

MENTAL HEALTH OF GIFTED PUPILS IN THE CONTEXT OF A POSITIVE SCHOOL CLIMATE

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Abstract: Giftedness results from a dynamic and interactive process. It manifests itself in abilities that are expressed in the cognitive domain, cognition, understanding, thinking academic achievement, creativity. The issue of giftedness is of interest not only to psychologists but also to educators. It is essential to support gifted children not only in the family but also in the school environment by creating a positive school climate linked to good mental health for these children. The main goal of research was to find out the relation between mental health of gifted pupils and school climate. Our research sample consisted of 71 intellectually gifted participants. There is a significant positive correlation between mental health and positive school climate.

Keywords: giftedness, gifted pupils, mental health, positive school climate

1 Introduction

In the following chapters, we will explore the concepts of giftedness, gifted students, their mental health and positive school climate. Subsequently, we will research giftedness in the context of mental health and school climate.

1.1 Giftedness

Giftedness is a biologically given characteristic, primarily denoting a label for a high intelligence level resulting from a precocious and accelerated combination of brain functions, including the senses, emotions, cognition, and intuition. It is also secondarily manifested in an accelerated thinking process, more complex problem identification and problem solving, and unusual and divergent abstract thinking (Clark, 2012).

Winnerová (1996) lists several types of giftedness: global giftedness, mathematical-linguistic giftedness, logical-mathematical giftedness, and verbal-linguistic giftedness. Dočkal and Duchovičová (2017) list the following types of giftedness: giftedness for sport and movement, artistic giftedness, rational (intellectual and academic giftedness), practical giftedness, creative giftedness, and general giftedness.

Our research focuses on participants with general intellectual giftedness. Intellectual giftedness is most commonly understood as highly above-average general intellectual ability relative to the population (Fábik, 2019). We can define an intellectually gifted child as a child with accelerated cognitive development. With sufficient motivation, creativity and adequate environmental stimulation, gifted children perform exceptionally in one or more intellectual activities compared to peers. It does not always have to be manifested by above-average performance at school. Typical characteristics of intellectually gifted children include developmental advantage over peers in one or more cognitive domains, early reading, and the emergence of mathematical abilities in preschool. They also have good memory, speed and ease of learning, intellectual curiosity, activity and motivation. These children enjoy discovering new things and asking unusual questions. They have a wide range of interests and vast vocabulary. Gifted children need to invent new things; they are unconventional, critical of authority, and have a highly average performance on psychological tests. Accompanying signs of high intellectual giftedness are a lower need for sleep, hyperactivity and low self-esteem. These children have reduced social adaptation, emotional problems, and negativism. They are unwilling to submit to external authority and to accept defeat. They are perfectionists with high demands on themselves and the environment (MŠ SR, 2008).

1.2 A brief history of giftedness

The study of giftedness came to the fore in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Until this period, vague philosophical reflections on different forms of thought, presented by Greek thinkers such as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, were prevalent. In the late 19th

century, the psychiatrist Lombroso advocated the genetic nature of the gifted. The natural scientist Galton made a breakthrough in giftedness research. He studied genes and noted that some families are biologically better equipped, concluding that intelligence is a set of abilities that are passed down from generation to generation. The first intelligence tests were created by psychologist Binet in collaboration with Simon, focusing on the prerequisite of children's mastery of compulsory schooling. The psychologist Terman examined thousands of children, selected about 1500 children with IQs above 140 and followed them until his death. Thanks to him, a genius began to be identified with high IQ. Subsequently, experts such as Gardner, Cattell, Guilford, and others devoted their research to high intelligence and giftedness.

The first elementary school for gifted students opened in New York City in 1940. In the 1970s, the first professional organizations to support the gifted, such as the National Association for Gifted Children, began to emerge. Magazines such as Gifted International, Gifted Child Today, Gifted Child Quarterly were published. New institutions such as the National Professional Training Institute guided teachers and parents. The issue reached a milestone in 1985 when the World for Gifted and Talented Children Congress organised the first World Congress on Giftedness in Hamburg. Thanks to this congress, the topic spread worldwide (Fábik, 2019).

Nowadays, giftedness is a subject of interest for psychologists, educators, and experts from various disciplines, such as sociologists, physiologists, biologists, and others (Fábik, 2019).

1.3 Gifted pupils in schools

A gifted pupil is further specified in a document issued by the Ministry of Education (2008), which states that a gifted pupil is a child whose IQ is above 130, provided that the level of creativity is at least in the average range. The gifted child is also the child whose level of creativity falls in the range of the top 2% of the population, provided that the intellectual ability reaches an IQ above 120. In assessing the intellectual aptitude of preschool children, there is a requirement that their mental age, as measured by a test of non-verbal intelligence, must be at least 7 years and 10 months when entering into the first year of primary school. At school age, pupils are intellectually gifted if they perform exceptionally well in learning, with an intellectual ability level falling in the IQ range above 120 and a creativity level at least in the average range. The level of sociability of children identified as gifted must not be significantly below average. The assessment also includes their attention, persistence and motivation.

School manifestations of gifted children are the following: They adapt relatively well in a new learning environment and prefer individual learning to group learning. They seek out and work with new information independently, and with interest. Their knowledge exceeds the required scope and depth of the curriculum. Gifted pupils like to experiment and prefer problem-based tasks. They work at their own pace, and strive for perfect completion of the task. The gifted often argue with teachers (Hříbková, 2009). Lazníbatová (2012a) mentions these characteristics: gifted pupils ask many questions and have unusual ideas and ways of solving problems. They draw conclusions independently; initiate projects; create new solutions, and enjoy intellectual activity.

Gifted children's cognitive characteristics include using encyclopaedic resources and modern technologies. They are interested in cause-and-effect relationships, and they recognise relationships between phenomena and identify inconsistencies. These children are sensitive to the existence of problems; they can generalise correctly and quickly, and they have developed critical thinking, manifested by a tendency to doubt. The gifted children have polemic and increased self-criticism and a rich

vocabulary; they use abstract concepts, are guided by their own criteria when evaluating their own and other's results, and have a more prolonged concentration of attention. The creative characteristics of gifted pupils include that they easily develop imagination and phantasy and are intellectually playful and curious. These children can absorb new information and like to learn. They are flexible in thinking, and their ways of solving problems and tasks are original. Regarding emotional characteristics, the gifted children have a higher need for emotional support and emotional acceptance. They are sensitive and they appear less emotionally mature than their peers. These children are impulsive and expressive when defending their views, and are attracted to the aesthetic side of things. Social characteristics include the need for freedom, liberty, and activity. The gifted children attract attention from the environment, and they usually have an extreme position in a group of peers. They have either high or, on the contrary, very low social skills. These children boldly present their opinions and resolutely defend them within the group. They seek out older children for communication and are socially naïve and gullible. Some gifted children have problems with self-confidence and inadequate self-image formation (Hříbková, 2009).

Qualities such as willpower, ambition, and appropriate social conditions and opportunities are necessary for innate abilities to translate into performance (Szobiová, 2004).

1.4 Mental health and positive school climate

Support for gifted pupils is essential to realising giftedness. The school environment, a positive school climate as well as a positive classroom atmosphere play crucial roles in supporting the development of giftedness, because it impacts the good mental health of gifted children. Unilateral support oriented only on the cognitive side insufficiently develops the social and emotional dimension of the gifted child (Dočkal, Duchovičová, 2017).

School climate is the quality of the school environment related to the attitudes and behaviours of members of different groups (Wood, Peterson, 2018). More comprehensively, school climate is the culture of a school with its values, norms, and beliefs. More thoroughly, it is the school's goals and values, the classroom rules, the pupil's psychological state, their mental health and other factors. We also include the culture of success, the teaching process and the social climate (Pílech, 2003, in Petlák, 2006).

Průcha, Mareš and Walterová (2009) state that school climate is a social-psychological variable that expresses the quality of interpersonal relationships and social processes functioning in a given school as evaluated, perceived and experienced by teachers, pupils and school staff.

Nowadays, there is an evident increase in aggression, violence, bullying, cyberbullying and suicidal attempts. There has also been an increase in substance and non-substance addictions, loss of life involvement, apathy, resignation, demotivation, anxiety and depression. Many children lack social and emotional competencies for everyday functioning. For these reasons, building a positive school climate is highly crucial.

A positive school climate is based on Martin Seligman's positive psychology concept. From the pupil's point of view, a positive school climate is a climate where stressful situations do not occur, and pupils have the opportunity for their own self-fulfillment. Children feel their teachers care about their development. They feel accepted, and teachers treat them individually and fairly. The pupils know what teachers expect of them and have no fear of unpredictable demands. A school climate is a variable that educational psychology should prioritise. It is related to classroom climate, which depends on communication and teaching practices. For this reason, teachers must communicate positively with students, discuss different topics, evaluate objectively, and respect each other. Pupils can participate in the school's and classroom's assessment processes.

Support and security have a motivating effect (Petlák, 2006). School climate affects school performance. A negative school climate impacts the underperformance of gifted pupils. A positive school climate influences pupils' overall quality of life and mental health.

The World Health Organization (WHO, 2001) defines mental health as a state of physical and mental well-being in which a person is aware of his or her abilities, can cope with the usual stress of life, and can work productively and successfully.

Positive psychology plays a vital role in studying mental health. It deals with the following concepts: mental health, joy, and mental freshness, hope, enthusiasm, gratitude, and love (Park, Peterson, Seligman, 2004).

Positive psychology frequently discusses the topic of social-emotional health, a synonym for mental health. Social-emotional health is a state of subjective well-being and impacts a person's optimal functioning in life (Thompson, 1994). Social-emotional health is influenced by genetic disposition, temperament, and health problems, parenting style, environmental risks (Calkins, 2004), school environment and teacher personality. Social and emotional health are interrelated and interact with each other.

Covitality is a synonymous term for social-emotional health, a term introduced by Furlong in 2013. The term implies the presence of positive traits. The harmonious progression of the different dimensions of covitality is a prerequisite for satisfactory physical and psychological health (Furlong et al., 2014). According to Furlong (2014), children's and adolescent's strengths and positive characteristics include gratitude, optimism, enthusiasm, and excitement, which are also part of covitality. Gratitude is the ability to appreciate a gift or help from another person. It is also the power to realise the good things in life, and to be grateful for them. It is essential to foster this focal trait in pupils in the school environment. Optimism represents a general orientation towards the future with an expectation of a positive outcome, contributing to well-being. In the school environment, enthusiasm is an energy in pupil's and teacher's approach to life. Perseverance is a quality we characterise as stamina and passion for achieving a goal. Pupil's strong points help them succeed in school (Furlong et al., 2013).

Positive psychology has also been introduced into schools to promote pupil's mental health. The first phase emphasised the identification and measurement of student strengths. The second phase consisted of the developing and testing of interventions that focused on developing identified strong points. Finally, the third phase centered on developing diagnostic tools and intervention programmes for creating a positive school environment (Renshaw et al., 2009).

1.5 Research aim and research questions

Our quantitative research aimed to investigate the relationship between the social-emotional health of gifted pupils and the school climate in a school for gifted pupils. We also explored the relationship between the domains of Social-Emotional Health Survey (SEHS-S) and Georgia School Climate Survey (GSCS) dimensions. For this reason, it is a quantitative and exploratory research.

We think that a positive and supportive school climate improves mental/social-emotional health of gifted pupils.

Based on the literature reviewed, we set the following research questions:

Is there a relationship between the social-emotional health of gifted pupils and school climate in the school for gifted children? Are there relationships between the particular domains/dimensions in the Social-Emotional Health Survey and Georgia School Survey?

2 Methodology

The following section provides information about the research population and data collection methods.

2.1 Research population

The research population consisted of 71 pupils from a school for gifted children. The average age of the participants was 12.59 years. The most frequently occurring value concerning age was 12 years, with the most participants at this age. The minimum age was 11 and the maximum age was 15 years. The median age was 13 years. The selection of the research population was intentional.

2.2 Research method

The Social-Emotional Health Survey, which includes social and emotional skills, is used to measure covitality. In our research, we used a version of the questionnaire for older school age (from grade 6 in primary school to grade 4 in secondary school) called Social-Emotional Health Survey – Secondary SEHS-S (Furlong et al., 2014).

The covitality index has four domains, and each domain has three indicators:

- emotional competence (emotion regulation, self-control, empathy) (ECO);
- engagement in everyday life (optimism, enthusiasm, gratitude) (ENL);
- self-belief (self-awareness, self-efficacy, perseverance) (BIS);
- belief in others (family support, school support, peer support) (BIO) (Social-Emotional Health Survey, SEHS, Furlong et al., 2014).

The Social-Emotional Health Survey provides insight into children's psychological schemas, focusing on the optimal development of their personalities. It shows the areas of mental health and social-emotional competencies where the children are strong or have reserves, weaknesses, or shortcomings (Gajdošová et al., 2018).

Furlong (2016) reports that on a relevant school population of 14 171 secondary-school students in California, USA, by measuring the internal consistency of the responses obtained, they found a Cronbach's alpha reliability of 0.95 for the all racial groups of the school population.

We used the Georgia School Climate Survey (GSCS) to examine school climate, which has the following dimensions:

- relationships at school,
- pupil's character and their communication (CHA),
- school environment (PRŠ),
- adult social support (SOD),
- peer social support (SOR),
- cultural acceptance (KUL),
- order and discipline (PAD)
- safety (BEZ).

There is also the dimension mental health, but we did not include it in the research because it studies roughly the same thing as the social-emotional health questionnaire.

La Salle and Meyers (2014) validated the Georgia School Climate Survey questionnaire as part of a research project.

3 Results

To investigate the relationship between the social-emotional health of gifted pupils and school climate, as well as relationships between the domains and dimensions of the two questionnaires, the Social-Emotional Health Survey (SEHS-S) and the Georgia School Climate Survey (GSCS), we used

Spearman's correlation, a non-parametric test, given that the data did not have a normal distribution.

Table 1 Correlations between domains and dimensions of social-emotional health and school climate

		CHA	PRŠ	SOD	SOR	KUL	PAD	BEZ	GSCS TOTAL
BIS	rs	.300*	.370**	.297*	.430**	.354**	0,181	-0,015	.484**
	p	0,011	0,002	0,012	0,000	0,002	0,131	0,903	0,000
BIO	rs	0,231	.458**	.377**	.397**	.334**	.445**	0,024	.508**
	p	0,053	0,000	0,001	0,001	0,004	0,000	0,842	0,000
ECO	rs	.374**	0,183	0,233	.378**	.343**	.269*	-0,153	.344**
	p	0,001	0,127	0,051	0,001	0,003	0,024	0,202	0,003
ENL	rs	.297*	0,217	0,111	.427**	.288*	.344**	-0,006	.450**
	p	0,012	0,070	0,355	0,000	0,015	0,003	0,962	0,000
SEHS TOTAL	rs	.409**	.370**	.307**	.527**	.433**	.411**	-0,026	.585**
	p	0,000	0,001	0,009	0,000	0,000	0,000	0,828	0,000

Explanatory notes:

rs=Spearman's correlation coefficient, i. e. the higher the value, the stronger the correlation between the dimensions. The coefficient also indicates substantive significance.

p=p-value: it is statistical significance, and if $p < 0.05$, then we talk about statistical significance.

The results show a strong positive correlation (0.585) between social-emotional health and school climate.

The most significant correlations are between the domains/dimensions self-belief (BIS) and peer support (SOR) ($rs=0.430$, $p=0.000$); belief in others (BIO) and school environment (PRŠ) ($rs=0.458$, $p=0.000$); belief in others (BIO) and order and discipline ($rs=0.455$, $p=0.000$); and life engagement (ENL) and peer social support (SOR) ($rs=0.427$, $p=0.000$). These are moderately strong correlations.

The least significant correlations are between the domains/dimensions of self-belief (BIS) and safety (BEZ) ($rs=0.015$); belief in others (BIO) and safety (BEZ) ($rs=0.024$); life engagement (ENL) and safety (BEZ) ($rs=0.0006$).

4 Discussion

Our research aimed to investigate the relationship between the social-emotional health of the gifted pupils and the school climate in a school for gifted children. We also researched relationships between the domains/dimensions of the Social-Emotional Health Survey (SEHS-S) and the Georgia School Climate Survey (GSCS).

4.1 Interpretation of the results

With the first research question, we wanted to investigate the relationship between the social-emotional health of the gifted pupils and the school climate. We found out a strong correlation between these two investigated constructs. It is possible to improve the social-emotional health of pupils by improving the school climate.

Gajdošová et al. (2018) examined the relationship between social-emotional health and experience of happiness. They found a strong positive correlation. The experience of happiness influences the level of social-emotional health positively.

In our research, we found moderately strong relationships/correlations in the Social-Emotional Health Survey and the Georgia School Climate Surveys between the domains/dimensions of self-belief (BIS) and peer support (SOR); belief in others (BIO) and school environment (PRŠ). Belief in others (BIO) and order and discipline (PAD); life engagement (ENL) and peer social support (SOR) also correlated positively.

We assume that when pupils perceive support from peers, it is related to their self-belief, which may be higher and more profound. An appropriate and positive school environment is related to belief in others. Teachers and school staff are leading creators of a positive school climate which influences good mental health of pupils. Belief in others is also related to order and discipline. Discipline is desirable to some extent. Pupils should respect the boundaries. Peers social support relates to a pupil's life engagement, such as optimism, enthusiasm, gratitude. Fostering good relationships between pupils, their peers, and teachers is vital. We found weak correlations between the domains/dimensions of safety and self-belief; safety and belief in others; safety and life engagement. These domains/dimensions are not significantly related and do not influence each other.

The overall school climate level is in the positive perception of school climate range ($M=2.72$), with the highest level reached by the grade 2 and the lowest level reached by the grade 4. We can attribute this result to the challenging developmental stage when children perceive everything more critically. Boys perceive the school climate more negatively than girls. The highest value in the Social-Emotional Health Survey reached the domain belief in others (BIO) and the lowest level reached the domain life engagement (ENL), which may also be related to the critical developmental stage. The character and communication (CHA) with other domains was the highest scoring dimension in the Georgia School Climate Survey. The safety (BEZ) dimension was the lowest scoring dimension. We found the pupils have friends at school who can help them when they need it.

Gajdošová and Majerčáková Albertová (2018) validated the Georgia School Climate Survey (GSCS) in Slovakia. They surveyed four elementary schools, and 832 students participated in the research. Pupils perceived the school climate positively.

Szobiová and Polák (2019) researched on school climate in inclusive schools. The sample consisted of 136 primary school pupils in Slovakia. Pupils from lower grades rated the school climate the lowest. Perceptions of school climate became more positive with increasing age.

Peterson and Ray (2006) researched bullying in a school for gifted children in grade 8. The authors found through qualitative analysis that victims of bullying did not share their problem with others. However, high intelligence helped them understand why they were bullied. It is crucial to create social contacts so gifted pupils can experience well-being and feel safe at school. Building a positive school climate is also essential.

The school represents an important social environment, influences the children's self-concept, self-image formation, and impacts their healthy development. Ignat (2011) emphasises the role of school counsellors in schools for gifted children. They co-create a positive school climate. Kumar, Phil and Vijay (2013) argue that school climate impacts the achievement and the use of the potential of gifted children.

5 Conclusion

We want to undertake further research in other schools for gifted children to provide them with the results. The research results would be interesting to these schools, as they would allow them to improve the conditions for the education of gifted pupils and enhance their well-being and mental/social-emotional health.

There is a lack of research on giftedness, and it seems vital to realise research on giftedness and gifted children. New and up-to-date research will contribute to better support for the gifted population in schools.

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