

Psychological Problems Faced by Teachers with Regard to the Unified State Exam in the Context of an Optimistic Attributional Style

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Abstract: The study presents the results of a study concerning the attitude of teachers to the Unified State Exam (EGE). The goal achieved in the process of this study is to analyse the psychological problems of teachers regarding the unified state exam in the context of the dominant attributional style. Using the theoretical framework, the author gives an explanation of socio-psychological problems experienced by teachers with regard to his or her social status as a provider of educational services as well as to a completely new system of conducting the EGE at school. An optimistic attributional style is defined as a style having a positive socio-psychological influence on the EGE process and preferable for a teacher. The diagnostic tools employed are methods and techniques that help to resolve difficult situations. Also the study gives an overview of the content analysis of essays which demonstrates that almost all teachers use verbs with negative connotations in their essays about the EGE. With the help of the Rosenzweig picture frustration test a high degree of frustration among subjects is shown and the dominant character of attributional styles different from optimism is defined. To measure a degree of optimism and pessimism the researcher uses the Russian version of the Success and Failure Explanatory Style Questionnaire (SFESQ) for adults, a version of the Attributional Style Questionnaire (ASQ) developed by T. Gordeeva, E. Osin and V. Shevyakhova. Finally, the study proves an inverse correlation between frustration and optimism as an attributional style.

Key words: Teachers, attributional style, EGE, attitude, (ASQ), (SFESQ)

INTRODUCTION

Recently general education in our country has undergone substantial changes. Their socio-psychological consequences have an immense impact on personal development in an educational environment but they have not been studied closely enough.

The implementation of the state final certification (GIA) and the unified state exam (EGE) has become an important psychological factor that has caused a wide range of issues in different social groups: senior pupils, their parents and school teachers (in their case socio-professional, personal and professional problems). The personal and professional characteristics of teachers have an impact on schoolchildren's academic progress and EGE results. When preparing schoolchildren for the EGE, teachers face a variety of psychological issues and information problems.

The reputation of education as a "sphere of educational services" and the low social status of

teachers, the lack of clarity regarding their role as professional education specialists, as well as the implementation of fundamental innovations in their professional activity—all these things influence the attitude of teachers to their profession and its most intense aspects such as the unified exams.

The way a teacher as a member of a socio-professional group feels about the EGE influences his or her productivity and consequently, the social situations and academic progress of pupils. The ability to resolve issues regarding the organisation of educational process is connected with certain personal qualities.

According to Dodge intent attributions of a child are characterised by a certain dynamics: with age the link between intent and positive or negative attributions becomes more ambiguous and cognitively complex (Dodge, 2006). Consequently, schoolchildren have an ability to perceive adequately their teacher's behaviour and attributions regarding their successful or not successful performance in an exam. To some extent, optimistic estimations and positive attitude of teachers to

current changes in education, exams and their results are conveyed to pupils influencing their adaptation to this process and its outcome.

When discussing the EGE, Chibisova uses the term “mythology” which denotes prejudices, beliefs and the overall negative attitude of schoolchildren, their parents and teachers towards this innovation. This phenomenon can be explained by the absence of comprehensive information about the purpose and procedure of the EGE as well as by the necessity to adapt to a new format of assessment which naturally causes anxiety and negative reactions (Chibisova, 2009). The optimal method of forming an objective mindset concerning the EGE and eliminating “mythological” prejudices is a discussion where schoolchildren can share their opinion about the exam.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

- To analyse the outcome of an attitude towards the EGE using the content analysis of essays on the subject “What the EGE means to me”
- To define the degree of frustration among teachers using the Rosenzweig picture frustration test
- To define the degree of optimism among teachers using the Success and Failure Explanatory Style Questionnaire (SFESQ) for adults
- To define the correlation between the studied characteristics using Spearman’s rank correlation coefficient

The subjects of the study are Maths teachers (N = 26) from the primorsky Region who have an experience of dealing with the EGE and have completed the EGE qualification course for teachers during school holidays. Their attitude to the EGE was defined on the basis of the content analysis of essays on the corresponding subject.

The degree of frustration was assessed with the help of the Rosenzweig picture frustration test. The predictor of frustration chosen is a percent value of Obstacle Dominance (OD) responses as part (%) of the Group Conformity Rating (GCR) indicating social adaptation. If the score of OD responses is above the average (norm) value of 20% it indicates a high degree of frustration “overload” (Rosenzweig, 1950). If it is below the norm frustration is absent.

The degree of optimism and pessimism was measured by the Success and Failure Explanatory Style Questionnaire (SFESQ) for adults, a version of the Attributional Style Questionnaire (ASQ) developed by

Russian scientists (Gordeeva and Osin, 2007). The questionnaire includes a set of 24 positive and negative situations from different spheres of human life. Subjects have to imagine that each situation has occurred to them and to explain the causes of their success or failure. Then they have to assess these causes using three parameters of attributional style which are permanence (stability) breadth (globality) and controllability (internality). So the questionnaire comprises 48 situations. Each event is rated on two out of three parameters using a response scale and characterised either as positive or negative. Also, all the situations concern either achievements, mainly in professional life or interpersonal relations, so they also can be divided into two groups on the basis of this parameter.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In order to define teacher’s attitude towards the EGE on the basis of content analysis, we considered the syntactic structure of essays as a hierarchy of predicates formed by different linguistic means. According to Zhinkin (1982), those predicates that convey the main idea and play the central role in a text usually act as verb forms (Zhinkin, 1982). Verbs give the subjects of an experiment an opportunity to discuss a certain topic using the words of action and personal engagement.

The data presented above Table 1 demonstrate the negative attitude to the EGE among the absolute majority of Maths teachers who were involved in the exam process which decrease statistical significance in the case of a correlation study.

Since, the implementation of the EGE and the preparation for this exam have given rise to issues similar to those of overcoming obstacles in this test we are particularly interested in the OD results (Obstacle Dominance responses). Only in the case of 5 out of 26 subjects (19%) the score of OD responses was < 20% (Rosenzweig, 1950). These data might be interpreted in the following way: even outside school hours the subjects of the study, i.e., teachers involved in the EGE process, experience a frustration “overload” in >80% of situations. We also compared the results of this test with the degree of optimism among teachers.

In the group of people under study there is only one teacher (No. 11) with a high degree of optimism Table 2.

Table 1: The ratio of verbs with positive connotations

Total number of verbs in words	Verbs with positive connotations		Verbs with negative connotations	
	Words	Percentage	Words	Percentage
67	12	17.91	55	82.09

Table 2: The ratio of the attributional style "Optimism" to OD response data

Optimism	OD responses (%)	Subject No.	Optimism	OD responses
161	41.67	14	170	25.00
-	45.83	15	176	20.83
-	29.17	16	171	37.50
-	25.00	17	187	20.83
-	25.00	18	165	20.83
171	16.67	19	-	29.17
-	41.67	20	173	29.17
183	25.00	21	-	29.17
-	16.67	22	-	33.33
172	16.67	23	175	12.50
191	16.67	24	-	29.17
-	45.83	25	157	33.33
178	25.00	26	159	50.00

Having compared the results of the Rosenzweig test and the SFESQ for adults we have drawn the following conclusion: the combination of "low degree of optimism-high degree of OD responses" occurs in the 20% of cases, the combination "middle degree of optimism-low/high degree of OD responses" takes place in the 20% of cases and the combination "high degree of optimism-low/high degree of OD responses" also happens in the 20% of cases. So, the more optimistic a teacher is, the less often he or she "gets stuck" facing an obstacle, i.e., a frustrating situation. The opposite is also true: pessimists are more prone to concentrate on obstacles. Taking into consideration the fact that teachers are often subject to frustrating situations in the educational process, it is possible to conclude that an optimistic attributional style helps them to overcome difficulties without "getting stuck" and to resolve issues effectively.

In order to measure dependence between optimism and the personal characteristics considered in this study, we used Spearman's rank correlation coefficient. The correlation coefficient for the attributional style "optimism" and the total number of OD responses (calculated on the basis of the Rosenzweig test) amounted to -0.64, a statistically significant figure. This means that a high degree of frustration among teachers and an optimistic attributional style have an inverse correlation. Optimistic teachers are not likely to be frustrated and vice versa-a teacher's frustration affects an optimistic attributional style.

CONCLUSION

The study, of an attitude towards the EGE by means of the content analysis of essays on the subject "What the EGE means to me" has shown an absolute majority of negative answers that are formed by verbs with negative connotations. The analysis of the degree of frustration among teachers with the help of the Rosenzweig picture frustration test has demonstrated that a large number of people (19 out of 26 subjects) feel frustrated.

Also, the degree of optimism among teachers is not very high. Only one out of 26 people has a high degree of optimistic attribution. The analysis of the correlation between the characteristics under study using spearman's rank correlation coefficient has demonstrated an inverse correlation between the indicators of optimism and frustration. When considering optimism as a personal and professional quality of a teacher, it is worth mentioning its positive influence on the educational process and people's attitude towards the EGE. The impact of pessimistic teachers on pupils during the preparation for the exam might be aggravated by depression. Optimistic teachers as an example of positive thinking can become an example of optimistic attribution thereby supporting his or her pupils. In case of mistakes optimistic teachers empathise with children, help them to cope with their failure and encourage them to make further efforts to achieve their goals.

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