR among the Romanian and Moldovan adolescent population;

c) three words distinguished themselves in both countries in the first area of the peripheral system, namely “homework” and “teachers” (quadrant II), and “learning” (quadrant III), respectively; the remaining associations were different, especially those which had lower frequency of occurrence, but higher importance in both countries; thus, for Romania, the picture of the words associated with the word “school” was more varied and included “responsibility”, “growth”, “school subjects”, “books”, “buying new things”, “communication”, “oral assessment” and “socialization”; however, for Moldovan adolescents, quadrant III included, in addition to the word “learning”, only “education”, “wisdom” and “lessons”; for quadrant II, it was found that Moldovan adolescents tended to associate school more frequently with the words “books”, “grades”, “students” and “colleagues” (although the importance given to these words was lower), while Romanian adolescents associated school with tests and stress;

d) an undeniable difference was also noted in terms of the content of the second peripheral area; thus, Romanian adolescents showed a greater variety of peripheral elements than their Moldovan counterparts; for Romania, the second area of the peripheral system included the words “boredom”, “tiredness”, “students”, “notebooks”, “fun”, “joy”, “nervousness”, “building”; two words predominated in the Republic of Moldova, namely “tests” and “communication”. Adolescents in Romania associated school with “tests” and “stress”;

For adolescents in both countries, the comparative analysis revealed a conceptual-definitional dimension of the aims of school activity. It is perceived as a factor that

contributes to a young person's progress, by providing them with a set of resources essential for their growth. The second dimension confirmed the role played by school activity in the teaching-learning process through which young people acquire information, i.e. theoretical knowledge and practical skills. The third dimension revealed in both countries involves the social function of school attendance, through the bonds of friendship that adolescents establish and cultivate.

D. Predictors of the engagement with school among Romanian adolescents

Although there were differences between the engagement-with-school scores according to the students' gender, grade, field of study, family status and self-assessment of the concordance between their educational outcomes and their cognitive-intellectual potential, the effects were modest or poor.

The absolute values of the correlations between the engagement-with-school scores and the other variables dwelt on in our research ranged from 0.003 to 0.62, most of them being statistically significant ($p < 0.05$; $p < 0.01$; $p < 0.001$). The correlations between the cognitive, emotional, agentic and overall engagement with school dimensions and the grade point average for the 2018-2019 academic year had negligible or low absolute values, which did not exceed the limit of statistical significance. The correlation between the behavioral dimension of engagement with school and the grade point average for the 2018-2019 academic year was statistically significant, yet modest ($r = 0.19$; $p < 0.05$).

Considering the results of correlational analysis, 12 independent variables were taken into account in the regression models in which the dependent variables (criteria) were the extent of engagement with school. Given the collinearity revealed between several independent variables (e.g., general attitude toward school with attitude toward teachers and classes or extrinsic motivation with intrinsic motivation), 31 regression models were tested, namely 12 for cognitive engagement, two for emotional engagement, four for behavioral engagement, one model for agentic engagement with school and 12 models for overall engagement, respectively.

The overall explanatory power of regression models in which the dependent variable was cognitive engagement with school ranged from 28.3 % to 39.5 %. Academic self-perception, extrinsic motivation, intrinsic motivation, general attitude toward school, goal valuation, learning motivation/self-regulation, social support from teachers and autonomy granted to students in the learning process, respectively, were positive predictors of the level of cognitive engagement, while amotivation was a negative predictor. The detailed analysis of the individual explanatory power of each of the independent variables that stood out as predictors gave us the opportunity to detect the attitudinal-behavioral variable related to motivation and self-regulation in the learning process as the most consistent predictor of cognitive engagement (9% - 11.15%). Attitude toward one's school, attitude toward teachers and classes, and support from peers were positive predictors and accounted for 6.96%, 6.35% and 11.35%/14.51%, respectively, of the variance of the emotional dimension of engagement with school. Regression models in which behavioral engagement with school was the dependent variable were statistically significant ($R = 0.53 - 0.67$; $F_R = 51.76 - 63.58$; $p < 0.001$). Academic self-perception, amotivation, general attitude toward

teachers and classes, goal valuation and learning motivation/self-regulation, respectively, proved to be positive/negative predictors of the behavioral dimension of engagement with school. Again, learning motivation/self-regulation stood out as the most consistent predictor, accounting for 5.10% to 7.02% of the variance of the score for behavioral engagement. The set of independent variables that were taken into account (intrinsic motivation, teacher support and autonomy granted to students in the learning process) accounted for about 17% of the variance of the score for agentic engagement with school. All three independent variables included in the analysis were positive predictors of agentic engagement with school, yet intrinsic motivation had the most consistent contribution (6.7%). Academic self-perception, amotivation, intrinsic motivation, attitude toward teachers and classes, motivation and self-regulation in the learning activity and support from teachers and peers, respectively, were positive/negative predictors and had individual contributions worthy of consideration to explain the variance of the score that the students obtained for overall engagement ($r^2_{sp} = 2.07\% - 4.79\%$).

All components of engagement with school were positive predictors of satisfaction with school, with individual contributions to explaining the variance of the dependent variable ranging from 0.96% to 8.29%. It was found that emotional and cognitive engagement had the most consistent contributions. Also, the overall score that the students obtained for engagement with school was a positive predictor and accounted for 35.52% of the variance of satisfaction with school.

Our research findings enabled us to suggest the following definition: *engagement with school includes a set of perceptions, cognitions, beliefs, emotional states and behaviors grouped in four dimensions (cognitive, emotional, behavioral and agentic) that are influenced by the intrinsic motivation for constant participation in school activities and learning process, self-regulation of efforts aimed at specific academic goals, positive attitude toward the school in which they learn and social support offered by their peers.*

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In accordance with the theme, basic hypotheses, and research goal and objectives, the following **scientific results** were obtained:

1. The analysis of the attitude toward school, of motivation and of engagement with school contributes to detecting and explaining the factors that determine adolescent adaptation to school assignments and to ensuring the continuity of their educational path. Engagement with school includes a set of perceptions, cognitions, beliefs, emotional states and behaviors that are influenced by attitudinal-motivational structures, as well as by external factors. All these variables play a predictive role in relation to the differences between students of different ages in terms of involvement in learning activities specific to their educational path, of reaction to the formative efforts of the education system, of attachment to the values of genuine (self)education, of a sense of belonging to educational institutions, of motivation for academic achievement and of success in a particular career.

2. Researching the content, organization and structure of the SR of school activity, as well as the motivational, attitudinal and behavioral dimensions that determine the consistent involvement of young people in their own education is a must for redefining education policies and strategies so that they meet the development and growth needs of

a post-industrial society. The free evocation tasks by the “normal method”, which were requested from Romanian adolescents starting from the stimulus word “school”, revealed three dimensions of the core of the SR of school activity, namely a conceptual-definitional dimension (“future”), a descriptive-operational one (“self-study hours”, “grades”) and a social dimension (“colleagues”, “friends”). The aspects related to their future and to socialization with their peers proved to be the main core components in terms of SR of school both for Romanian and Moldovan adolescents. When the “substitution method” was applied, the field of school activity was described by Romanian adolescents through the lens of counterproductive psychological pressure (stress, tiredness/exhaustion), as well as by the low level of attractiveness of the educational offer of the local school system. The findings of the research of the SR of school activity served to develop and validate the *Perception and Attitude towards School Questionnaire*.

3. In the normal and substitution methods that were used for the SR survey of school activity among Romanian and Moldovan adolescents, the central core was highlighted by evoking terms such as “future/education/development/studies”, “information and knowledge”, “study hours and homeworks”, “grades”, “stress and exhaustion”, “boredom”, “friends and colleagues”. These associations were evoked by a consistent number of study participants and, in addition, were assessed as being of high importance. In order to ensure the continuity of the efforts to investigate the perception, representation and attitude that adolescents in Romania and the Republic of Moldova have about what school means in general, as well as about their own participation in the school field, the content of the central core of the SR of the school activity was capitalized in order to identify the psychosocial and educational factors that contribute to the determination of the engagement with school among adolescents. For example, the term for grades was connected to the level of aspirations/expectations that adolescents have about their own school results. The central element regarding information and knowledge was connected with the valorization of the school activity, as well as with the perception regarding the quality of the instructive-educational practices. The individual study hours were related to motivation and self-regulation, as well as to the valorization of the school activity. As elements of the central core, the terms referring to the future, education and studies determined us to select the valorization of the school activity, intrinsic motivation and motivation for personal achievement in the future among the determinants of engagement with school. The social dimension of SR in school activity (reflected by the term “friends and colleagues”) suggested the role that peer support plays in involving adolescents in school tasks. Also, the elements of the central core (stress, exhaustion/fatigue, boredom, grade pressure) highlighted in the investigation through which we aimed to explore the silent area of SR of school activity among Romanian adolescents were connected with motivation, attitude towards teachers and classes, the perception regarding the autonomy granted to the students in the learning process and the one regarding the instructive-educational practices, the satisfaction towards the field of school activity, respectively other variables that we considered possible predictors of the school engagement. Among them, motivation, intrinsic motivation, motivation for future achievement, attitude towards teachers and classes, valorization of school activity, motivation and self-regulation, respectively support from the elderly were highlighted as predictors of the dimensions of engagement with school among Romanian adolescents.

4. The analysis of the factors that account for the individual differences in terms of engagement with school among adolescents has resulted in the development of a model of predictors of this school area. The model included several variables grouped into four dimensions: academic self-perception, motivational characteristics and orientations, attitudes toward school and behaviors manifested in relation to school activities, perception of school climate and training-education practices. According to this model, tools have been identified, adapted and validated to measure possible predictors of engagement with school.

5 Measuring engagement with school on a consistent sample of Romanian high school students enabled us to identify the predictors for each of the dimensions of engagement: for the cognitive and behavioral dimension – motivation in the learning process and self-regulation of efforts aimed at this specific academic goal; for the emotional dimension – the general attitude that high school students have toward the school where they learn and the social support offered by their peers; for the agentic dimension – the intrinsic motivation for constant participation in school activities. The findings of our research allowed us a more comprehensive definition of engagement with school among contemporary adolescents.

6. Regression analyzes supported the hypotheses that high levels of cognitive, affective, behavioral, agency, and global engagement are positive predictors of high school students' satisfaction with school activity and positive self-perception, that students have in school, extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, positive attitudes towards school, respectively positive perception that students have about the school climate contributes positively to predicting the dimensions of engagement with school, while motivation is a negative predictive factor.

The scientific problem solved in this doctoral thesis is the validation of the model developed to explain the predictors and effects of engagement with school, as well as of the tools used for measuring the psychosocial and educational dimensions of engagement, in line with contemporary adolescents' perception of and attitudes toward school.

Novelty and originality of our scientific findings. The identification in our thesis of the content and structure of the SR of school activity among Romanian and Moldovan adolescents was a first for Romania, and the findings enabled us to determine the aspects that may be used when assessing the perception and attitude of contemporary adolescents toward school, as well as when developing intervention programs meant to improve their engagement with school and to stimulate their motivation for success. Also, the theoretical and applied approaches materialized in conceptual clarifications and results that allowed the identification of the psychosocial factors and of the effects of engagement with school. Thus, other dimensions have been defined that may be used in interventions aimed at improving the attachment of adolescents to school and to the goals of sound education.

Theoretical significance of the thesis. The research conducted and described in this thesis complements the concerns of social psychology applied in education, by elucidating the universe of social representation, perception and attitudes of contemporary adolescents toward school and by relating to the dimensions, predictors and effects of engagement with school.

Applied value of the thesis:

1. The model developed to explain the predictors of engagement with school

may be used when analyzing the educational path of students of different school ages (middle school, high school and post-secondary school education).

2. *The Perception and Attitude Towards School Questionnaire* developed and validated, as well as the tools validated for the Romanian school population and used to research psychosocial determinants of engagement with school may prove useful for school psychologists, guidance counselors, head teachers and other specialists in the field.

3. The information collected by the research on the predictors of engagement with school may be used as the grounds for developing school and educational counseling and guidance programs, as well as in interventions aimed at improving adolescents' attachment to school and to the goals of sound education.

Considering these findings, we make the following **practical recommendations**:

1. The students' cognitive, emotional, attitudinal-behavioral, motivational and social characteristics may be assessed from the very beginning of the high school cycle, in order to identify and monitor by counseling students who are at risk of disengagement from school activities and, hence, are vulnerable to partial or total school failure, and to early school drop-out, respectively. The multidimensional questionnaire that we have developed and validated may be used for the assessment of individual factors to provide school counselors, head teachers, teachers and researchers with a useful tool for probing adolescents' perception of and attitude toward school.

2. Individual and group psychopedagogical support programs aimed at preventing the disengagement of adolescents with school and the decline in their motivation for thorough training and success may include dimensions that have been counted among the consistent predictors of engagement with school.

3. In addition to controlling individual, family and social factors, intervention measures should aim to redefine curricular content and teaching-training methods so that they better meet the growth and education needs of contemporary generations of young people.

4. Psychopedagogical actions should also be taken to help reduce anxiety, stress, tiredness and boredom – problems that Romanian adolescents have evoked in the core of their SR of school activity, when the “substitution method” was used.

The findings of our quantitative research shown in Chapters 2 and 3 of our doctoral thesis should be analyzed considering the following **limitations** that also suggest further **research directions**:

1. The adolescents who were included in the Romanian samples were students recruited from public high school institutions, who were selected from the geographical-economic region located in North-Eastern and Eastern Romania (Moldova Region). As far as the Republic of Moldova is concerned, the population of high school students studying in rural high schools was not represented in the sample that we used. For our future research, we aim to use more heterogeneous samples in terms of socio-demographic variables that may have a significant impact on their adaptation to school tasks.

2. Another limitation is the transversal and correlational nature of the design that underlined the research of the psychosocial determinants and of the effects of engagement with school among Romanian adolescents. For our future research, we intend to use a longitudinal design and appropriate statistical methods. These will ena-

ble us to determine the temporal dynamics of the links between engagement with school and causal factors, and its effects, respectively.

3. A limited set of variables was used to analyze the predictors and the effects of engagement with school. For our future research, we aim to use a much wider range of variables, which will provide us with a longer list of factors that contribute to the engagement of adolescents with school goals and to the prevention of academic motivation decrease and of the weakening of their attachment to school.

4. The items of the SES/4-DS tool that we used for our research allowed us to determine four dimensions of engagement with school in general, without being able to distinguish the extent of a student's involvement in particular learning goals, such as preference for a particular subject. Therefore, in our future research, we to cover this limit.

5. The survey that we conducted among Romanian high school students revealed very weak links between the extent of engagement with school and overall performance (grade point average for the 2018-2019 academic year). Here are our further research goals: a) to collect more indicators of students' academic performance (grades in different subjects, semester or annual grade point average, assessments of teachers), which we will correlate with indicators of engagement with study of different subjects or of the overall engagement with school; b) to test several hypotheses regarding variables that could mediate or moderate the relations between the extent of a student's engagement with school and their performance indicators.

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1.1. reviews and journals indexed in other databases accepted by ANACEC

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2. Articles in proceedings included in the Register of published materials based on scientific manifestations organized in the Republic of Moldova.

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ANNOTATION (in Romanian)

ADNOTARE

la teza de doctorat în psihologie a dnei Caranfil Narcisa-Gianina „Determinante psihosociale ale angajamentului adolescenților în activitatea școlară”, Universitatea Liberă Internațională din Moldova, Chișinău, 2021

Structura tezei. Teza conține: *Introducere*, trei capitole, *Concluzii generale și recomandări*, *Bibliografie* (171 titluri) și *27 Anexe*. Volumul tezei este de 178 pagini text de bază, inclusiv 15 tabele și 8 figuri. Rezultatele obținute sunt publicate în 8 lucrări științifice.

Cuvinte-cheie: angajament în activitățile școlare, determinante psihosociale, efecte, adolescenți, reprezentare socială a activității școlare, tehnica asociațiilor libere, „consemn normal”, zonă mută a reprezentării sociale, „consemn de substituție”, percepție și atitudine față de școală, motivație în domeniul școlar, studiu psihometric, studiu corelațional, predictorii.

Domeniu de studiu: 511.03 – Psihologie socială

Scopul lucrării. Scopul lucrării constă în evidențierea modalității în care adolescenții contemporani percep activitatea școlară, prin delimitarea conținutului, structurii și a organizării reprezentării sociale, ca parte componentă a tabloului credințelor, atitudinilor și comportamentelor față de școală, precum și a determinantelor psihosociale și a efectelor angajamentului în domeniul școlar în rândul elevilor de liceu.

Obiectivele lucrării. Obiectivele care au orientat demersurile investigative au fost: analiza abordărilor teoretico-practice din domeniul de cercetare în vederea identificării factorilor psihosociale care contribuie la angajamentul școlar; determinarea conținutului, structurii și a organizării reprezentării sociale a activității școlare, a asemănărilor și a deosebirilor în rândul adolescenților din România și Republica Moldova în vederea stabilirii universului percepției pe care adolescenții o au despre activitatea școlară; elaborarea și validarea modelului predictorilor și al efectelor angajamentului în domeniul școlar, precum și a instrumentelor pentru măsurarea dimensiunilor psihosociale și educative ale angajamentului; măsurarea angajamentului în domeniul școlar într-un eșantion consistent format din elevi de liceu din România și Republica Moldova prin utilizarea unui instrument standardizat recunoscut în comunitatea academică; interpretarea semnificațiilor psihopedagogice ale rezultatelor obținute prin efectuarea prelucrărilor statistice asupra datelor brute.

Noutatea și originalitatea științifică. Inovația științifică rezultă din faptul că, pentru prima dată în spațiul românesc și cel din Republica Moldova, a fost identificat conținutul și structura reprezentării sociale a activității școlare în rândul adolescenților, rezultate care au condus la determinarea dimensiunilor ce pot fi valorificate în demersurile de evaluare a percepției și atitudinii pe care adolescenții contemporani le au față de școală, precum și în elaborarea programelor de intervenție destinate creșterii angajamentului în activitățile școlare și stimulării motivației pentru succes. De asemenea, demersurile teoretice și aplicative au condus la clarificări conceptuale și rezultate care au permis identificarea factorilor psihosociale și a efectelor angajamentului în activitățile școlare.

Rezultatele obținute care contribuie la soluționarea problemei științifice. Rezultatele cercetărilor au oferit baza pentru validarea modelului elaborat în vederea explicării predictorilor și a efectelor angajamentului în domeniul școlar, precum și a instrumentelor pentru măsurarea dimensiunilor psihosociale și educative ale angajamentului, în concordanță cu percepția și atitudinile pe care adolescenții contemporani le au față de școală.

Semnificația teoretică. Cercetările întreprinse și prezentate în teză completează preocupările psihologiei sociale aplicată în domeniul educației, prin elucidarea universului reprezentării sociale, a percepției și a atitudinilor pe care adolescenții contemporani le au față de școală și prin raportarea la dimensiunile, predictorii și efectele angajamentului în domeniul școlar. Modelul elaborat pentru a explica predictorii angajamentului în activitățile școlare poate fi utilizat în cercetări asupra traseului educativ pentru elevi care urmează treptele de învățământ gimnazial, liceal și postliceal.

Valoarea aplicativă. *Chestionarul pentru evaluarea percepției și a atitudinii față de școală* elaborat și validat, precum și instrumentele validate pentru populația școlară românească în vederea cercetării determinantelor psihosociale și a efectelor angajamentului în domeniul școlar pot fi utile în activitatea psihologilor școlari, consilierilor educaționali, diriginților și a altor specialiști de referință. Constatările cercetării cu privire la predictorii angajamentului în activitățile școlare pot fi aplicate ca bază pentru elaborarea programelor de consiliere școlară și educațională, precum și în intervenții ce urmăresc creșterea atașamentului adolescenților față de școală și față de scopurile educației temeinice.

Implementarea rezultatelor științifice. Rezultatele investigațiilor au fost valorificate în: a) proiectarea a trei ateliere de lucru pe problematica motivației școlare în rândul adolescenților și a relației acesteia cu stilul de comportament al cadrelor didactice; acestea au fost realizate cu studenți, masteranzi, doctoranzi și cadre didactice de la Universitatea Liberă Internațională din Moldova, respectiv studenți, cadre didactice și consilieri școlari din România; b) 15 lucrări prezentate la manifestări științifice naționale și internaționale; c) 8 lucrări științifice publicate, dintre care 5 în reviste de specialitate din România și Republica Moldova și 3 în volume cu materiale ale conferințelor și simpoziunilor naționale și internaționale.

ANNOTATION (in English)

to Doctoral Thesis in Psychology of Ms. Caranfil Narcisa-Gianina, “Psychosocial determinants of engagement with school activity among adolescents” Free International University of Moldova, Chisinau, 2021

Structure of thesis. The thesis comprises: *Introduction*, three chapters, *General conclusions and recommendations*, *References* (171 titles) and *27 Annexes*. The thesis volume contains 178 pages of basic text, including 15 tables and 8 figures. The obtained results are published in 8 scientific papers.

Keywords: engagement with school activity, psychosocial determinants, outcomes, adolescents, social representation of school activity, free association technique, “normal method”, silent zone of social representation, “substitution method”, perception and attitude towards school, academic motivation, psychometric study, correlational study, predictors.

Field of study: 511.03 – Social Psychology

Purpose of the research. The purpose of the research is to highlight the way in which contemporary adolescents perceive school activity. Another aim was to delimit the content, structure and organization of social representation, as part of the picture of beliefs, attitudes and behaviors towards school. Also, the psychosocial determinants and the effects of school engagement among high school students were investigated.

Objectives of research. The objectives that oriented the investigative approach were: the analysis of theoretical and practical approaches of the research field in order to identify the psychosocial factors contributing to school engagement; determining the content, structure and organization of the social representation of the school activity, as well as the similarities and differences among adolescents in Romania and the Republic of Moldova; developing and validating the model of predictors and the effects of school engagement; adaptation and validation of instruments for measuring the psychosocial and educational dimensions of engagement with school; measuring engagement with school using a consistent sample of high school students from Romania and the Republic of Moldova; in this respect, a standardized measure (recognized in the academic community) was used; interpretation of the psychopedagogical meanings of the results obtained by performing statistical processing on raw data.

Novelty and scientific originality. The scientific innovation results from the fact that, for the first time in the Romanian context and in the Republic of Moldova, the content and structure of the social representation of school activity among adolescents has been identified. The results of this approach have led to the determination of the dimensions that can be used in order to evaluate the perception and attitude that contemporary adolescents have towards the school, as well as to elaborate the intervention programs aimed at increasing school engagement and stimulating achievement motivation. Also, the theoretical and applied approaches have generated conceptual clarifications and results that allowed to identify the psychosocial factors and the effects of school engagement.

The relevance of findings in relation to solved scientific issue. The research results provided the basis for validating the model developed to explain the predictors and the effects of school engagement. In addition, the validity of the instruments for measuring the psychosocial and educational dimensions of school engagement has been confirmed, in accordance with the perception and attitudes that contemporary adolescents have towards school.

Theoretical significance of research. The research undertaken and presented in the thesis complements the concerns of applied social psychology in the field of education, by elucidating the universe of social representation, the perception and attitudes that contemporary adolescents have towards school and by comparing the dimensions, predictors and effects of school engagement. The model developed to explain the predictors of engagement with school can be used in research on the educational route for students covering the secondary, high school and post-secondary education levels.

Applicative value of research. The *Questionnaire for assessing the perception and attitude towards school* developed and validated, as well as the instruments validated for the Romanian school population in order to investigate the psychosocial determinants and the effects of school engagement can be useful in the activity of school psychologists, educational counselors, leaders and other teachers. Research findings on predictors of school engagement can be applied as a basis for developing school and educational counseling programs, as well as in interventions aimed at increasing adolescent school bonding and attachment to the goals of thorough education.

Implementation of research findings. The results of the investigations were capitalized in: a) designing three workshops on the issue of school motivation among adolescents and its relation with the behavioral style of teachers; these were realized with undergraduates, masters and doctoral students and teachers from the Free International University of Moldova, respectively students, teachers and school counselors from Romania; b) 15 papers presented at national and international scientific events; c) 8 published scientific papers, of which 5 in specialized journals from Romania and the Republic of Moldova and 3 in proceedings of national and international conferences and symposiums.

CARANFIL NARCISA GIANINA

**PSYCHOSOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF ENGAGEMENT WITH
SCHOOL AMONG ADOLESCENTS**

SPECIALTY: 511.03 – SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

**ABSTRACT
of the PhD thesis in Psychology**

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