



UNIVERSITATEA BABEŞ-BOLYAI
BABEŞ-BOLYAI TUDOMÁNYEGYETEM
BABEŞ-BOLYAI UNIVERSITÁT
BABEŞ-BOLYAI UNIVERSITY
TRADITIO ET EXCELLENTIA

JOURNAL OF RESEARCH IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Volume VIII Issue 2



Centrul Qualitas
Qualitas Központ
Qualitas Zentrum
Qualitas Centre

Journal of Research in Higher Education

- **Vol. VIII, No. 2, 2024**

Published twice yearly by
© Qualitas Centre, Babeş-Bolyai University

ISSN 2559 - 6624
ISSN-L 2559 - 6624

<https://doi.org/10.24193/JRHE.2024.2>

Edited by: Qualitas Centre, Babeş-Bolyai University

Editor-in-Chief

Professor Ioana Bican, Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania

Editorial Board

Professor Dan Chiribucă, Babeş-Bolyai University, Romania

Professor Daniela Cojocaru, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iaşi, Romania

Professor Daniel David, University Babeş-Bolyai, Romania

Professor Arleen Ionescu, Shanghai Jiao Tong University, China

Associate Professor Sándor Lénárd, Eötvös Loránd University, Hungary

Professor Elena Madrussan, University of Torino, Italy

Professor Markó Bálint, University Babeş-Bolyai, Romania

Professor Adrian Opre, Babeş-Bolyai University, Romania

Lecturer Dana Opre, Babeş-Bolyai University, Romania

Professor Liviu Papadima, University of Bucharest, Romania

Professor Marian Preda, University of Bucharest, Romania

Professor Ian McNay, University of Greenwich, United Kingdom

Associate Professor Irina Pop Păcurar, Babeş-Bolyai University, Romania

Professor Horaţiu Rusu, Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Romania

Professor Marcela Sălăgean, Babeş-Bolyai University, Romania

Associate Professor Pedro Teixeira, University of Porto, Portugal

Professor Robert Toutkoushian, University of Georgia, Athens, USA

Associate Professor Vilmos Vass, Budapest Metropolitan University, Hungary

Professor Valér Veres, Babeş-Bolyai University, Romania

Associate Professor William Yat Wai Lo, Hong Kong Institute of Education,
China

Executive Editors

dr. Ana Tamás

drd. Sebastian Pavalache

Borbála Szász

© Cover design

Simona Mălăescu

All material copyright ©2024 by the Qualitas Centre, Babeş-Bolyai University.

Reproduction or use without written permission is prohibited.

e-mail: journal.rehe@ubbcluj.ro

<http://jrehe.reviste.ubbcluj.ro/>

Contents

Lennita Oliviera Ruggi & Nata Duvvury	<i>Grassroots Key Performance Indicators: A Contribution to the Monitoring and Evaluation of Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Initiatives in Higher Education</i>	5
Abeni El-Amin	<i>Performative to Transformative: Implementing Authentic Diversity and Inclusion Training in Higher Education</i>	23
Malcolm J. Bond & Sandra E. Carr & Kirsty N. Prior & Linda K. Frost & Ruth M. Sladek	<i>Anticipatory Homesickness, Resilience, and Psychological Distress among Commencing Medical Students</i>	39
Anida Vrcić Amar & Atif Avdović & Milena Belić & Denis Demirović	<i>Potential Factors That Can Model the Attitude Towards Psychotherapy Among Students - An Analysis of a University in Serbia</i>	55
Crina Tomoiagă & Leyla Safta-Zecheria	<i>Internalizing Unequal Access to Higher Education in High School Students' Perspectives on Studying for the Baccalaureate Examination in a City in Northwest Romania</i>	74

***Grassroots Key Performance Indicators: A Contribution to the
Monitoring and Evaluation of Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion
(EDI) Initiatives in Higher Education***

Lennita Oliviera Ruggi

*Lecturer, Department of Theory and Fundamentals of Education, Federal University of Paraná,
Brazil, email address: lennita@ufpr.br*

Nata Duvvury

*Senior Lecturer, Director of Centre for Global Women's Studies, School of Political Science,
University of Galway, Ireland, email address: nata.duvvury@universityofgalway.ie*

Abstract: This article summarises a frame of grassroots Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that centres on everyday transformation, displacing the opportunistic use of equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) initiatives as marketing tools. It is based on ethnographic research conducted at the University of Galway (Ireland) from 2018 to 2021. Instead of focusing on the development of KPIs within the policy field or by a panel of experts, the paper fleshes out the collective attempts of rank-and-file staff to judge if, how, and to what extent EDI initiatives have changed the university. Evidence shows that several indicators are effective and already operational amongst staff. Grassroots KPIs serve a dual function: assessing change and expanding EDI goals.

Keywords: Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of Equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI), grassroots KPIs (key performance indicators), Irish higher education.

Introduction

Almost a century has passed since Virginia Woolf's essay *A Room of One's Own* (1929) made the critical connection between the closed gates of the elite university of "Oxbridge" and women's subordination within political, familial and intellectual spheres of life. Since then, the enormous changes galvanised by feminist movements have deeply altered the scenario prevailing within institutions of higher education (HEIs), albeit not enough to be able to claim that we have attained gender equality in teaching and research or that HEIs can be taken as role model institutions for the promotion of gender equality (O'Connor et al., 2015; Pereira, 2017).

There is today a considerable corpus of research shedding light on the gendered dimensions of processes of knowledge production and distribution, opportunity structures and social and pedagogical relations within HEIs (Lynch, 2010; Coate and Howson, 2014). Feminist research has constructed the understanding that gender is an unescapable and structuring aspect of institutionality and interpersonal relations within universities, and one whose epistemological impact cannot be ignored (O'Keefe and Courtois, 2019; Ivancheva et al., 2019; Lund, 2020).

Awareness of the importance of gender equality within HEIs has gained increasing momentum in many parts of the world, including the European Union. In the Republic of Ireland, the national gender equality policy for higher education, first implemented in 2016, represents a crucial turning point in the promotion of change and offers a particularly fruitful research locus for examining how gender has been addressed by HEIs (O'Connor and Irvine, 2021; Hodgins et al., 2022).

While the current moment may be promising for Irish universities, it is vital to keep in mind the paradoxes and complications of processes of change. As Ahmed (2012) has shown, there is a gap between a professed commitment to change and real change within HEIs. One of the ways to bridge this gap is through monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems. M&E work must be ingrained in the action plans and ongoing equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) efforts, for it is decisive to sustain momentum for transformation (Duvvury, 2011).

To progress in this regard, it is necessary to define goals for equality, diversity and inclusion in HEIs and create appropriate change indicators. A robust M&E system must be premised on the understanding that EDI is not limited to its quantitative

measurement, that several forms of social inequality (race/ethnicity, gender, class, nationality, disability) intersect, and that multiple and diverse actions at all institutional levels are required, which makes the construction of M&E indicators a challenging task.

M&E systems for EDI need to be aware that institutional resistance is often a significant issue in implementing change, and this resistance "reflects the enactment of hidden or stealth power" (Hodgins and O'Connor, 2021, 1). In other words, opposition to equality is often warranted by people in positions of power and privilege (Hodgins, 2021). Thus, in the context of HEIs, senior management ought to be assessed by M&E efforts.

In Ireland, the Irish Higher Education Authority (HEA) is developing key performance indicators (KPIs) for EDI (HEA, 2018; Huck et al., 2020). Such KPIs are primarily concerned with comparisons between institutions and with assessing the success of the national gender equality action plan. Following the European model, most HEA indicators focus on the increase in the number of women in senior positions (Ruggi and Duvvury, 2023). They are tailored to grasp EDI issues consolidated in the policy but do not expand the EDI agenda or deepen its remit. Furthermore, the national KPIs are part of the EDI expert realm, requiring central data collection, specific policy knowledge, and conceptual know-how. They do not necessarily communicate with or empower the part of the academic community committed to change but who are not EDI practitioners, i.e., feminists.

Instead of centring on the development of KPIs within the policy field, this paper flashes out the collective attempts of rank-and-file staff¹ to judge if EDI initiatives have transformed the university. In this sense, our approach addresses the need to understand the constitutive role of context in policy practice (Ní Laoire et al., 2021, 579).

The article is organised into the following four sections. The next one is dedicated to the literature on KPIs in HE. The second presents the research context and methodology. The third considers the empirical data and offers a summary of grassroots KPIs for EDI synthesised from ethnographic interactions. The final section concludes the paper.

¹ In this text, the term 'staff' refers to academic, administrative, technical, and ancillary staff in permanent or precarious contracts, directly employed or hired by outsourced third companies. From now on, all mentions to 'staff' concerns rank-and-file, that is, employees who are not senior managers.

Key-performance indicators in HEIs

The use of KPIs in higher education is deeply intermingled with neoliberal governance reforms that concentrate decision-making power in senior managers' hands. It is not surprising, thus, that for some authors, "one of the main strategic tasks of the university administration is to draw up Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and to rate academic staff on their bases" (Safonov et al., 2022, 153). In such a view, KPIs are taken as a tool management uses to control staff. However, KPIs can be repurposed to serve staff's examination of senior management's performance. Indeed, as indicated by the literature, "[t]he main advantage of KPIs is their versatility" (Safonov et al., 2022, 155).

Although controversial, KPIs have become 'indispensable' in HEIs (Leiber, 2019, 77-78). One of their primary functions is to link the everyday functioning of HEIs with the strategic goals (Masron et al., 2012, 497; Broshkov et al., 2020, 288; Safonov et al., 2022, 153). This is done by creating a record system to produce and analyse institutional data as part of decision-making. For this to work, "[t]he development of appropriate indicators is the most important part because meaningful results can be generated from using the right measuring tools" (Kim et al., 2018, 315). Several authors agree that "developing KPIs is a non-trivial task [and] that [it] requires a deep understanding of the business or operation" (Collins et al., 2020, 196; Leiber, 2019).

Broshkov et al. (2020, 289) highlight several indispensable principles for developing KPIs for HEIs: relevance to institutional goals, measurability and transparency, manageability, specificity, time-reference, and achievability. One of the benefits of KPIs is the increased transparency of information (Broshkov et al., 2020, 290) and the "creation of an effective teamwork and collaborations between all the participants of the educational process" (Safonov et al., 2022, 160). Indeed, KPIs help draw and implement collective "visions of the future" (Masron et al., 2012, 497), for their primary function is to "track progress towards the strategic goal" (Safonov et al., 2022, 153).

In summary, KPIs are one of the ways to dispute power and influence the future of HEIs. Since KPIs are premised on institutional transformation, they are helpful for EDI efforts. An example of EDI-focused KPIs for higher education is given in Kayyaly (2022). This approach stresses the benefits of increasing diverse representation by recruiting students and staff from underrepresented groups, developing an inclusive curriculum,

and creating a safe and welcoming campus environment. Complementary to Kayyaly's, our proposal focuses on EDI actions targeted at decision-making processes, organisational transformation, and employment conditions.

Context and methodology

The University of Galway (formerly known as National University of Ireland, Galway) is a public institution located in the West of Ireland that houses approximately 19,000 students and 2,300 direct employees. In 2014, the university became the stage of a national polemic related to the discrimination of women academics (Sheehy-Skeffington 2016; Quinlivan, 2017; Ruggi, 2023). This gender crisis resulted in the implementation of a Gender Equality Task Force² in 2015 and the creation of dedicated EDI management structures like a Vice-President for Equality and Diversity in 2016. Since then, several institutional policies, procedures, and practices have been assessed and transformed to prioritise EDI, with sustained academic attention focusing on their outcomes (Hodgins and O'Connor 2021; Hodgins et al., 2022). Because of the local crisis, the national policy for HE was also changed to prioritise gender equality (Walsh 2018; O'Connor and Irvine 2020; Ruggi and Duvvury, 2023). Such context makes the University of Galway a fruitful location to investigate EDI initiatives in higher education.

This paper is based on four years of ethnographic research conducted as part of a PhD project developed by one of the authors and supervised by the other. The participant observation was done from 2018 to 2022, including in-person and (due to Covid restrictions) remote interaction as well as extensive document analysis³. Institutional research sites included the office of the Vice-President for Equality and Diversity, an academic union, and four decision-making committees⁴. The ethnography included interviews with 43 employees, conducted between September 2020 and June 2021. The recruitment of interviewees aimed at ensuring the presence of diverse experiences and contrasting views⁵. A careful anonymity protocol was developed to ensure that

² One of the authors was a member of this task force.

³ A detailed account on the methodology can be found in Ruggi, 2022.

⁴ Namely, the Academic Council, the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee of the Governing Authority, the Equality Diversity and Inclusion Campus Committee, and the Athena SWAN Institutional Self-Assessment Team.

⁵ Details of the interviewees' profiles: 28 cis women, 13 cis men, and two non-binary persons. Most (31) declared to be heterosexual/straight; two declared to be homosexual/gay; one self-designated as queer, one

interviewees identities would not be disclosed. The data collection focused on EDI efforts to promote institutional transformation and the perception about the gender equality action plan.

The methodology was grounded on decolonial feminism, aspiring to co-theorise with research participants (Leyva et al. 2018). The principle of such an approach is to consider research participants not as bearers of *data*, but as bearers of *knowledge*. One of the insights resulting from co-theorising was the development of the notion of “grassroots KPIs”, consolidated from converging the work of EDI practitioners and the ongoing critical assessment of staff. The ethnography made it possible to identify the several indicators that staff use to monitor transformation. In this sense, the proposal of grassroots KPIs was an outcome of the research process, not being a part of the EDI effort observed during the ethnography. Participant observation revealed that the continuing effort to materialise change in HEIs requires pressuring powerful groups to relinquish power and privilege (Hodgins, 2021) while implementing equitable management (Vara-Horna et al., 2023).

Traditional methods to develop KPIs for HEIs draw from the input of a 'panel of experts' primarily composed of senior managers who are knowledgeable about the internal processes and institutional goals (Suryadi, 2007; Badawy et al., 2018; Varouchas et al., 2018; Kim et al. 2018; Bashir et al., 2023). In terms of EDI, however, evidence shows that senior managers are not prepared to identify or address crucial issues (Grummell et al., 2009; Treanor, 2015; O'Connor, 2020). For this reason, it is vital to design alternative approaches to foster EDI-targeted KPIs. One possibility is to adopt a bottom-up method built on how staff assess EDI initiatives. This article sustains that the systematisation of grassroots KPIs may be a tool in this direction. In the next section, we present ethnographic data to demonstrate this proposal.

as bisexual, and eight did not inform their sexual orientation. Most (37) did not disclose a disability, whilst six did. In classifying ethnicity, the 37 people self-declared as Irish, Caucasian, and any other white background; six interviewees self-described as black, brown, mixed, Traveller or from other non-white backgrounds. Considering the staff category, 18 were academic, 14 worked in professional services, seven were researchers, and four were outsourced; 29 were permanent employees, while 14 were temporary. In terms of institutional affiliation, nine interviewees were based in the College of Arts, Social Sciences & Celtic Studies; five in the College of Medicine, Nursing & Health Sciences; six in the College of Business, Public Policy & Law; six in the College of Science and Engineering; seven in Central Services and ten in Student's Services. Most interviewees (33) did not occupy leadership positions, seven were in middle management (heads of units), and three were in senior management (encompassing Presidents, Vice-Presidents, Registrar and Deans).

Staff assessment of EDI actions

Staff at the University of Galway are constantly evaluating their work environment and monitoring institutional transformation/stagnation. A valuable framework of reference to the development of an M&E system was offered by an interviewee when she identified two main EDI approaches: 'pity' versus 'party'. The first is based on denouncing exclusion and identifying the worst situation possible, as she explains: "Especially with the Coronavirus, someone is in a room that is very small, they can only work from their bed, [and] they don't have anything" (Laura⁶). This 'pity' approach triggers charity responses, focusing on remedial and emergency actions. The 'party' approach follows the opposite direction, that is, the promotion of EDI as a positive feature, in her terms: "Literally, let's throw a party to celebrate the diversity we have! Let's do a coffee morning!" The problem with these opposing views, she argued, is that "then you forget everything in the middle; you forget that inclusion is in everyday activities." This insight highlights that EDI should be embedded in the daily functioning of the university, thus grounding one of the goals of a M&E system (summarised in Table 1 below).

Focusing on the day-to-day is an insightful principle. It refuses both the self-congratulatory and the defeatist positions that bind the debate on change to an unfruitful dichotomy of celebratory accomplishment against pessimist Lampedusianism. Both stands make it hard to identify partial change and the re-accommodation of interests resulting from shifts in power relations. Refusing the extremes of 'pity' versus 'party' and foregrounding the everyday, it is possible to place the assessment of change within the hands of people for whom change is needed, such as those suffering from institutional inequalities.

Additionally, focusing on the everyday prevents confining EDI work to initiatives more concerned with PR exercises than transforming practices, policies, and relationships. Criticisms voiced by staff often despised the effort to *look* equal instead of *being* equal. EDI work was frequently named 'box-ticking exercise', 'lip service', 'window dressing', 'cosmetic exercise', 'showmanship', and 'optics.' The scepticism expressed in such terms critically highlights the distance between what is said and what is done and the emphasis on perception over practice.

⁶ Pseudonyms are used for all research participants. Due to anonymity protocols, no individualised information is disclosed.

The ethnographic research revealed that staff resent the misuse of EDI as a PR exercise, shifting the aim of promoting equality to promoting the institution. Such admonishment is worth considering because it is collective and continuous. The source of EDI transformation is precisely such internal criticism (Ahmed, 2021). Disregarding complaining staff as representatives of 'pockets of dissent or dissatisfaction' is a failure to understand how the energy to question inequality depends on political dissent and dissatisfaction. Friction is intrinsic to EDI work, especially when scrutinising the institution's workings. Thus, EDI needs to be integrated into the decision-making processes (a second KPI goal). This is done by ensuring inclusive institutional practices, both in terms of the representation of different demographics and of different staff cohorts and grades.

Interestingly, nearly all research participants highlighted that one of the indicators for institutional transformations is the dislocation of EDI issues from the margin to a legitimate position within university politics, confirming previous research (Agócs 1997; Hodgins and O'Connor 2021). The discursive shift is crucial since it empowers internal questioning through participation. One interviewee reasoned, "The recognition that there have been gender equality issues at the university is some progress because that was something that was largely just denied" (Evelyn). To strengthen this recognition over time, it is important to include standing EDI items in the agenda of decision-making committees.

To dismantle a 'culture of compliance' (Lynch, 2010), staff must be confident in contesting daily inequalities. Several interviewees spoke about the importance of normalising 'speaking truth to power', which is a significant indicator of culture change. They declared: "Mentoring and coaching people and developing them to be able to challenge others in positions of power, to be able to do it in a confident and non-confrontational way, is really important" (Anthony) and "We need to teach people that they don't have to accept that kind of discriminatory behaviour" (Adrian). This goal requires the promotion of equitable management and the prevention of cases of abuse of power and exclusionary behaviour.

There is no example more convincing about the importance of long-term voicing of dissatisfaction than the demand for women's access to senior academic and managerial positions (Hodgins et al., 2022). The ethnographic observation of decision-making bodies confirmed that the collective call for women's promotion is sustained by

people (mainly women academics) pushing the agenda on an everyday basis. They probe and question available data, require explanations on the implementation of action plans, and recap previous commitments. They verify if the increase in women professors is due to external appointments or internal promotions. They keep a constant flux of information and sustain the momentum for equality.

Interview data corroborated the effectiveness of this persistent and cooperative, although unofficial, effort done by solidarity networks to promote women academics. Aspiring and working for equality, these groups assess ongoing practices, identifying insufficient actions and commemorating successes. In this sense, they develop several grassroots KPIs and effectively monitor and evaluate EDI actions. Their effort was crucial to (partially) overcome institutional gender-blindness. This fact demonstrates the importance of ensuring that underprivileged groups are represented in decision-making fora.

There is plenty of scepticism about the promises of senior management to transform the university. An interviewee described how leadership is constantly under scrutiny regarding the intentions behind the discourse: "The actions of leaders can't be seen to contradict what they say. If there are mission statements, if there are declarations around values, and yet actions follow that are a contradiction of those statements, people are very smart. They pick up the contradiction, and then they disregard any attempt to change" (Mary J). The university staff has developed mechanisms to verify the coherence of institutional goals. One of the criteria used to assess whether EDI institutional pledges are trustworthy is the allocation of resources.

Discussing mental health services and disability support for students, an interviewee explained the need for proper implementation: "It's one thing to have all these things in place; it's another thing to have them materially accessible and actually functioning" (Christine). Indeed, under-resourcing was denounced by several interviewees, who criticised the opportunistic use of EDI: "The resources just aren't behind the prestige. (...) They need to put their money where their mouths are" (Bart). The refusal to allocate appropriated resources has been identified by literature as a form of institutional resistance to transformation (Hodgins and O'Connor 2021). There is an understanding, thus, that EDI units need to be fully resourced, and this includes avoiding hiring precarious employees to perform EDI tasks. This is the third EDI goal identified by the research, namely, that EDI ought to be an institutional priority.

Thus, staff mentioned the need to ensure the institution appropriately values EDI work: "Particularly senior management, those that are in those powerful positions, that do step up to the place and do support it. When I say support, I mean resources, not just turning up for a press release or a photo. It's really putting resources behind it, rolling out a consultation process, creating this plan and getting it moving" (John M). Several research participants abhorred EDI opportunism, emphasising the relevance of material redistribution. In this sense, material support (including human and financial resources) for EDI initiatives is one of the KPIs staff use to judge if commitments for change are reliable. To make sure that EDI is an institutional priority, transparent, easily accessible, and updated information of resource allocation models must be part of the M&E system.

A crucial issue repeatedly voiced by staff relates to the distribution of care work within and across different units. Previous research demonstrated the tendency of academic care work to be 'dumped' on subordinate/precarious staff (Lynch, 2010; Coate and Howson, 2014; Lund, 2020). A similar concern is raised for committees regarding who occupies the visible position of being the chair and who does the behind-the-scenes work. This requires daily negotiation and is directly related to EDI goals, premised on the insight that people's time is one of the main forms of institutional resource. One interviewee reasoned: "If transformation projects are happening, there has to be an understanding that people need to be given time to do that" (Cathy). The investigation revealed that a critical EDI action, the development of Workload Allocation Models, was not implemented in several units due to overwork.

Except for a limited number of practitioners whose job description relates specifically to EDI, for most remaining staff at the University of Galway, EDI is a commitment on top of an already stretched workload. This unfavourable dynamic can be identified with the implementation of the University of Sanctuary (UoS), an international initiative joined by Galway in 2019. The initiative aims at "challenging inequitable access to third-level education, particularly for Irish Travellers, asylum seekers, refugees, and other vulnerable migrant groups" (Harte 2020: 6). The UoS awards scholarships to undergraduates and postgraduates from these targeted communities, ensuring annual recruitment is gender balanced.

The UoS is an important initiative, prioritising underrepresented groups. An academic mentor is nominated to support Sanctuary students on their educational path. This mentor offers insight and information, helping incoming students to navigate the

university. It is undoubtedly an essential EDI-caring role, which was not formalised in workload allocation models. An interviewee described a conflict that arose in 2020 when one of the colleges refused to appoint mentors without the appropriate consideration of time allocation: "In previous years, we would have seen people have mentored on a voluntary basis. (...) This escalated to HR to look at what is the work model. What hours should be given to lecturers if they decide to become academic mentors? So maybe this is the way to go in the future? I don't know. Maybe it is, and that becomes embedded" (Penelope).

This example demonstrates how EDI work is routinely taken for granted or made invisible in the distribution of tasks, taken 'on a voluntary basis.' Staff identity groups face similar problems. In Galway, they include the University Women's Network, the LGBT+ Staff Network, and the International Staff Network. Although these groups offer an essential space to formulate and express collective demands, they also represent an increased workload for people who tend to be a minority and/or disadvantaged cohort. Staff who invest their time in ERGs are rewarded with little acknowledgement and few resources. The labour, including emotional, is mainly done voluntarily, which is to say, on top of other obligations. This demonstrates the need for the university to ensure staff is allocated time to perform EDI tasks, and thus explicitly recognising the resources required for sustained EDI work.

In other words, to foreground the everyday, EDI efforts must inquire about what is happening, where and how. Due to institutional heterogeneity, attention needs to be placed at the level of units. Even a straightforward policy like scheduling meetings during core hours to accommodate employees' care responsibilities has an uneven implementation. Several interviewees voiced the understanding that EDI awareness is not the same across the institution: "Some units are better than others (...) I'm very privileged and lucky to work in a unit that everyone is respected equally (...) But I think it's in little pockets in the university" (Adrian); "I find the environment I am in extremely supportive. (...) I am aware of how fortunate I am, how lucky I am. I'm coming from an empowered space" (John M).

It is worth highlighting the 'luckiness' voiced by some staff. Although adequate to describe individual experiences, fortune is a limited analytical concept. It does little to help us understand how some units successfully ensure EDI principles are embedded and, therefore, acknowledged as a daily experience by staff. In the context of this

research, it would be risky to name the units praised by interviewees because their anonymity would be in danger. It stands out, however, that most research participants commended as inclusive precisely the units where EDI-related work is performed.

There is, thus, a meaningful connection between EDI remit, EDI expertise, and EDI embeddedness. The coherence attained within some units is not often acknowledged as an institutional resource that can be shared with the broader university. This lack of appreciation is also expressed in terms of the working conditions of people responsible for institutional EDI. This is a serious issue, and the research identified a significant number of EDI-related staff who were precariously employed, outsourced or hired as post-doctors/researchers while performing administrative EDI jobs. This situation is especially acute for people who worked with students from underrepresented backgrounds in the Centre for Adult Learning and Professional Development or who offered front-line support for students with disability through a third company.

As the example of UoS' mentorship demonstrates, EDI work often requires expanding the conversation beyond one's unit, dislodging the usual way of doing things, formalising the job, and involving HR. That is, EDI creates work. The examples discussed hint at another indicator staff use to monitor if change can be trusted. It relates to bestowing responsibility for EDI work. More than one interviewee pointed to the meaninglessness of a non-targeted aim. This dimension is also acknowledged in the literature, which questions the "busyness" of action plans failing to bestow responsibility, coupled with foot-dragging and slippage preventing transformation (Hodgins and O'Connor 2021).

Such an issue relates to how EDI work is distributed and verified by the university. Research participants often stressed the importance of creating management-tools to ensure commitments are not floated irresponsibly but followed up with an action plan. In many senses, an action plan offers a prioritisation platform and a leverage to pressure different units to follow institutional commitments. The success of the plan largely depends on empowering the people affected by it. For instance, to make sure a policy like the meeting at core hours is successful, staff on the ground scheduling and attending the meetings must monitor it, sometimes against their own line managers. This means another indicator relates to the enforcement of EDI commitments. As reasoned by an interviewee: "Policies are no good to me if I have no implementation" (Kate).

The appointment of a Vice-President for EDI at the University of Galway in 2016 partially ensured a senior manager overseeing the agenda and granted institutional power to control other people's work. The presence of the VP and the standing EDI agenda item at the Governing Authority is crucial, and EDI also depends on re-organising work at all levels. Thus, EDI power must flow through the system to other EDI units or EDI-responsible roles. This means that EDI work necessitates horizontal power, a mandate to enforce decisions to different units. Several interviewees involved in EDI understood the need for accountability and sanctions in the case of non-compliance. Moreover, they stressed the need for cases of harassment and abuse of power to be dealt with consistently.

The EDI agenda should not be siloed, although there is undoubtedly a risk of that happening. Research participants explained how EDI requires transforming the very power structure of the university and the distribution of resources. There is virtually no dimension of HE that is untouched by aspirations for transformation. This was stated by an interviewee: "I was on the EDI Campus Committee for a few years, and I remember coming out of one meeting, thinking that it is amazing that so many aspects of the work of the university are now either impacted by EDI issues or impacted on EDI issues, heretofore. It just amazes me how far-reaching the issue is" (Anthony).

Overall, it is possible to synthesise three main goals emanating from the efforts of staff to monitor institutional transformation: firstly, EDI must be an institutional priority. Second, EDI must be integrated into decision-making processes. Third, EDI ought to be embedded in everyday functioning. The table below summarises the grassroots M&E system based on the empirical data presented. It offers an initial attempt to develop indicators for EDI change that are built from the bottom up.

Table 1. Summary of grassroots EDI monitoring & evaluation system for higher education

KPI	Target
Goal: EDI is an institutional priority	
Recruit staff from underrepresented groups	Increase in the number of underrepresented staff by year
Prioritise EDI and care work	Transparent, easily accessible and updated information on resource allocation models
Fully resource EDI units	Yearly self-assessment of units' demand in comparison to available resources
Reduce, and ultimately eliminate, precarious employment for EDI practitioners	Assessment by year
Assess budgets from EDI perspective	Publicly reported in yearly budget
Monitor and evaluate the EDI system	Publicly reported EDI data
Goal: EDI is integrated into decision-making processes	
Promote equitable management	Qualitative assessment of staff's perception of consultation and input mechanisms
Prevent abuse of power and exclusion	Monitor incidents of harassment, incivility, and abuse of power by year
Include a standing item on EDI issues in all decision-making committees' agenda	Assessment of committees' minutes
Ensure gender and racially-balanced senior management reflecting the composition of the university community (staff and students)	Assessment by year
Ensure all committees, and hiring and promotion panels are gender and racially-balanced reflecting the composition of the university community (staff and students)	Assessment of committees by year
Ensure all decision-making committees have representation of non-academic, junior, and precarious staff in proportion to their presence in all staff	Assessment of committees by year
Goal: EDI is embedded in everyday functioning	
Attribute EDI responsibilities/duties to academic and non-academic units	Develop and implement EDI Action Plans
Empower EDI-responsible units to enforce policies' determinations	Existence of sanctions and disadvantages to units that do not accomplish EDI goals
Ensure work allocation models (WAMs) recognise time for performing EDI	Qualitative assessment of WAM criteria and implementation by units
Institute EDI experience as hiring criteria for senior and middle management positions	Assessment of job description and hiring outcomes by units
Institute contribution in EDI initiatives as promotion criteria for academic and administrative grades	Assessment of promotion criteria and promotion outcomes by units
Mentoring units to implement EDI practices	Qualitative assessment of staff perception in each unit

Conclusion

In the previous pages, we offered an alternative approach to developing KPIs for EDI in HEIs. Instead of drawing from 'expert panels', we relied on ethnographic data to identify the criteria used by rank-and-file staff to assess institutional transformation. This method effectively connects EDI goals to the everyday functioning of the university. It prevents the opportunistic use of EDI as a marketing tool and reveals that decision making processes and employment conditions are crucial to prioritise EDI. Grassroots KPIs serve a dual function: assessing change and expanding EDI goals. The paper demonstrates that staff's informal indicators can be synthesised to become the source of a robust EDI M&E system.

References

- Ahmed, S. (2012). *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life*. Duke University Press.
- Ahmed, S. (2021). *Complaint!* Duke University Press.
- Badawy, M., El-Aziz, A. A. A., & Hefny, H. (2018). Exploring and Measuring the Key Performance Indicators in Higher Education Institutions. *International Journal of Intelligent Computing and Information Sciences (IJICIS)*, 18(1), 37–47.
- Bashir, H., Araci, Z. C., Obaideen, K., & Alyouf, I. (2023). An approach for analysing and visualising the relationships among key performance indicators for creating sustainable campuses in higher education institutions. *Environmental and Sustainability Indicators*, 19(1), 1–10.
- Broshkov, M., Forostian, O., Kichuk, Y., Liapa, M., Horbashevskaya, M., & Kakhiani, Y. (2020). Management of Key Performance Indicators by Heads of Higher Education Institutions. *International Journal of Management (IJM)*, 11(5), 286–298.
- Coate, K., & Howson, C. K. (2014). Indicators of esteem: Gender and prestige in academic work. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 37(4), 567–585. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2014.955082>
- Collins, A. J., Hester, P., Ezell, B., & Horst, J. (2020). An improvement selection methodology for key performance indicators. *Management of Key Performance Indicators by Heads of Higher Education Institutions. International Journal of Management*, 11(5), 286–298.

- Duvvury, N. (2011). *Monitoring Change: Learning & Practice* [Video recording]. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n0umkdhfnes&t=3236s&ab_channel=IrishGBVC consortium.
- Grummell, B., Devine, D., & Lynch, K. (2009). The care-less manager: Gender, care and new managerialism in higher education. *Gender and Education*, 21(2), 191–208.
- Harte, A. (2020). Feature article: NUI Galway, A University of Sanctuary (Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Annual Report 2019/20. OVPED, pp. 6–7). NUIG.
- HEA (Higher Education Authority). (2018). *Implementation plan: measuring and monitoring progress*. Dublin, HEA.
- Hodgins, M. (2021). Taking on the Institution: An Autoethnographic Account. *Societies*, 11(2), Article 2.
- Hodgins, M., & O'Connor, P. (2021). Progress, but at the Expense of Male Power? Institutional Resistance to Gender Equality in an Irish University. *Frontiers in Sociology*, 6, 1–14.
- Hodgins, M., O'Connor, P., & Buckley, L.-A. (2022). Institutional Change and Organisational Resistance to Gender Equality in Higher Education: An Irish Case Study. *Administrative Sciences*, 12(2), 59.
- Howson, C. B., Coate, K., & de St Croix, T. (2018). Mid-career academic women and the prestige economy. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 37(3), 533–548.
- Huck, A., Woods, R., & Linková, M. (2020). *Report on the Implementation of Targets: Follow-Up on the 2018 Guidance Recommendations*. General Secretariat of the Council.
- Ivancheva, M., Lynch, K., & Keating, K. (2019). Precarity, gender and care in the neoliberal academy. *Gender, Work & Organisation*, 26(4), 448–462.
- Kayyali, M. (2022). *Equity, Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion as Key Performance Indicators in Higher Education*.
- Kim, Y., Kim, M. S., & Kim, J. H. (2018). *Development of Key Performance Indicators for the Improvement of University Facility Management Services in Korea*.
- Leiber, T. (2019). A general theory of learning and teaching and a related comprehensive set of performance indicators for higher education institutions. *QUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION*, 25(1), 76–97.
- Leyva, X., Cumes, A., Macleod, M., Krotz, E., Alonso, J., Hernández, R. A., Escobar, A., Köhler, A., Sandoval, R., Speed, S., Blaser, M., Piñacué, S., Nahuelpan, H., Intzín, J. L., García, J. L., Báez, M., Bolaños, G., Restrepo, E., Bertely, M., ... de Sousa Santos, B. (2018). Prisma de miradas situadas. In *Prácticas otras de conocimiento(s)* (pp. 10–30). CLACSO.

- Lund, R. (2020). Becoming a professor requires saying 'No': Merging equality and quality agendas in a Norwegian gender balance project. In H. Lawton Smith, C. Henry, H. Etzkowitz, & A. Poulouvassilis (Eds.), *Gender, Science and Innovation* (pp. 35–57). Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Lynch, K. (2010). Carelessness: A hidden doxa of higher education. *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education*, 9(1), 54–67.
- Masron, T. A., Ahmad, Z., & Rahim, N. B. (2012). Key Performance Indicators vs Key Intangible Performance Among Academic Staff: A Case Study of a Public University in Malaysia.
- Ní Laoire, C., Linehan, C., Archibong, U., Picardi, I., & Udén, M. (2021). Context matters: Problematising the policy-practice interface in the enactment of gender equality action plans in universities. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 28(2), 575–593.
- O'Connor, P. (2001). A Bird's Eye View.....Resistance in Academia. *Irish Journal of Sociology*, 10(2), 86–104.
- O'Connor, P. (2020). Creating gendered change in Irish higher education: Is managerial leadership up to the task? *Irish Educational Studies*, 39(2), 139–155.
- O'Connor, P., Carvalho, T., Vabø, A., & Cardoso, S. (2015). Gender in Higher Education: A Critical Review. In J. Huisman, H. de Boer, D. D. Dill, & M. Souto-Otero (Eds.), *The Palgrave International Handbook of Higher Education Policy and Governance* (pp. 569–584). Palgrave Macmillan UK.
- O'Connor, P., & Irvine, G. (2020). Multi-Level State Interventions and Gender Equality in Higher Education Institutions: The Irish Case. *Administrative Sciences*, 10(4), 98.
- O'Keefe, T., & Courtois, A. (2019). 'Not one of the family': Gender and precarious work in the neoliberal university. *Gender, Work & Organisation*, 26(4), 463–479.
- Oliveira Filha, E. A. de, & Ruggi, L. O. (2020). News values and feminisms: A campaign for gender equality in Irish higher education. *Comunicación y Género*, 3(1), 47–60.
- Pereira, M. do M. (2017). *Power, Knowledge and Feminist Scholarship: An Ethnography of Academia*. Routledge.
- Quinlivan, S. (2017). Disrupting the Status Quo? Discrimination in Academic Promotions | Westlaw IE. *Irish Employment Law Journal* 2017, 14(3), 68-75.
- Ruggi, L. O., & Duvvury, N. (2023). Shattered glass piling at the bottom: The 'problem' with gender equality policy for higher education. *Critical Social Policy*, 43(3), 469–491.
- Ruggi, L. O. (2022). Rebranded university. *Journal Des Anthropologues*, 170171(2), 49–67.

- Ruggi, L. O. (2023). Three conditions for equality: Feminist organising at the University of Galway. *Dearcadh: Graduate Journal of Gender, Globalisation and Rights*, 4(1), 61–80.
- Safonov, Y. M., Marichereda, V. G., Borshch, V. I., Khrapatyi, M., & Goncharenko, M. (2022). Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) as a Part of the Staff Performance Management at the University: A Case of Medical University. *Journal of Higher Education Theory and Practice*, 22(18), 152–162.
- Sheehy-Skeffington, M. (2016). Chapter 1: Women Changing Law, Changing Society. In I. Bacik & M. Rogan (Eds.), *Legal Cases That Changed Ireland*. Dublin: Clarus Pr.
- Suryadi, K. (2007). Framework of Measuring Key Performance Indicators for Decision Support in Higher Education Institution. *Journal of Applied Sciences Research*, 3(12), 1689–1695.
- Treanor, A. (2015). Meeting with Jim Browne. *Micheline's Three Conditions Blog*. <https://michelinsthreeconditions.wordpress.com/a-meeting-with-jim-browne/>
- Vara-Horna, A. A., Díaz-Rosillo, A., Asencios-Gonzalez, Z., & Quipuzco-Chicata, L. (2023). Direct and indirect effects of workplace sexual harassment on the productivity of victims and witnesses: The preventive role of equitable management. *Heliyon*, 9(11), e21096.
- Varouchas, E., Sicilia, M.-Á., & Sánchez-Alonso, S. (2018). Academics' Perceptions on Quality in Higher Education Shaping Key Performance Indicators. *Sustainability*, 10(4752), 1–16.
- Woolf, V. (1929 [2019]). *A Room of One's Own/Three Guineas*: Virginia Woolf. Penguin Classics.

***Performative to Transformative:
Implementing Authentic Diversity and Inclusion Training in Higher
Education***

Abeni El-Amin

*“EMPOWER!” Public Health Innovation Program Manager, Kinesiology & Health
Promotion, College of Education, University of Kentucky, United States of America, email:
abeni.elamin@uky.edu*

Abstract: This exploratory conceptual review addresses the challenges between performative diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) in higher education and authentic DEIB training practices. Performative diversity is utilized to express an assurance to DEIB implementation and execution. Conversely, in doing so, performative diversity neglects to provide strategic visioning, planning, investment, policy directives, actions, or empowered individuals to develop and sustain racial equity. Performatives are procedural social practices sanctioned to avoid potential litigation or discontent from clients or stakeholders. A further consideration is how higher education can effectively use online DEIB training strategies to help institutions effectively implement DEIB initiatives and programs. As a result, critical progress has been made in incorporating innovative online DEIB training methods, which are proven to transform learning and DEIB training processes.

Keywords: Diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB), performative diversity, DEIB training innovation, haptic and experiential learning, higher education.

Introduction

The problem related to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) efficacy includes the failure of institutions to identify process improvements, ascertain appropriate stakeholders to accomplish institutional goals, and implement streamlined processes (Guenther et al., 2022; Stanley et al., 2019). Consequently, current performance measures of DEIB programs illuminate issues within DEIB program implementation, processes, the quantity of trained leaders, mentors, professional support networks, and existing programming, which may need improvement yet are not addressed in higher education institutions (Bernstein et al., 2020). DEIB performance measurement factors impacting long-term institutional efficacy still need to be discovered within educational institutions (Clason & McKnight, 2018). To this end, DEIB training application aims to examine whether current modes of DEIB program implementation are a factor in DEIB efficacy.

Indeed, the ability of higher education leaders to implement improved performance within organizations provides insights into the success rates of DEIB program implementation (El-Amin et al., 2021). Moreover, organizational performance is a critical aspect of effective and efficient management. Further, educational leadership factors are determined as appropriate for organizational performance within higher education (Greller & Drachsler, 2012; Spranger, 2022). Likewise, the role of higher education leaders is to improve organizational performance, identify stakeholders to develop and execute quality initiatives of performance within the organization, provide collaborative decision-making to foster a team environment and develop integrated leadership systems that focus on value-added leadership to create a welcoming culture (Cook-Sather et al., 2018; Doscher & Landorf, 2018; Morieson et al., 2018; Randel et al., 2018).

This exploratory conceptual review investigates the interplay between performative diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) practices in higher education and the need for authentic and transformative DEIB training methodologies. The study aims to elucidate the limitations of performative diversity, which often manifests as superficial commitments to DEIB principles, lacking the strategic planning, resource allocation, and actionable frameworks necessary for fostering genuine racial equity and systemic change.

Thus, performative diversity is identified as a procedural social practice, implemented primarily to satisfy institutional or stakeholder expectations and mitigate risks, such as potential litigation or reputational damage (Plotnikof, et al., 2022). However, these practices frequently fall short of addressing deeper systemic inequities or empowering individuals to enact and sustain meaningful change (El-Amin, 2023). This review critically examines the inherent tensions within such approaches, particularly their failure to support long-term progress in racial equity and inclusion within academic institutions.

The primary objective of the study is to explore how higher education leaders can leverage innovative applied DEIB training strategies to overcome the shortcomings of performative diversity measures. By doing so, the study seeks to identify methods that can transform the learning and application of DEIB principles, ensuring that initiatives and programs are not only implemented but also embedded as integral components of institutional culture.

Ultimately, this review highlights the importance of strategic, evidence-based approaches to DEIB training that transcend performative measures, offering a pathway for higher education institutions to achieve authentic, measurable, and sustainable progress in equity and inclusion.

Transitioning From Performative Diversity to Authentic Diversity

Implementation

Additional benefits of DEIB training advocacy impress upon institutions that necessitate skilled facilitation to engage DEIB training participants as an indicator of organizational performance and inclusivity (Nieminen, 2022). Developing an applied practice for training is to contextualize DEIB strategic planning incorporating andragogical experiences (Scaffold & Eddy, 2006). Developing effective training (applied practice) for adult learners includes engaging learners and using best practices for andragogy. Andragogy, as purported by Malcolm Knowles, is the paramount study indicating that adults learn differently from youth/young people. Knowles (1984) specified six assumptions underlying andragogy, which are self-concept, experience, readiness to learn depending on need, problem-centered focus, internal motivation, and

indicates that adults need to know why they need to learn information (as cited in Merriam et al., 2007).

Likewise, a well-designed training experience is determined by developing effective and engaging content (Rankin et al., 2022). For instance, higher education offers facilitators alternative and adaptable instructional methods, which is valuable for training participants with varied learning styles and needs (Blumenfeld et al., 1991; Dransfield et al., 2022). While innovation empowers DEIB training participants and facilitators, it presents new difficulties for educators (Rankin et al., 2022). Nevertheless, adaptable instructional methods are needed to engage DEIB training participants.

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB) Training (Applied Practice)

DEIB training as an initiative focuses on establishing a comprehensive framework for educational leadership and the effective implementation of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) principles. By emphasizing applied best practices, the program seeks to address critical institutional challenges related to leadership support, stakeholder accountability, and barriers to implementing meaningful DEIB initiatives. The goal is to equip leaders with the tools and strategies necessary to foster inclusive environments and drive sustainable, equity-focused change within their institutions. As a result, DEIB training outcomes aim to create a paradigm for educational leadership and DEIB implementation (Binkley et al., 2012). DEIB exemplifies best practices and principles for inclusionary training (applied practice). The training seeks to discover DEIB institutional issues of:

- 1. Institutional leadership support;*
- 2. Accountability to stakeholder engagement;*
- 3. Issues leaders face implementing diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) initiatives.*

DEIB Key Process Indicators (KPIs) – Set One

The ability of leaders to implement DEIB initiatives within higher education provides insights into their commitment levels to diversity and inclusion. For instance,

DEIB training aims to help educational leaders determine institutional factors related to DEIB efficacy (reduction of bias, implicit bias, microaggressions, macroaggressions, and imposter syndrome) (Davis et al., 2022). Moreover, DEIB training evaluation is critical to efficient organizational development and management (Steiner et al., 2007; Webb et al., 2022). As currently applied within DEIB program implementation, factors for DEIB efficacy include the strategic objectives of the institution, the significance of implementing DEIB initiatives, the rationale for implementing DEIB initiatives, and the factors impeding the implementation of DEIB initiatives (Gomez & Bernet, 2019; Rankin et al., 2022). As a result, the central theme of DEIB training is to develop a sustainable DEIB culture in higher education.

Training Overview

Higher education leaders provide support by creating and implementing efficacy at all institutional levels (Saha et al., 2020). Educational leaders provide a review of internal and external DEIB organizational factors, initiate programs, and execute change management (Muhammadiyah et al., 2022). Leadership development through coaching, assessment, and development planning reinforces embedded organizational ethos (El-Amin, 2022). Educational leaders' organizational development, strategy, and change management abilities improve DEIB internal and external operations (Schachner, 2019; Stanley et al., 2019; Stentiford & Koutsouris, 2020). Educational leaders advance, facilitate, and execute organizational efficacy by encouraging stakeholder participation (Challis, 2005; Guenther et al., 2022). As a result, leadership skills comprise exceptional facilitation, communication, and coaching expertise in times of crisis.

Purpose

Integrated DEIB analysis is the best approach to execute and analyze DEIB training (Pati & Lorusso, 2018). Thus, data collection involves surveying literature to ascertain how leaders utilize development assessment techniques in their institutions to ascertain leadership commitment, support services, information technology services, programming, continuous improvement, and DEIB program implementation quality (Stentiford & Koutsouris, 2020). Systematic results of the training may have a cross-

sectional outcome based on individual and institutional occurrences (Ramdeholl & Jones, 2022). The justification for utilizing integrated DEIB analysis occurs in the methodology section of DEIB training.

Objectives of DEIB Training

The objectives of DEIB training in higher education are rooted in empowering leaders to drive meaningful change at institutional levels. By addressing both internal and external organizational factors, educational leaders are equipped to initiate and sustain DEIB programs through strategic planning and effective change management. Leadership development further reinforces the organizational ethos by fostering coaching, assessment, and planning skills, which enhance the execution of DEIB initiatives and stakeholder engagement. Consequently, higher education leaders provide support by creating and implementing efficacy at institutional levels (Saha et al., 2020).

- 1. Educational leaders provide a review of internal and external DEIB organizational factors, initiate programs, and execute change management.*
- 2. Leadership development through coaching, assessment, and development planning reinforces embedded organizational ethos.*
- 3. Educational leaders' organizational development, strategy, and change management abilities improve DEIB internal and external operations (Schachner, 2019; Stanley et al., 2019; Stentiford & Koutsouris, 2020).*
- 4. Educational leaders advance, facilitate, and execute organizational efficacy by encouraging stakeholder participation.*
- 5. As a result, leadership skills comprise exceptional facilitation, communication, and coaching expertise in times of crisis.*

DEIB Key Process Indicators (KPIs) – Set Two

Developing robust DEIB Key Process Indicators (KPIs) is critical for fostering an environment that embodies genuine diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging within institutions. This second set of DEIB KPIs emphasizes three core dimensions: DEIB Efficacy, Institutional Development, and Support Mechanisms for DEIB Communities.

Together, these indicators serve as actionable benchmarks to measure cultural integration, organizational progress, and inclusive support structures that cater to diverse community needs.

1. *DEIB Efficacy (An environmental culture of DEIB, increased metrics for recruitment, hiring, promotion, succession, and stakeholder satisfaction).*
2. *Institutional Development (STEEP – Social, Technological, Economic, Environmental, and Political), including financial, program, and staff capacity.*
3. *Support Mechanisms for DEIB Communities (BIPOC, Women, LGBT, Accessibility, Religious, Aging, Cultural) (programming).*

Content

Implementing the DEIB program requires performance measurement to gauge if KPIs are met. Using the interactive DEIB SWOT analysis, variation in many factors and existing correlations may emerge. These outcomes are ascertained by participant collaboration to extract training findings. As such, an organized approach to DEIB program performance measurement framework is assessed. Further, the interactive DEIB SWOT analysis provides data for better strategic planning and decision-making.

Integrated DEIB analysis as an examination technique has likewise expanded in educational exploration, corresponding to the patterns in evidence-based data needed to review prior training (Munn et al., 2018). Subsequently, the interactive DEIB SWOT analysis framework is utilized as an engaging training technique. Moreover, the computerized benefits of electronic information sharing advance systematic exploration as a feasible and logical strategy for examination and support training effectiveness (Pati & Lorusso, 2018).

The integrated DEIB analysis technique seeks to resolve one execution and transformative question: *How is it possible to develop a sustainable diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging culture in higher education?* Four essential components may emerge: (a) change management, (b) institutional capital, (c) leadership commitment, and (d) diversity staff expertise and proficiency.

Interactive Elements: DEIB SWOT Analysis

Participants in this training session will engage in a collaborative exercise to create a DEIB-specific Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis tailored to their organizational contexts. Working in small groups, they will identify key elements that influence the effectiveness of DEIB initiatives, exploring both internal and external factors. The session concludes with group presentations, allowing participants to share insights and strategies with the broader cohort, fostering collective learning and actionable feedback.

Table 1. Example of a DEIB SWOT analysis

Strengths	Opportunity
Relationship building. Large buy-in from staff. Quantity and growth. Collaboration. The staff has a broad amount of experience, expertise, and skill sets that lead to strong collaboration when combined. Continually increasing DEIB performance, improving relationships, and buy-in with internal partners. Stakeholders who genuinely care about DEIB success and find different pathways for the institution to achieve its goals.	Building DEIB program and community-building pathways. Regularizing systems within the institution. Helping stakeholders gain important skills such as intercultural communication, emotional intelligence, and understanding the Theory of Generative Interactions (Bernstein et al., 2020). DEIB capacity increased metrically by at least 5% annually for all institutionally identifiable indices.
Weakness	Threats
Lack of future planning; consistency. Gaps in communication with institutional leadership. A need for defined processes to ensure consistency.	Lack of support for DEIB programming or initiatives. Limited DEIB program budget. Lack of DEIB support staff.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQS)

In addressing frequently asked questions (FAQs) about diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) in higher education, participants engage in small group discussions to explore these critical topics in depth. These discussions are then presented to the full forum for collaborative analysis, fostering a comprehensive understanding of challenges

and opportunities in implementing DEIB initiatives. The insights are recorded in a detailed training transcript and shared with participants post-training to reinforce learning and support ongoing efforts to create sustainable DEIB cultures.

FAQ 1. *How is it possible to develop a sustainable diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging culture in higher education?*

FAQ 2. *Are higher education leaders implementing DEIB initiatives?*

FAQ 3. *What are the barriers to implementing DEIB initiatives?*

FAQ 4. *What are the best practices for higher education DEIB initiatives?*

FAQ 5. *Are leaders aware of their role and impact of DEIB implementation?*

DEIB Training Plan in Alignment: Andragogical Principles and Best Practices

Transformative learning is utilized to help training participants understand the significance of change management while working with cohort participants to determine viable solutions to institutional challenges relating to DEIB implementation (Muhammadkadirovna et al., 2022). The transformative worldview within DEIB training best lends itself to the notion that educational institutions need alternative or different institutional development practices to improve DEIB performance and align with andragogical principles for training modality. The goal is for participants to share training outcomes with institutions and leaders, identify working performance measures, and support tools that are utilized, if at all. As a result, higher education leaders are better positioned to build capacity for the long-term development of DEIB institutional objectives. Additionally, the experiences obtained by the DEIB SWOT analysis illuminate trending practices that assist education institutions in realizing more significant levels of DEIB performance towards institutional goals.

Recommendations

Inclusive practices in higher education focusing on student retention and satisfaction require faculty and administrators to adopt behaviors that prioritize individual engagement and active support for students (Spranger, 2022). Faculty and staff should schedule one-on-one meetings with students to actively listen to their needs and concerns, providing tailored guidance and resources.

Positive diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) practices in higher education include fostering equity in academic assignments and campus opportunities, employing diverse admissions and recruitment practices, and ensuring fairness in hiring and compensation for student workers, teaching assistants, and staff. Additionally, institutions should offer both virtual and in-person DEIB training annually, with supplemental training provided as needed to address specific incidents of noncompliance.

To align institutional DEIB strategies with departmental and student-focused functions, administrators and faculty can frequently communicate DEIB metrics and progress through dashboards or updates, ensuring transparency and accountability. These efforts promote a culture of fairness, belonging, and continuous improvement, contributing to enhanced student satisfaction and retention.

Common mistakes that administrators make that prevent an inclusive atmosphere are not inviting diverse associates to key meetings, lack of hiring, equal pay for equal work, job category pay discrepancies, promotion contracts, and opportunities to prove expertise - employees need assignment of complex work appropriate to skill level (El-Amin, 2023). Further, effective execution of DEIB training emphasizes the need to provide the resources to deliver instructive practice and transformative experiences tailored to DEIB issues, challenges, behavioral changes, and solutions.

Results and Discussion

Leaders can train administrators to better support a diverse workforce by implementing practical strategies such as conducting equitable interviews, employing diverse hiring practices, ensuring equal pay for equal work, treating everyone fairly, and providing equal opportunities across the board. Leaders should also transparently communicate who receives certain opportunities and the rationale behind those decisions. Additionally, leaders must take intentional and actionable steps to manage diverse teams effectively, fostering a workplace grounded in DEIB principles. A culture of diversity thrives when leaders fully commit to DEIB by developing, clearly communicating, and actively investing in a transformative DEIB strategy. (Al-Alawi et al., 2019).

Hiring or appointing a performative chief diversity officer (CDO) without authenticity or support is counterintuitive to a culture of DEIB performance. When employees look across the organization and see people who look like them, they trust organizational commitment to a culture of DEIB (Guenther et al., 2022). Equity ensures that EEOC and corporate compliance protocols are strictly followed: recruiting, interviewing, hiring, onboarding (30-60-90 plans), training, supporting, mentoring, promoting, highlighting, succession, retirement, and paying employees 'equal pay for equal work.' Inclusionary Equity (IE) is created by ensuring that all individuals get an equal opportunity for employment, training, and promotion and are part of a supportive workplace community. Belongingness is a feeling where employees feel valued through opportunities to build community in employee resource groups (ERGs), volunteer in missions that are important to their communities during work hours, and input where corporate social responsibility (CSR) investments are spent. All employees must be paid and valued according to their education, expertise, performance, passion, and commitment to the organization (El-Amin, 2022). When organizations authentically apply the recommendations provided, we can all get back to work.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there are many traditional and online training methods for DEIB training. DEIB training indicates that for many institutions, providing DEIB services and securing resources are top priorities. DEIB efficacy efforts that build the institution's capacity, improve internal systems. Regardless of institutional, economic, environmental, and social capacity, institutions can utilize performance plans in anchoring and increasing their DEIB efficacy. The goal is to discern what factors for improvements occur if institutions apply DEIB performance measurements to improve leaders' capacity to effectively lead DEIB initiatives (El-Amin, 2023). Another purpose of the training is to identify issues regarding a higher education leader's ability to apply DEIB performance measurements, which focus on performance issues in educational institutions within the framework of DEIB program implementation and DEIB efficacy.

An Integrated DEIB analysis approach occurs in DEIB training to identify higher education DEIB program implementation frequently practiced and adopted in educational institutions (Bernstein et al., 2020). An interactive DEIB SWOT analysis is

tailored to educational institutions, identifying factors for educational DEIB program implementation by higher education stakeholders (administrators, faculty, or staff).

Moreover, there are various distinctive aspects of validity. Internal validity is the extent to which questions correlate. The training aims to identify the internal validity of the interactive DEIB SWOT analysis to ensure that subjectivity is nonexistent so that results are accurate. As a result, relationships are measured by the connections between KPIs and the interactive DEIB SWOT analysis (Pati & Lorusso, 2018).

DEIB efficacy measurements within higher education are an operational variable for training. Higher education leaders' performance is associated primarily with institutional development and support mechanisms for DEIB communities (BIPOC, Women, LGBT, Accessibility, Religious, Aging, Cultural). The goal is to assist leaders so they can provide quality DEIB program implementation. The training identifies higher education stakeholder experiences to measure KPIs: DEIB efficacy, institutional development, and support mechanisms for DEIB communities (BIPOC, Women, LGBT, Accessibility, Religious, Aging, Cultural).

The interactive DEIB SWOT analyzes higher education best practices and is determined by cohort members' shared experiences to validate findings. The generalized results of the interactive DEIB SWOT analysis may be that data provides a cross-sectional outcome based on individual and institutional experiences (Siddawa et al., 2019). The interactive DEIB SWOT analysis reveals various educational DEIB program implementation performance measurements. The results are operationalized based on the interactive DEIB SWOT analysis developed by training participants.

By choosing the best blend of media applications for DEIB training, whether face-to-face, online, or blended, DEIB participant engagement increases and transitions institutions from a performative state to authenticity (Chau & Cheng, 2010; Plotnikof et al., 2022; Seeley, 2022). Effective execution of DEIB training methods highlights the capacity of higher education to provide needed resources to deliver instructive practice and transformative experiences tailored to DEIB training participants (El-Amin & George, 2020). Furthermore, concept mapping should improve curriculum quality, educational leadership, support and enhance DEIB training effectiveness (Spranger, 2022).

References

- Al-Alawi, A. I., Abdulmohsen, M., Al-Malki, F. M., & Mehrotra, A. (2019). Investigating the barriers to change management in public sector educational institutions. *International Journal of Educational Management*.
- Bernstein, R. S., Bulger, M., Salipante, P., & Weisinger, J. Y. (2020). From diversity to inclusion to equity: A theory of generative interactions. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 167(3), 395-410.
- Binkley, M., Erstad, O., Herman, J., Raizen, S., Ripley, M., Miller-Ricci, M., & Rumble, M. (2012). *Defining twenty-first century skills. In assessment and teaching of 21st century skills*. (pp. 17-66). Springer, Dordrecht.
- Blumenfeld, P. C., Soloway, E., Marx, R. W., Krajcik, J. S., Guzdial, M., & Palincsar, A. (1991). Motivating project-based learning: Sustaining the doing, supporting the learning. *Educational Psychologist*, 26(3-4), 369-398.
- Challis, D. (2005). Towards the mature ePortfolio: Some implications for higher education. *Canadian Journal of Learning and Technology/La revue canadienne de l'apprentissage et de la technologie*, 31(3), 1-12.
- Chau, J., & Cheng, G. (2010). Towards understanding the potential of continuing education for independent learning: A qualitative study. *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology*, 26(7) 932-950.
- Clauson, C., & McKnight, J. (2018). Welcome to campus: Planning for diversity, inclusion, and equity. *Planning for Higher Education*, 47(1), 39.
- Cook-Sather, A., Des-Ogugua, C., & Bahti, M. (2018). Articulating identities and analyzing belonging: a multistep intervention that affirms and informs a diversity of students. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 23(3), 374-389.
- Couros, G. (2016). *Eight characteristics of the "Innovator's mindset."* George Couros. <https://georgecouros.ca/blog/archives/4783>.
- Davis, L. S., García-Leeds, C., Youngman, Y., Rothery, C., & Grafsky, E. (2022). Stress from microaggressions and discrimination: A focus on Asian American, African American, Latina/o/x, and queer families. *In Treating contemporary families: Toward a more inclusive clinical practice*. (pp. 29-60). American Psychological Association.

- Doscher, S., & Landorf, H. (2018). Universal global learning, inclusive excellence, and higher education's greater purposes. *Peer Review, 20*(1), 4-7.
- Dransfield, M., Wood, M., & Su, F. (2022). Following the yellow brick road? Developing inspiring learning and teaching in the pursuit of teaching excellence in higher education. *Journal of Further and Higher Education, 1*-16.
- El-Amin, A. (2022). Improving organizational commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging. In *Social Justice Research Methods for Doctoral Research* (pp. 208-221). IGI Global. doi.10.4018/978-1-7998-8479-8.ch010
- El-Amin, A. (2023). Words and deeds: Achieving a workplace culture without bias. *Administrative Issues Journal: Connecting Education, Practice, and Research, 13*(2), 10-17.
- El-Amin, A., & George, B. (2020). Towards a model and strategy for transformational change. *Economics, Management, and Sustainability, 5*(2), 28-38.
- El-Amin, A., Hill, J. M., Austin, S. J., & Marks, Q. L. (2021). The way forward: collaborative organisational decision-making. *International Journal of Innovation in Education, 7*(1), 17-26.
- Gomez, L. E., & Bernet, P. (2019). Diversity improves performance and outcomes. *Journal of the National Medical Association, 111*(4), 383-392. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jnma.2019.01.006>
- Greller, W., & Drachsler, H. (2012). Translating learning into numbers: A generic framework for learning analytics. *Journal of Educational Technology & Society, 15*(3), 42-57.
- Guenther, S., Matkin, G. S., Fagan, H. A. S., & Wells, B. (2022). The Path to inclusion. *Journal of Leadership Education*. DOI, 10(V21/I1). https://journalofleadershiped.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/21_1_fagan.pdf
- Knowles, M. (1984). Introduction: The art and science of helping adults learn. *Andragogy in action: Applying modern principles of adult learning, 1*-21.
- Kuo, Y. Y., & Fitzpatrick, B. J. (2020). Instructional design guidelines for advancing self-sustaining online higher education in the USA. *Performance Improvement Quarterly*.
- Merriam, S. B., & Caffarella, R. S. Baumgartner. (2007). *Learning in adulthood: A comprehensive guide*. John Wiley.

- Morieson, L., Murray, G., Wilson, R., Clarke, B., & Lukas, K. (2018). Belonging in space: Informal learning spaces and the student experience. *Journal of Learning Spaces, 7*(2).
- Muhammadkadirovna, G. D., Abdulhamitovna, S. H., & Qizi, R. D. T. (2022). The role of innovative training methods in individualization training. *Spanish Journal of Innovation and Integrity, 6*, 272-279.
- Munn, Z., Peters, M. D., Stern, C., Tufanaru, C., McArthur, A., & Aromataris, E. (2018). Systematic review or scoping review? Guidance for authors when choosing between a systematic or scoping review approach. *BMC medical research methodology, 18*(1), 1-7.
- Nieminen, J. H. (2022). Assessment for inclusion: Rethinking inclusive assessment in higher education. *Teaching in Higher Education, 1-19*.
- Pati, D., & Lorusso, L. N. (2018). How to write a systematic review of the literature. *HERD: Health Environments Research & Design Journal, 11*(1), 15-30.
- Plotnikof, M., Muhr, S. L., Holck, L., & Just, S. N. (2022). Repoliticizing diversity work? Exploring the performative potentials of norm-critical activism. *Gender, Work & Organization, 29*(2), 466-485.
- Ramdeholl, D., & Jones, J. (2022). *Confronting Institutionalized Racism in Higher Education: Counternarratives for Racial Justice*. Routledge.
- Ramprasad, K. S., & Kumar, P. (2020). Enhancement of human performance by competency development in High-Reliability Organizations (HROs). *In Reliability and Risk Assessment in Engineering* (pp. 327-336). Springer.
- Randel, A. E., Galvin, B. M., Shore, L. M., Ehrhart, K. H., Chung, B. G., Dean, M. A., & Kedarnath, U. (2018). Inclusive leadership: Realizing positive outcomes through belongingness and being valued for uniqueness. *Human Resource Management Review, 28*(2), 190-203.
- Rankin, J. C., Pearl, A. J., Jorre de St Jorre, T., McGrath, M. M., Dyer, S., Sheriff, S., Armitage, R., Ruediger, K., Jere, A., Zafar, S., Sedres, S., & Chaudhary, D. (2022). Delving into institutional diversity messaging: A cross-institutional analysis of student and faculty interpretations of undergraduate experiences of equity, diversity, and inclusion in university websites. *Teaching and Learning Inquiry, 10*. <https://doi.org/10.20343/teachlearninqu.10.10>

- Saha, R., Cerchione, R., Singh, R., & Dahiya, R. (2020). Effect of stakeholder leadership and corporate social responsibility on firm performance: A systematic review. *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management*, 27(2), 409-429.
- Schachner, M. K. (2019). From equality and inclusion to cultural pluralism—Evolution, and effects of cultural diversity perspectives in schools. *European Journal of Developmental Psychology*, 16(1), 1-17.
- Seeley, S. V. (2022). Zoom 'n gloom: Performativity and inclusivity during the pandemic and beyond. *Academic Labor: Research and Artistry*, 6(1), Article 7.
- Siddaway, A. P., Wood, A. M., & Hedges, L. V. (2019). How to do a systematic review: A best practice guide for conducting and reporting narrative reviews, meta-analyses, and meta-syntheses. *Annual review of psychology*, 70, 747-770.
- Spranger, A. N. (2022). The Inclusive leader's toolkit. In *policy and practice challenges for equality in education* (pp. 279-294). IGI Global.
- Stanley, C. A., Watson, K. L., Reyes, J. M., & Varela, K. S. (2019). Organizational change and the chief diversity officer: A case study of institutionalizing a diversity plan. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 12(3), 255–265. <https://doi.org/10.1037/dhe0000099>
- Steiner, C. M., Albert, D., & Heller, J. (2007). Concept mapping as a means to build e-learning. *Advanced Principles of Effective E-Learning*. 59-111.
- Stentiford, L., & Koutsouris, G. (2020). What are inclusive pedagogies in higher education? A systematic scoping review. *Studies in Higher Education*, 1-17.
- Vass, V. (2020). Changing the culture of curriculum development in teacher education. *R&E-SOURCE*, (14).
- Webb, M., Tracey, M., Harwin, W., Tokatli, O., Hwang, F., Johnson, R., ... & Jones, C. (2022). Haptic-enabled collaborative learning in virtual reality for schools. *Education and Information Technologies*, 27(1), 937-960. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10639-021-10639-4>

Anticipatory Homesickness, Resilience, and Psychological Distress among Commencing Medical Students

Malcolm J. Bond

*Associate Professor, College of Medicine and Public Health, Flinders University, Adelaide Australia,
email address: malcolm.bond@flinders.edu.au*

Sandra E. Carr

*Professor, Health Professions Education, Faculty of Health and Medical Sciences, University of
Western Australia, Australia, email address: sandra.carr@uwa.edu.au*

Kirsty N. Prior

Lecturer, College of Medicine and Public Health, Flinders University, Adelaide Australia

Linda K. Frost

*Student Policy and Integrity Advisor, Academic Quality and Enhancement, Adelaide Australia,
linda.frost@flinders.edu.au*

Ruth M. Sladek

*Senior Lecturer, Prideaux Centre for Research in Health Professions Education, College of Medicine
and Public Health, Flinders University, Adelaide Australia*

Abstract: Successful adaptation to new surroundings can be restricted by the experience of anticipatory homesickness. This may be particularly compromising in a high-stake learning environment such as medicine. This study sought to record the prevalence of anticipatory homesickness among commencing medical students, its association with psychological distress, and whether resilience mediates this association. A questionnaire comprising sociodemographic details, and items concerning homesickness, resilience and psychological distress was completed by graduate entry students at two Australian universities who had relocated to commence their medical studies (N = 75, 64% women). Psychological distress was negatively related to resilience and positively related to anticipatory homesickness. Only one resilience measure (Perception of Self) was related to anticipatory homesickness, but it demonstrated full mediation such that psychological distress was evident only in the presence of low Perception of Self. Screening and subsequent preventative programs targeting self-perception may be an appropriate check on wellbeing, enabling timely intervention to reduce psychological distress and potential adverse academic outcomes. Potential programs are discussed through the lens of social inclusion.

Keywords: Anticipatory homesickness, resilience, psychological distress, mediation, medical student relocation, social inclusion.

Introduction

It is timely to note that there is a crisis in mental health among university students generally (Gfellner et al., 2024). This 'epidemic' is occurring in a world in which less and less university study is being undertaken one-on-one on campus. Given this context, perhaps the formula for building a new or better perception of self, and ultimately greater resilience to deal with the demands of university life, may be found in programs that focus on social inclusion.

For example, commencement at medical school is a time of significant celebration for successful applicants yet is also associated with a range of stressors. For a subgroup of medical students, the need to move geographically ('relocate') to enable the acceptance of an offered place can represent an additional transitional stressor (Chew-Graham et al., 2003). Relocation has previously been associated with both psychosocial and economic strains, and the potential to experience homesickness which may be mild for some but significant for others (Stroebe et al., 2015, 2016; Van Tilburg et al., 1996).

Homesickness has been defined as "the distress or impairment caused by an acute longing and preoccupying thoughts of home and attachment objects" (Thurber & Walton, 2012, p. 415). It has been shown to be associated with emotional, cognitive, social, and somatic ramifications (Stroebe et al., 2015). Homesickness is experienced across a continuum ranging from normative (which might be linked to positive outcomes) to severe and problematic (Sun et al., 2017; Thurber & Walton, 2012). A range of personality (e.g., emotional instability, neuroticism, and poor social self-concept) and sociodemographic factors (e.g., being younger, female, greater distance from home) have all been implicated in the experience of homesickness, although the evidence remains mixed due to the heterogeneity of study populations and the likely complex interactions among hypothesized risk factors (Stroebe et al., 2015).

Although homesickness among university students who have relocated has been relatively well studied (Thurber & Walton, 2012), its true prevalence and severity remain unknown (Stroebe et al., 2015). Early UK studies suggested 60-70% (Fisher, 2016), but reports range from 19%-94% (English et al., 2017; Stroebe et al., 2002). Homesickness may exacerbate existing conditions or lead to new ones (Thurber & Walton, 2012) such as physical, cognitive, behavioural, and emotional symptoms (Van Tilburg et al., 1996, 1999), including anxiety, depression, concentration and memory problems, neurotic

behaviour, and social isolation. Unsurprisingly, homesick students can be at risk of reduced academic performance or even course attrition (Sun et al., 2017), which may pose long term consequences for future academic prospects and employment (Atkinson, 2020; Azizi, 2016; English et al., 2017).

It has also been argued that people are able to both anticipate and self-assess homesickness (Stroebe et al., 2015). That is, if early intervention to ameliorate negative psychological consequences is a desired outcome, the evaluation of anticipatory homesickness prior to, or soon after, relocation may be possible. Van Tilburg et al. (1996), for example, describe 'anticipation homesickness' as obsessive thoughts about the old environment, experienced before having left, that inhibit exploration of, and adaptation to, a new environment (Van Tilburg, 2005). Other research also acknowledges the anticipation of leaving home in descriptions of homesickness (Van Vliet, 2001), and anticipatory homesickness has been included in prevention programs offered prior to participants leaving home (Thurber, 2005). Finally, there is evidence of self-selection such that those more likely to be homesick elect not to relocate (Stroebe et al., 2015; Van Vliet, 2001). From a theoretical perspective, anticipatory homesickness has been considered a case of secondary anxiety, or a form of separation anxiety, expressed in circumstances where there is the possibility of isolation and loneliness (Beck & Taylor, 2003; Flett et al., 2009; Sun et al., 2016).

The importance of resilience continues to be reinforced across a range of domains (Agaibi, 2018; Fletcher & Sarker, 2013; Garcia-Dia, 2013; Windle, 2011). While the difficulties of identifying a universal definition have been noted (Agaibi, 2018; Luthar et al., 2015; Park et al., 2021; Shaikh & Kauppi, 2010), it is agreed that resilience reflects a blend of abilities obtained from both internal and external resources that interact to create positive adaptation to adversity (Luthar et al., 2015; Rutter, 2012). More specifically, resilience among medical students has been demonstrated to buffer the negative effect of course demands on quality of life. Further, resilience may protect against the adverse effects of homesickness (Stroebe et al., 2015; Thurber & Walton, 2012). For the current study it was argued that anticipatory homesickness may adversely impact both students' general adjustment to university and their mental wellbeing (Munro & Pooley, 2009), with those expressing greater levels of resilience potentially demonstrating adaptive skills relevant not only to their immediate academic success but perhaps also their later career (Kjeldstadli et al., 2006; Lin et al., 2019).

In summary, the evidence remains inconsistent concerning the prevalence and intensity of homesickness (and anticipatory homesickness) among relocating university students, including its association with student wellbeing. A better understanding of the specific mechanisms of homesickness is required (Stroebe et al., 2015). The aim of the current study was to evaluate the early signs of homesickness (anticipatory homesickness) in commencing medical students. The specific questions addressed were: what is the prevalence and intensity of anticipatory homesickness among relocating medical students?; is anticipatory homesickness associated with psychological distress?; does resilience buffer the experience of anticipatory homesickness and if so, what is the nature of this resilience?

Methods

The study was approved by the human research ethics committees of both universities at which data were collected.

1. Participants and Procedure

This quantitative cross-sectional study invited graduate entry medical students (N = 376) who were commencing Year 1 of their studies at one of two Australian universities to participate. An email was sent during the first week of their course inviting completion of an online, anonymous survey. As it was anticipated that reflecting on homesickness may be upsetting for some students, contact details of appropriate support and counselling services were included as part of the participant information. The subsample reported in the current paper comprised those students who reported the need to relocate to accept their position.

2. Measures

Participants were asked their age, gender, and whether they had relocated to accept their place offer. They were also asked whether they believed it likely that they would experience homesickness during their studies (anticipatory homesickness). Responses were recorded on a 5-point scale from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'.

i. Resilience

The Resilience Scale for Adults is a 33-item self-report scale that surveys intrapersonal and interpersonal factors presumed to facilitate adaptation to psychosocial adversities (Friborg et al., 2005). Each item is a semantic differential anchored by positive and negative attributes using a 5-point continuum (50% right positive, 50% left positive). In the current study only three subscales, proposed to be most relevant to the study goals, are reported. These are Perception of Self (6 items), Family Cohesion (6 items), and Social Resources (7 items). In each case scores are calculated as the mean of responses (range 1-5). Internal reliabilities (α) were .81, .82, and .80, respectively. The Resilience Scale for Adults is able to identify adjustment and vulnerability profiles in the general population (Friborg et al., 2009).

ii. Psychological Distress

The Kessler Psychological Distress Scale is a 10-item, self-report measure of non-specific psychological distress commonly used in primary health settings as a screening instrument (Kessler et al., 2003). Respondents indicate the frequency with which each item (e.g., 'How often did you feel worthless?') has been true for them during the past four weeks ('none of the time', 'a little of the time', 'some of the time', 'most of the time', 'all of the time'). Responses are scored 1 to 5, yielding a total score ranging from 10-50. Higher scores reflect greater distress ($\alpha = .89$).

3. *Statistical Analyses*

Data were analysed using SPSS version 23.0. Relevant bivariate correlations were first calculated to determine whether the preconditions for mediation were met. Mediation was then tested using the procedures of Preacher and Hayes (2004) through their purpose-built macro (PROCESS v2.12.1). Regression coefficients were calculated for the proposed mediator on the predictor (a), the outcome on the predictor (c'), and the outcome on the mediator (b). Path c represents the magnitude of the total indirect effect between the predictor and outcome by way of the mediator, the significance of which was determined using a bootstrapped confidence interval (95%) following 5000 iterations. Path c' quantifies the direct effect from the predictor to the outcome. Variables were standardized to enable the interpretation of derived coefficients as β .

Results

The sample comprised 75 students, of whom 48 (64%) were women. Participants had undertaken either intra-state ($n = 21, 28.0\%$), inter-state ($n = 35, 46.7\%$), or overseas ($n = 19, 25.3\%$) relocation, with 57 (76.0%) prior to their current studies. Age, anticipatory homesickness, psychological distress, and resilience are summarized in Table 1. Of note is that five participants (6.7%) recorded psychological distress indicative of a probable severe mental disorder (Slade et al., 2011). Women ($M = 3.88, SD = 1.14$) were significantly more likely to anticipate homesickness than men ($M = 3.19, SD = 1.52; t_{(73)} = 2.22, p < .05$). There were no other gender differences. Age shared negative associations with Family Cohesion and Social Resources, respectively. That is, younger students reported higher levels of resilience in these domains. This relationship was not evident for Perception of Self.

There were strong negative associations between all measures of resilience and psychological distress, and distress was positively associated with anticipatory homesickness. Further, among the resilience measures, only Perception of Self was significantly related to anticipatory homesickness. This result precluded the testing of mediation for Family Cohesion and Social Resources. However, Figure 1 presents the results of the test for Perception of Self as a mediator. While the size of the effect was modest, Perception of Self was nevertheless demonstrated to fully mediate the association between anticipatory homesickness and psychological distress. That is, anticipatory homesickness is proposed to be associated with psychological distress only in the presence of a low Perception of Self.

Table 1. Summary statistics and correlations among study variables.

	Range	M	(SD)	1	2	3	4	5
1 Age (years)	19 - 39	24.59	(4.74)					
2 Anticipatory homesickness	1 - 5	3.63	(1.32)	.14				
3 Psychological distress	10 - 38	18.16	(6.43)	.06	.19			
4 Perception of Self	2.33 - 5.00	3.89	(0.70)	-.13	-.30**	-.47***		
5. Family Cohesion	1.67 - 5.00	3.99	(0.80)	-.32**	.11	-.30**	.24*	
6. Social Resources	3.00 - 5.00	4.34	(0.58)	-.34**	-.03	-.32**	.45***	.58***

Note. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

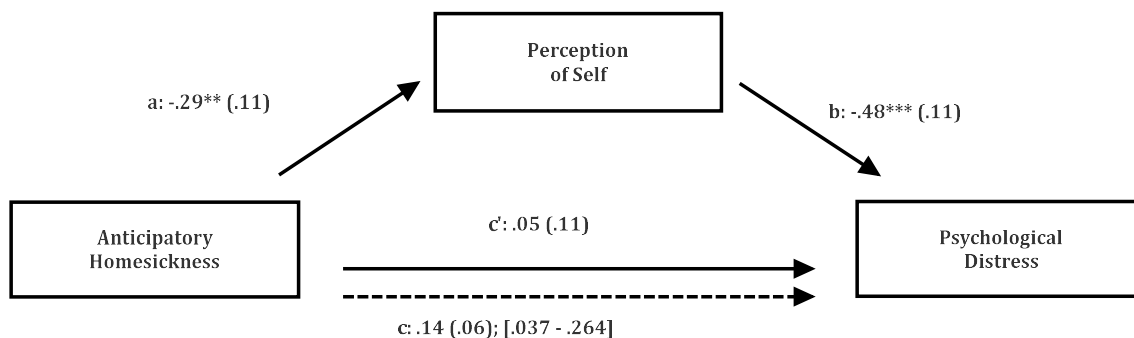


Figure 1. Schematic representation of the mediation between anticipatory homesickness and psychological distress by Perception of Self. Direct paths (* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$) are indicated as \longrightarrow , and the indirect path as $\text{-----}\rightarrow$.

Discussion

A key goal of this study was to examine whether anticipatory homesickness existed among a cohort of medical students who had recently relocated to accept a course offer. Two of the more remote graduate entry medical programs in Australia provided these students. The importance of the choice of these programs is both the absolute distances that may be travelled by students to accept their place (geographical isolation), and the perception of remoteness (psychological isolation) that may accompany the move. Both have been acknowledged as relevant to homesickness (Stroebe et al., 2002). Of particular interest was students' psychological distress and level of resilience at commencement, and their associations with anticipatory homesickness. These are all potential indicators of personal preparedness to undertake the challenging course of study that is medicine.

The first question was the degree to which students anticipated homesickness. There were various levels of affirmation, with responses distributed along the full continuum from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree', although the mean response was above the mid-point. The relevance of these arguably low incidence levels is reinforced by the observation of Stroebe et al. (2015) concerning self-selection against relocation. That is, those who believe they will experience homesickness may elect not to move. Therefore, it is congruent to suggest that the current sample actually has a lower likelihood of anticipatory homesickness than might be expected from a wider pool of prospective students. Further, being older did not seem to be related to higher resilience.

To the contrary, the current data suggest increasing age to be associated with lower reported resilience (Family Cohesion and Social Resources).

Anticipatory homesickness was associated only with Perception of Self and psychological distress. However, while the other selected measures of resilience had no relationship with homesickness they were strongly associated with psychological distress. That is, there was evidence of the importance of resilience to distress, but not of resilience to anticipatory homesickness. Perception of Self, on the other hand, was not only related to homesickness, but fully mediated the association between anticipatory homesickness and psychological distress. Note that an important caveat to these observations is the small magnitude of the relationship between Perception of Self and anticipatory homesickness and also of the overall mediation coefficients.

It is of some interest that the key component of resilience in this research was a personal variable rather than family or social variables. Intuitively the alternate result might be expected. That is, homesickness might be expected to be associated with the stressors of separation from family and/or social isolation. Instead, it was a negative self-perception that played the key role. Anecdotally, the quest for medical school entry often involves compromise and sacrifice from families, being viewed as 'a team effort'. Hence rather than being stressed by separation/isolation, relocating students may actually feel a heightened sense of connection to those who helped them 'succeed' in gaining a medical course position, particularly at course commencement. This account may explain why only Perception of Self was related to anticipatory homesickness.

Additionally, the relevance of this finding may be found in the interpretation of Perception of Self as an index of emotional stability/neuroticism (Friborg et al., 2005). A neurotic personality is a potential risk factor for homesickness and psychological distress whereas emotional stability may offer a protective effect to vulnerable students. The potential benefit of this finding is that, unlike separation from family and/or social isolation (stressors that cannot easily be altered for relocated students) emotional stability represents a target for intervention programs. That is, personal level resilience can become the focus of interventions for reducing the potential for both psychological distress and the manifestation of homesickness at a later time.

Within this framework, more flexible leave policies to support homesick students returning 'home' are unlikely to be an effective management strategy. To the contrary, such allowances could actively interfere with the opportunity to develop personal level

resilience that might later be helpful as the student progresses through the course and embarks on a career as a medical practitioner. That is, resilience may assist them in facing the inherent challenges of medicine and also their ongoing career development as they pursue opportunities in different intra-state, inter-state or international locations.

Nevertheless, there does appear to be a role for the institution at which the student is enrolled to promote greater resilience to deal with the demands of university life. This role could reasonably focus on programs that foster social inclusion. There are a number of ways in which such programs may assist, with the overarching goal being the encouragement to develop a new social community to protect against the development of homesickness by encouraging greater connectedness (Buote et al., 2007; Wilcox et al., 2005).

It is possible that anticipated homesickness arises from isolation in new surroundings. Social inclusion actively reduces such feelings of loneliness. Among international students, Poyrazli and Lopez (2007) found social inclusion to be effective in ameliorating homesickness by promoting emotional well-being. Social inclusion may include, for example, the structuring of a local support network. Stroebe et al. (2002) have shown that the availability of social support is protective against homesickness as it entails a reliable network for emotional sharing, advice, and practical help in the form of structured tutoring provided, for example, by university-provided mentors. This is particularly useful during the initial transition period in a new environment.

Social inclusion also bolsters a sense of belonging. When the basic psychological need for meaningful relationships is met, feelings of homesickness are less likely (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), with Watt and Badger (2009) reporting that students who perceive greater social inclusion on campus report lower levels of homesickness. Further, social connections facilitate quicker and more successful adaptation (Fisher, 2016). Being socially active encourages the development of new routines, allowing a focus on the positive aspects of a new environment, again with the potential to reduce the impact of anticipated homesickness. Finally, social inclusion may specifically improve resilience against the anticipation of homesickness by promoting emotional well-being through social connectedness (Van Tilburg et al., 1996). Inclusive environments allow the expression of feelings and the receipt of emotional validation, thus preventing the escalation of homesickness into more severe emotional distress.

Limitations

The current findings should be considered with reference to a number of caveats. First, the available sample size was relatively small. Second, the effect size of the mediation reported was also modest. While these two facts may be associated with each other (i.e., a larger effect size may be obtained in future research should a larger sample be available), it may also be that the importance of Perception of Self is a statistical artefact. Third, the model presented is a hypothetical, albeit plausible, representation of the manner in which the study variables are associated with each other. However, it may be that other relations among the variables are equally likely. That is, a causal relationship cannot be claimed. It may be, for example, that higher levels of psychological distress result in the expression of anticipatory homesickness and/or lower levels of resilience. The current analyses, on the other hand, have proposed psychological distress to be the outcome of these variables. Similarly, lower levels of resilience may lead to the reporting of anticipatory homesickness. This is likely due to perceived social isolation and loss of social support. Finally, while the value of recording anticipatory homesickness has been demonstrated, as argued, its association with the later development of homesickness *per se* in this cohort requires confirmation.

The manner in which non-academic problems such as perceptions of self and homesickness impact on student motivation for learning and participation and subsequently influence early academic achievement is important to consider, particularly for highly competitive courses such as medicine (Abdulghani et al., 2014; Elliott, 2016; Stegers-Jager et al., 2012). The value of the current research is that it represents one of the first attempts to identify a mediating relationship in relation to the complex construct of homesickness and the associated ability to adapt, with personal resilience being more proximal to psychological distress than anticipatory homesickness (Stroebe et al., 2015).

Conclusions

As noted, the demands of university life are creating a mental health crisis among students (Gfellner et al., 2024). Among a group of students who relocated to study medicine, poor mental health is associated with anticipatory homesickness. For a small number in the current study the related psychological distress was severe. While the

magnitude of the identified relationship was modest, full mediation by personal resilience was noted. This finding was not evident for other types of resilience relating to the closeness of family or the availability of social resources, suggesting that targeting personal resilience may be a positive step in mitigating psychological distress. Such observations provide encouragement for further research as universities seek effective means of promoting both student performance and wellbeing at a time when the medical profession is also concerned with the psychological health of its members, including its students (Puthran et al., 2016). As the need for relocation continues to be a feature of medical education, focusing on any protective factors that may assist students may be an important goal for universities offering medical programs. Specifically, it is argued that a focus on social inclusion may militate against the effects of anticipated homesickness. Factors such as a strong university-led support network, a sense of belonging, and the promotion of positive adaptation may promote emotional resilience as a necessary psychological resource for managing the challenges of being away from home.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

a) *Conflict of Interest* - The authors report no conflicts of interest.

b) *Ethical Standards* -The study was conducted in accord with the ethical standards of the institutional research committees and with the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

c) *Informed Consent* -All participants gave their informed consent prior to their inclusion in the study.

d) *Funding* - This study was funded by the Australian Graduate Medical School Admissions Test (GAMSAT) Consortium under Grant number 78313_2.

References

- Abdulghani, H. M., Al-Drees, A. A., Khalil, M. S., Ahmad, F., Ponnamparuma, G. G., & Amin, Z. (2014). What factors determine academic achievement in high achieving undergraduate medical students? A qualitative study. *Medical Teacher*, 36(Supp 1), S43-S48. <https://doi.org/10.3109/0142159X.2014.886011>
- Agaibi, C. E. (2018). Resilience: A versatile concept from Biblical to modern times. *The Journal of Happiness & Well-Being*, 6(1), 33-48.
- Atkinson, S. R. (2020). Elevated psychological distress in undergraduate and graduate entry students entering first year medical school. *PLoS ONE* 15(8), e0237008. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0237008>
- Azizi, S. (2016). Relationship between homesickness and test anxiety in non-native students of Shiraz University of Medical Sciences International Branch in the clinical and physiopathology course in 2013. *Global Journal of Health Science*, 8(7), 293-300. <https://doi.org/10.5539/gjhs.v8n7p293>
- Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (1995). The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. *Psychological Bulletin*, 117(3), 497-529. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.117.3.497>
- Beck, R., Taylor, C., & Robbins, M. (2003). Missing home: Sociotropy and autonomy and their relationship to psychological distress and homesickness in college freshmen. *Anxiety, Stress and Coping*, 16(2), 155-166. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10615806.2003.10382970>
- Buote, V. M., Pancer, S. M., Pratt, M. W., Adams, G., Birnie-Lefcovitch, S., Polivy, J., & Wintre, M. G. (2007). The importance of friends: Friendship and adjustment among 1st-year university students. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 22(6), 665-689. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0743558407306344>
- Chew-Graham, C. A., Rogers, A., & Yassin, N. (2003). 'I wouldn't want it on my CV or their records': Medical students' experiences of help-seeking for mental health problems. *Medical Education*, 37(10), 873-880. <https://doi.org/10.1046/j.1365-2923.2003.01627.x>
- Elliott, D. C. (2016). The impact of self beliefs on post-secondary transitions: The moderating effects of institutional selectivity. *Higher Education*, 71(3), 415-417. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-015-9913-7>

- English, T., David, J., Wei, M., & Gross, J. J. (2017). Homesickness and adjustment across the first year of college: A longitudinal study. *Emotion*, 17(1), 1-5. <https://doi.org/10.1037/emo0000235>
- Fisher, S. (2016). *Homesickness, cognition, and health*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315636900>
- Fletcher, D., & Sarkar, M. (2013). Psychological resilience: A review and critique of definitions, concepts, and theory. *European Psychologist*, 18(1), 12-23. <https://doi.org/10.1027/1016-9040/a000124>
- Flett, G. L., Endler, N. S., & Besser, A. (2009). Separation anxiety, perceived controllability, and homesickness. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 39(2), 265-282. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1559-1816.2008.00438.x>
- Friborg, O., Barlaug, D., Martinussen, M., Rosenvinge, J. H., & Hjemdal, O. (2005). Resilience in relation to personality and intelligence. *International Journal of Methods in Psychiatric Research*, 14(1), 29-42. <https://doi.org/10.1002/mpr.15>
- Friborg, O., Hjemdal, O., Martinussen, M., & Rosenvinge, J. H. (2009). Empirical support for resilience as more than the counterpart and absence of vulnerability and symptoms of mental disorder. *Journal of Individual Differences*, 30(3), 138-151. <https://doi.org/10.1027/1614-0001.30.3.138>
- Garcia-Dia, M. J., DiNapoli, J. M., Garcia-Ona, L., Jakubowski, R., & O'Flaherty, D. (2013). Concept analysis: Resilience. *Archives of Psychiatric Nursing*, 27(6), 264-270. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.apnu.2013.07.003>
- Gfellner, B. M., Cordoba, A. I., & Maria Fernanda Cordero-Hermida, M. F. (2024). Adjustment to university by students in Canada, Spain, and Ecuador: Distress and identity issues. *Academia Mental Health and Well-Being*, 1(2). <https://doi.org/10.20935/MHealthWellB7328>
- Kessler, R. C., Barker, P. R., Colpe, L. J., Epstein, J. F., Gfroerer, J. C., Hiripi, E., Howes, M. J., Normand, S-L. T., Manderscheid, R. W., Walters, E. E., & Zaslavsky, A. M. (2003). Screening for serious mental illness in the general population. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 60(2), 184-189. <https://doi.org/10.1001/archpsyc.60.2.184>
- Kjeldstadli, K., Tyssen, R., Finset, A., Hem, E., Gude, T., Gronvold, N. T., Ekeberg, O., & Vaglum, P. (2006). Life satisfaction and resilience in medical school – a six-year longitudinal, nationwide and comparative study. *BMC Medical Education*, 6(48). <https://doi.org/10.1186/1472-6920-6-48>

- Lin, Y. K., Lin, C. D., Lin, B. Y. J., & Chen, D. Y. (2019). Medical students' resilience: A protective role on stress and quality of life in clerkship. *BMC Medical Education*, 19(473). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12909-019-1912-4>
- Luthar, S., Crossman, E. J., & Small, P. J. (2015). Resilience and adversity. In R. M. Lerner & M. E. Lamb (Eds.), *Handbook of child psychology and developmental science (Vol 3): Social, emotional, and personality development (7th ed., pp. 247-286)*. Wiley.
- Munro, B., & Pooley, J. A. (2009). Differences in resilience and university adjustment between school leavers and mature entry university students. *Australian Community Psychology*, 21(1), 50-61.
- Park, E. R., Luberto, C. M., Chad-Friedman, E., Traeger, L., Hall, D. L., Perez, G. K., Goshe, B., Vranceanu, A.-M., Baim, M., Denninger, J. W., Fricchione, G., Benson, H., & Lechner, S. C. (2021). A comprehensive resiliency framework: Theoretical model, treatment, and evaluation. *Global Advances in Health and Medicine*, 10. <https://doi.org/10.1177/21649561211000306>
- Poyrazli, S., & Lopez, M. D. (2007). An exploratory study of perceived discrimination and homesickness: A comparison of international students and American students. *Journal of Psychology*, 141(3), 263-280. <https://doi.org/10.3200/JRLP.141.3.263-280>
- Preacher, K. J., & Hayes, A. F. (2004). SPSS and SAS procedures for estimating indirect effects in simple mediation models. *Behavior Research Methods, Instruments, & Computers*, 36(4), 717-731. <https://doi.org/10.3758/BF03206553>
- Puthran, R., Zhang, M. W. B., Tam, W. W., & Ho, R. C. (2016). Prevalence of depression amongst medical students: A meta-analysis. *Medical Education*, 50(4), 456-468. <https://doi.org/10.1111/medu.12962>
- Rutter, M. (2012). Resilience: Causal pathways and social ecology. In M. Ungar (Ed.), *The social ecology of resilience: A handbook of theory and practice (pp. 33-42)*. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4614-0586-3_3
- Shaikh, A., & Kauppi, C. (2010). Deconstructing resilience: Myriad conceptualizations and interpretations. *International Journal of Arts and Sciences*, 3(15), 155-176.
- Slade, T., Grove, R., & Burgess, P. (2011). Kessler Psychological Distress Scale: Normative data from the 2007 Australian national survey of mental health and wellbeing. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*, 45(4), 308-316. <https://doi.org/10.3109/00048674.2010.543653>

- Stegers-Jager, K. M., Cohen-Schotanus, J., & Thenmen, A. P. N. (2012). Motivation, learning strategies, participation and medical school performance. *Medical Education*, 46(7), 678-688. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2923.2012.04284.x>
- Stroebe, M. S., Schut, H., & Nauta, M. (2015). Homesickness: A systematic review of the scientific literature. *Review of General Psychology*, 19(2), 157-171. <https://doi.org/10.1037/gpr0000037>
- Stroebe, M. S., Schut, H., & Nauta, M. (2016). Is homesickness a mini-grief? Development of a dual process model. *Clinical Psychological Science*, 4(2), 344-358. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2167702615585302>
- Stroebe, M.S., Van Vliet, T., Hewstone, M., & Willis, H. (2002). Homesickness among students in two cultures: Antecedents and consequences. *British Journal of Psychology*, 93(2), 147-168. <https://doi.org/10.1348/000712602162508>
- Sun, J., Hagedorn, L. S., & Zhang, Y. (2016). Homesickness at college: Its impact on academic performance and retention. *Journal of College Student Development*, 57(8), 943-957. <https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2016.0092>
- Sun, J., Hagedorn, L.S., Zhang, Y. (2017). Homesickness at college: Its impact on academic performance and retention. *Journal of College Student Development*, 57(8), 943-957. <https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2016.0092>
- Thurber, C. A. (2005). Multimodal homesickness prevention in boys spending 2 weeks at a residential summer camp. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 73(3), 555-560. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-006X.73.3.555>
- Thurber, C. A., & Walton, E. A. (2012). Homesickness and adjustment in university students. *Journal of American College Health*, 60(5), 415-419. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07448481.2012.673520>
- Van Tilburg, M. A. L. (2005). The psychological context of homesickness. In M. A. L. Van Tilburg & A. Vingerhoets (Eds.), *Psychological aspects of geographical moves: Homesickness and acculturation stress* (pp. 35-48). Amsterdam University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9789048504169.004>
- Van Tilburg, M. A. L., Vingerhoets, A. J. J. M., & Van Heck, G. L. (1996). Homesickness: A review of the literature. *Psychological Medicine*, 26(5), 899-912. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0033291700035248>
- Van Tilburg, M. A. L., Vingerhoets, A. J. J. M., Van Heck, G. L., & Kirschbaum, C. (1999). Homesickness, mood and self-reported health. *Stress and Health*, 15(3), 189-196.

[https://doi.org/10.1002/\(SICI\)1099-1700\(199907\)15:3<189::AID-SMI814>3.0.CO;2-U](https://doi.org/10.1002/(SICI)1099-1700(199907)15:3<189::AID-SMI814>3.0.CO;2-U)

Van Vliet, A. (2001). *Homesickness: Antecedents, consequences and mediating processes*. Utrecht University Press.

Watt, S. E., & Badger, A. J. (2009). Effects of social belonging on homesickness: An application of the belongingness hypothesis. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 35(4), 516-530. . <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167208329695>

Wilcox, P., Winn, S., & Fyvie-Gauld, M. (2005). 'It was nothing to do with the university, it was just the people': The role of social support in the first-year experience of higher education. *Studies in Higher Education*, 30(6), 707-722. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075070500340036>

Windle, G. (2011). What is resilience? A review and concept analysis. *Reviews in Clinical Gerontology*, 21(2), 152-169. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0959259810000420>

***Potential Factors That Can Model the Attitude Towards
Psychotherapy Among Students - An Analysis of a University in
Serbia***

Anida Vrcić Amar

*Assistant professor, Study group Psychology, State University of Novi Pazar Serbia, email address:
anvrcic@np.ac.rs*

Atif Avdović

*Student, Department of science and mathematics, State university of Novi Pazar Serbia, email
address: aavdovic@np.ac.rs*

Milena Belić

*Assistant Professor, Study group Psychology, State University of Novi Pazar Serbia, email address:
mbelic@np.ac.rs*

Denis Demirović

*Student, Study group Psychology, State University of Novi Pazar Serbia, email address:
ddemirovic@np.ac.rs*

Abstract: For psychotherapy practice, it has always been important to research what motivates or demotivates individuals to seek and use it. Therefore, our goal was to determine the attitudes of students at the State University of Novi Pazar towards psychotherapy, while understanding potential differences in attitudes between humanities and non- humanities students. Attitudes were measured using the Psychotherapy Scale, and general data were collected using a sociodemographic questionnaire. The sample consisted of 322 students from 16 study programs. The findings showed that the attitudes towards psychotherapy in our sample are distributed across four components: positive attitude, negative attitude, scepticism and hesitation in seeking psychotherapy services. Students of all study programs are equally reluctant to seek professional help, while positive, negative and sceptical attitudes towards psychotherapy significantly differentiate between humanities and non-humanities students. Additionally, female respondents have significantly higher positive attitude and hesitance towards therapy, as well as significantly lower scores for negative attitude and scepticism towards therapy.

Keywords: Psychotherapy, attitude towards psychotherapy, humanities students, students, counselling centre.

Introduction

Psychotherapy is clearly defined as a process that takes place between a therapist and a patient or a group of patients in a relationship of mutual trust and is a form of treatment, providing support and strengthening the individual's mental capacity. Research shows that impaired mental health is a common problem among students (Bowman & Payne, 2011; Young, 2009; Bruffaerts et al., 2019; Knapstad et al., 2021) and that students tend to delay seeking help (Young, 2009). With the assumption that there is goodwill of the institution (school or faculty) to provide an adequate psychotherapy service, the primary question is whether young people as students are ready to be the users of psychotherapy practice and what attitudes model their actions. We believe that it is important to know the views of future users of counselling centres as the first and most important indicator for the establishment and launch of this type of service at faculties, as the issues of impaired mental health are increasingly the cause of poor academic achievement (Hysenbegasi et al., 2005), leaving or interrupting studies (Sheldon et al. 2021). Theoretical models that try to answer this question by describing the reasons why psychotherapy is (not) accessed, rely on the model of reasoned action and the fear of stigma. The fear of stigma can be interpreted through the special sensitivity that people show when it comes to mental health, where, according to the authors' investigation (Jokić-Begić, Kamenov, & Korajlija, 2005), the fear of labelling, misunderstanding, non-acceptance and alienation is particularly emphasized in people with mental difficulties, while the fear of stigma is especially intensified in small communities where people are more familiar with each other (Fazlagić&Rakić-Bajić, 2011). A significant negative association between stigmatization of seeking professional help and attitudes towards psychotherapy creates a consequential relationship in which the higher the level of stigma, the more negative the attitude towards psychotherapy (Huțul et al., 2022). Conversely, people who have a more positive attitude toward psychotherapy and help-seeking experience less self-stigma and social stigma (Elkins et al., 2017).

The reasoned action model (Ajzen & Fishbaib, 2005) assumes that behaviour can be predicted based on the intention one has or performs, and that intention is based on attitudes about a particular behaviour, perceived control of the behaviour, and the subjective feeling it produces in each of us.

Most psychotherapy interventions have been shown to be effective and efficient for numerous psychopathological phenomena, but people continuously report negative attitudes towards psychotherapy, even in situations where psychotherapy is recommended and mandatory for treatment (Angermeyer et al., 2017; Ten Have et al., 2010). Research shows that psychotherapy is usually chosen as a last resort measure when the pressure is already high enough (Komiya et al., 2000), which has a retrograde effect on the effects of the therapeutic agent, since prolonging extends the time for therapeutic action.

If, on the other hand, people decide to completely exclude psychotherapy even though they have some mental disorder, in return they usually get a series of individual/health, social, and economic negative effects (Jacobi et al., 2014; Lindinger-Sternart, 2015). Examination of these effects has contributed to examinations of psychotherapy expectancies (Braun-Koch, Rief, & Teige-Mocigemba, 2022), as it was shown that expectations from therapy also model the attitude towards psychotherapy in a positive direction (Rief & Glombiewski, 2017).

In the research (Constantinou et al. 2017), medical students had positive attitudes towards psychotherapeutic help, as well as psychology students (Fay et al., 2016), which can lead to the conclusion that students who express the intention to offer professional help will have more positive attitudes towards psychotherapy (Jakovčić & Živčić Bećirović, 2009). People with adaptive behaviour choose psychotherapy as a way of coping with difficulties, while in the student population attitudes change more significantly after taking a course on psychotherapy (Pastner et al., 2014). It is especially important to check the attitudes of the support groups of humanities students because in the future that group of students will be able to provide support and help.

Several meta-analyses show that most high-income countries are prepared to provide psychological support to pupils and high school students, but these services are frequently fragmented, uncoordinated, and underutilized (Osborn et al., 2022). Given that students are in a critical stage of their life and taking into account the university's skills and possible role in giving assistance, we chose to explore students' attitudes toward psychotherapy in 16 study programs.

1. *Research Background*

The objective of the research was to determine the attitude of young people towards psychotherapy, as well as whether the polarization of the attitude (positive, negative, neutral and others) changes in relation to the study program among students of different orientations.

2. *Sample*

This research sample consists of 322 respondents, where 106 (32.7%) are male and 216 (67.3%) are female. Also, 277 (86%) of them live in the city and 45 (14%) live in the country. Respondents' mean age is 19.4 with standard deviation of 2.082, oldest respondent being 36 and the youngest one 18. Students from the following study programs took part in the research: Psychology, Law, Economics, Sports and Physical Education, Rehabilitation, Fine Arts, Biology, English Language and Literature, Serbian Literature and Language, Chemistry, Construction, Preschool Teacher, Agricultural Production, Food Production, Architecture, Technical Sciences and Management.

3. *Instruments and Procedures*

A questionnaire on sociodemographic characteristics was constructed for the purposes of this research. It provides basic data on gender, age, education and place of residence.

Attitude towards psychotherapy was measured using the Author's Psychotherapy Scale (Pušara, 1996). The original scale contained 28 items with a satisfactory factor structure with a Kronbach alpha coefficient ($\alpha = .86$) (Pušara, 1996).

The scale was adapted for the needs of this research and shortened to 21 items. Due to redundancy, we choose to decrease the number of elements in order to improve the research's validity and reliability because some objects measure the same concept more than once.

Additionally, we observed that non-humanities responders would either struggle to comprehend specific items or become perplexed by the items' more intricate conceptualization. The used scale with 21 items has yielded the Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.654 which represents the questionable level of reliability of this scale's measurement. However, it also means that the scale gives no low-quality test. Additional

information on the characteristics of the scale used is obtained using Principal component analysis.

The degree of agreement with the statement is expressed in the range from 1 to 5. Examples of items are shown in the results.

Results

For checking the overall correlation significance of items, the Bartlett's test of sphericity is used. The correlation of the items is significant (Chi-squared=2108.275, $p=0.000<0.05$). These results, while also considering the sample size of $N=322$, give the conclusion of principal component analysis being applicable.

The principal component analysis has extracted four components yielding the eigenvalue higher than 1, and these components determine 53.627% of latent variables variance. For the first component the eigenvalue is 5.982, for the second component 2.575, for the third component 1.581 and for the fourth component 1.124.

After the rotation of the solution performed by the varimax method, obtained eigenvalues of extracted components are 3.803, 3.170, 2.234 and 2.054 respectively. Extracted components determine 28.486%, 12.260%, 7.530% and 5.350% of the manifested latent variables variance, respectively. After the rotation these percentages are as follows: 18.112%, 15.096%, 10.638% and 9.781%.

Table 1. The first component variables and manifested variable correlation.

Item number	Item	r
12	<i>Through therapy, people can learn how to improve their relationships with others.</i>	0.748
3	<i>Through therapy people can resolve problems they have.</i>	0.742
8	<i>Therapy enables us to change what we do not like about ourselves.</i>	0.697
6	<i>Therapy is used by strong people who are ready to face their problems.</i>	0.630
1	<i>Through therapy people get to know themselves better.</i>	0.624
19	<i>People using therapy can deal with the problems they encounter more easily.</i>	0.610
14	<i>If I were to have a problem that I cannot resolve myself, I would decide to go to therapy.</i>	0.564
21	<i>There were situations in my life that could be handled better with the help of a therapist.</i>	0.318
5	<i>Therapy is good only for leisure and rich people.</i>	-0.307
7	<i>Therapy is only for mentally disabled people.</i>	-0.315
9	<i>Therapy is of no use to normal people.</i>	-0.375

The first component items detect the characteristic of recognizing the benefits of therapy in respondents. Based on Table 1 correlations, variable 1, further on named “positive attitude towards therapy (PATT)” is obtained by calculating the sum of the scores of items 1, 3, 6, 8, 12, 14, 19 and 21, and scores of reverse coded items 5, 7 and 9.

Table 2. The second component variables and manifested variable correlation.

Item number	Item	r
7	<i>Therapy is only for mentally disabled people.</i>	0.694
4	<i>Changes caused by therapy are risky because we do not know what is ahead of us once we change.</i>	0.651
13	<i>Therapy is used by weak people who are not able to confront the problems they have by themselves.</i>	0.641
11	<i>Using therapy is enough. The therapist will resolve all our problems.</i>	0.627
5	<i>Therapy is good only for leisure and rich people.</i>	0.572
2	<i>Therapy is used to manipulate people.</i>	0.557
9	<i>Therapy is of no use to normal people.</i>	0.548
15	<i>Only I can help myself. Therapy is not needed.</i>	0.403
1	<i>Through therapy people get to know themselves better.</i>	-0.308

The second component items detect the characteristic of misconceptions or delusions concerning therapy in respondents. Based on the Table 2 correlations, variable 2, further on named “negative attitude towards therapy (NATT)” is obtained by calculating the sum of the scores of items 2, 4, 5, 7, 9, 11, 13 and 15, and the score of reverse coded item 1.

Table 3. The third component variables and manifested variable correlation.

Item number	Item	r
16	<i>If I were to use therapy, I would only do so abroad.</i>	0.737
18	<i>Time used for therapy is wasted because one always remains essentially the same person.</i>	0.609
10	<i>I would use therapy only if no one from my environment is aware of that.</i>	0.602
17	<i>I do not believe I will find myself in a situation where I would require the therapist's help.</i>	0.512
15	<i>Only I can help myself. Therapy is not needed.</i>	0.382
5	<i>Therapy is good only for leisure and rich people.</i>	0.346
9	<i>Therapy is of no use to normal people.</i>	0.316
20	<i>I would go to therapy, but I cannot afford it.</i>	0.314

The third component items detect the characteristic of scepticism concerning therapy in respondents. Based on the Table 3 correlations, variable 3, further on named “scepticism towards therapy (STT)” is obtained by calculating the sum of the scores of items 5, 9, 10, 15, 16, 17, 18 and 20.

Table 4. The fourth component variables and manifested variable correlation.

Item number	Item	r
20	<i>I would go to therapy, but I cannot afford it.</i>	0.731
21	<i>There were situations in my life that could be handled better with the help of a therapist.</i>	0.723
14	<i>If I were to have a problem that I cannot resolve myself, I would decide to go to therapy.</i>	0.423
15	<i>Only I can help myself. Therapy is not needed.</i>	-0.420
17	<i>I do not believe I will find myself in a situation where I would require the therapist's help.</i>	-0.526

The fourth component items detect the characteristic of respondent's inability or hesitation to go to the therapy. Based on the Table 4 correlations, variable 4, further on named "hesitance towards therapy (HTT)" is obtained by calculating the sum of the scores of items 14, 20 and 21, and scores of reverse coded items 15 and 17.

Table 5. Reliability analysis for each component.

Component	Number of items	Cronbach's alpha
1	11	0.850
2	9	0.817
3	8	0.719
4	5	0.689

Cronbach's alpha coefficients indicate reliable measurement of referent characteristic performed by the items of components 3 and 4, while the measurement performed by the items of components 1 and 2 is very reliable. For the reliability analysis, negatively correlated variables have been recoded.

Table 6. Analysis of variance relative to gender.

Variable	Mean \pm Standard deviation		Levene's test F	t	Cohen's d
	Male	Female			
PATT	36.55 \pm 9.14	41.90 \pm 7.19	5.771**	-4.940***	0.68***
NATT	22.23 \pm 6.61	17.85 \pm 6.00	2.692	5.611***	0.70***
STT	19.71 \pm 5.71	16.30 \pm 5.07	1.310	5.316***	0.66***
HTT	14.29 \pm 4.25	15.97 \pm 4.26	0.461	-3.242***	0.39***

*0,05 \leq p \leq 0,1; **p \leq 0,05; ***p \leq 0,01.

Results given in Table 6 indicate that there is a significant difference in all four of the research variables' scores when compared between male and female respondents. Namely, it has been shown that female respondents have significantly higher positive attitude (t=-4.940, p<0.01) and hesitance towards therapy (t=-3.242, p<0.01) and significantly lower scores for negative attitude (t=5.611, p<0.01) and scepticism

($t=5.316$, $p<0.01$) towards therapy. Cohen's d for PATT, NATT and STT is higher than 0.6 indicating that the results are consistent for all of the respondents. For HTT Cohen's d is 0.39 indicating that the significant difference in average scores might be due to a few respondents showing scores that are inconsistent with the scores of others in their group.

Table 7. Descriptive statistics of research variables.

Categories	N	Independents	Mean	Standard Deviation	Min	Max
Humanities Sciences	185	PATT	41.12	8.12	19	55
		NATT	18.45	6.36	9	35
		STT	16.15	5.25	8	30
		HTT	15.66	4.56	5	25
Others	137	PATT	39.06	8.50	11	55
		NATT	20.12	6.67	9	37
		STT	18.60	5.34	8	34
		HTT	15.48	4.09	5	25
Total	322	PATT	40.22	8.34	11	55
		NATT	19.18	6.54	9	37
		STT	17.21	5.42	8	34
		HTT	15.58	4.36	5	25

Table 7 displays basic descriptive statistics of manifested variables as well as frequency of each observed group of respondents.

Table 8. Tests of equality of group means.

Variable	Wilk's Lambda	ANOVA's F
PATT	0.985	4.169*
NATT	0.984	4.482*
STT	0.949	14.611**
HTT	1	0.119

* $p<0.05$; ** $p<0.001$

Table 8 results indicate that mean scores of variables PATT, NATT and STT significantly differ ($F>=4.169$, $p<=0.042<0.05$) between the respondents that study humanities and the ones that study something else. That is not the case for variable HTT ($F=0.119$, $p=0.730>0.05$).

The classification performed via obtained discrimination function D has shown to be statistically significant (Wilks' Lambda=0.929, Chi-square=19.930, $p<0.001$) with canonical correlation coefficient of 0.266 for correlation between discriminant function and grouping variable.

Table 9. Standardized canonical discriminant function coefficients and canonical correlations.

Variable	SCDFC	CC
PATT	-0.607	-0.447
NATT	-0.603	0.464
STT	1.257	0.837
HTT	0.599	-0.076

Table 9 indicates that the variable that correlates the highest with the discriminant function is variable STT. Hence, this variable is the most important in discriminating between respondents that study social sciences and humanities and others. Namely, it is 2.07 ($1.257/0.607$) times more important than PATT, 2.08 ($1.257/0.603$) times more important than NATT and 2.1 ($1.257/0.599$) times more important than HTT. If we were to use a stepwise method of discrimination analysis, variable STT would be the only independent figuring the equation of D. The discrimination performed by this model has successful classification in 60.4% of cases.

Discussion

In a broader context, the university environment is often stressful for students due to its atmosphere and pressures, where success is constrained by deadlines and fluctuating tasks (Flisher et al., 2002). One way to achieve balance is through the utilization of counselling and psychotherapy services within the university, in order to preserve mental health. The availability of free intervention helps reduce costs incurred by students during their studies.

However, studies indicate that students' knowledge about mental health problems and the utilization of counselling services is relatively low (Fandie, 2015), and in accordance with our research, negative attitudes towards psychotherapy are reported (Giovazolias et al. 2010; Voracek, Jandk-Jager & Springer- Kremser, 2001) to slightly negative attitudes towards psychotherapy (Digiuni, Jones & Camic, 2013; Löffler-Stastka et al., 2010; Fazlagić & Rakić-Bajić, 2011).

Students of psychology and pedagogy tend to have positive attitudes towards psychotherapy (Löffler-Stastka et al., 2008), while medical students often have slightly negative attitudes (Lauber et al., 2005). There is no difference in stigma levels between medical and social workers (Gervas et al. 2020), but lower levels are found among psychiatry students and higher among nursing students (Poreddi, Thimmaiah & Math,

2015). Students' attitudes towards psychotherapy are influenced by climate, undergraduate knowledge, lack of experience, and willingness to approach the therapeutic process (Furnham & Wardkey, 1990). Research shows that positive attitudes towards online psychotherapy are more pronounced with technological advancements (Awabil & Clifford, 2018).

Modern technology and online therapy are becoming increasingly popular among therapists (Rutkowska et al., 2023), offering a discreet alternative for treating anxiety (Dear et al., 2018), conduct disorders (Bendsten et al., 2020), and substance abuse (Das et al., 2016), despite the risks associated with working with adolescents and adults (Zhou et al., 2021).

While boys may be socialized to be more stoic or independent, females are typically encouraged from a young age to express their emotions and ask for help (Nam et al., 2010; Qiu, et al. 2024). Men may face more stigma related to mental health issues because they assume that seeking help is a sign of weakness (Addis & Mahalik 2003). This may lead to an increased reluctance to participate in therapy. Women are more accustomed to verbally expressing their emotions, which promotes their engagement in therapeutic contexts (Strauss et. al, 2015). Certain therapeutic approaches may appeal to women, who may be more comfortable with therapy's interpersonal dynamics.

The realization that scepticism is a variable that significantly differentiates between humanities and non-humanities students directs us to understanding the reasons why students are not inclined to seek professional help. We assume that the obstacle on their way to psychotherapy is often social or self-stigma, which students with humanistic beliefs likely overcome through the curriculum of their studies. Authors Tenjović and Srna refer to the findings of their research indicating that the direct and indirect effects of public stigma on self-stigma, as well as on attitudes towards seeking professional psychological help, are statistically significant (Tenjović & Srna, 2015). While the importance of cultural norms was clear in the research domain in prior years, stigmatization and perceptions of the psychotherapy process might be greatly influenced by culture (Fazlagić & Rakić Bajić, 2011). According to Constantinou et al. (2017), attitudes toward psychotherapy can be shaped by a confluence of cultural, educational, and personal variables. This can have a substantial impact on how non-humanities students feel about the subject. Students from individualistic cultures exhibited significantly higher stigma and a lower propensity to "open up" to strangers, as well as

generally lower positive attitudes toward all aspects of psychotherapy, according to several studies that looked at the impact of stigma on the decision to seek help (Digiuni, Jones & Camic, 2013; Löffler-Stastka et al. 2010; Fazlagić & Rakić-Bajić, 2011).

One of the advantages of this study is that, starting from the initial need to polarize the attitudes towards psychotherapy, we obtained a factorial structure with four factors that model attitudes towards psychotherapy using appropriate statistical methods.

We consider the hesitancy of all students to be particularly important as a strategy that prevents individuals from seeking help in the general population. Analysing hesitancy as a strategy, we note that the trend to choose psychotherapy when the client is faced with the consequences of their avoidant behaviour or simply when all resources for help are exhausted still persists (Wills, 1992). We consider education and the promotion of psychotherapy to be important aspects of our community work, but also as practical implications for communities facing similar problems. Research suggests that people who are more informed about mental health and hold positive attitudes are more likely to seek help when needed in the domain of mental health (Bonabi et al., 2016). Initial positive attitudes towards seeking help are likely to lead to a tendency to seek psychotherapy services and benefit insights (Hill et al. 2012). On the other hand, young people often secretly seek someone whom they trust will provide them with an opportunity to express their doubts, which can lead to the need for the counselling centres to maintain and promote counselling appointments, rather than psychotherapy. It seems that in this way, students would reduce self-stigma and social stigma and increase the likelihood of accepting psychotherapy, avoid hesitation and a negative attitude. The current findings suggest that it is necessary to promote the terms stigma and self-stigma so that the population understands and confronts them, while presenting seeking help as an effective intervention in the youth mental health help system (Pfeiffer & In-Albon, 2023). Additionally, we consider it particularly important that, especially first-year students, should be familiar with the types of help offered to them, specifically psychotherapy, through forums and other awareness-raising activities, which is in line with the recommendations of other researchers (Giovazolias et al. 2010). It is optimistic that recent data give evidence of practice within educational institutions, with recent research indicating that 3162 psychological counselling centres for students were actively functioning, which leads to the conclusion that there is a noticeable need for

psychological counselling centres for students relative to the number of institutions (Franzoi et al., 2022).

Conclusions

The necessity of establishing student counselling centres is undeniable, but for the sustenance of a counselling centre, it is crucial to first familiarize oneself with the structure of its users, their attitudes, and beliefs.

With the intention of comprehending the structure of students' attitudes towards psychotherapy, considering attitudes as potential and significant indicators for directing future actions in the establishment and promotion of the student counselling centre, the research involving students from all study programs at this university clarified the initial intention of the researcher. Specifically, the results demonstrated that within this structure of students, four variations in attitude towards psychotherapy are observable: positive, negative, sceptical, or hesitant attitudes. Positive, negative, and sceptical attitudes differentiate between humanities and non-humanities students, while hesitation does not create significant differences between students of various orientations. In alignment with prior research, we concur that the education and promotion of psychotherapy, its values and possibilities, remain pertinent issues requiring attention.

Young people are the foundation of a healthy society, and caring for mental health is the starting point for caring about society as a whole. The results of this research help to illuminate attitudes toward psychotherapy and to understand the broader context of the community. The practical implications focus on creating preventive programs, empowering youth, conducting informative campaigns, and actively promoting positive attitudes toward psychotherapy. This research has also identified significant individual variations, highlighting the need for a personalized approach to this issue. Additionally, considering the stigma that may be influenced by social context, the results can lead to adaptations in therapy and the exploration of more flexible approaches that resonate with contemporary generations, particularly by leveraging digital technologies as a potential. Efforts towards destigmatization should encompass and broaden the cultural context, particularly in smaller communities with specific beliefs and forms of behaviour.

We maintain that in accordance with social changes and the increasing influence of technology, promotion strategies should be adapted to students and potential users of counselling centres. Finally, advocating for educational policies that promote mental health, provide information, and educate young people must be implemented in a way that does not rely solely on professional guidance but is integrated into every level of education.

References

- Addis, M. E., & Mahalik, J. R. (2003). Men, masculinity, and the contexts of help seeking. *American Psychologist*, 58(1), 5–14. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.58.1.5>
- Ajzen, I., & Fishbein, M. (2005). The Influence of Attitudes on Behavior. In *The handbook of attitudes* (pp. 173–221). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.
- Angermeyer, M. C., van der Auwera, S., Carta, M. G., & Schomerus, G. (2017). Public attitudes towards psychiatry and psychiatric treatment at the beginning of the 21st century: a systematic review and meta-analysis of population surveys. *World psychiatry: official journal of the World Psychiatric Association (WPA)*, 16(1), 50–61. <https://doi.org/10.1002/wps.20383>
- Awabil, G., & Clifford, A. (2018). Attitude of Ghanaian University students towards online counselling attitude of Ghanaian University Students towards online counselling. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 9, 10–16. <https://core.ac.uk/reader/234641510>
- Bendtsen, M., Müssener, U., Linderoth, C., & Thomas, K. (2020). A Mobile Health Intervention for Mental Health Promotion Among University Students: Randomized Controlled Trial. *JMIR mHealth and uHealth*, 8(3), e17208. <https://doi.org/10.2196/17208>
- Bonabi, H., Müller, M., Ajdacic-Gross, V., Eisele, J., Rodgers, S., Seifritz, E., Rössler, W., & Rüsch, N. (2016). Mental Health Literacy, Attitudes to Help Seeking, and Perceived Need as Predictors of Mental Health Service Use: A Longitudinal Study. *The Journal of nervous and mental disease*, 204(4), 321–324. <https://doi.org/10.1097/NMD.0000000000000488>
- Braun-Koch, K., Rief, W., & Teige-Mocigemba, S. (2022). Changing attitudes towards psychotherapy via social observations: are similarities more important than

discrepancies? *BMC psychology*, 10(1), 286. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40359-022-00952-z>

Bruffaerts, R., Mortier, P., Auerbach, R. P., Alonso, J., Hermsillo De la Torre, A. E., Cuijpers, P., Demyttenaere, K., Ebert, D. D., Green, J. G., Hasking, P., Stein, D. J., Ennis, E., Nock, M. K., Pinder-Amaker, S., Sampson, N. A., Vilagut, G., Zaslavsky, A. M., Kessler, R. C., & WHO WMH-ICS Collaborators (2019). Lifetime and 12-month treatment for mental disorders and suicidal thoughts and behaviors among first year college students. *International journal of methods in psychiatric research*, 28(2), e1764. <https://doi.org/10.1002/mpr.1764>

Bowman, B., & Payne, J. (2011). A profile of students receiving counselling services at a university in post-apartheid South Africa. *Journal of Child & Adolescent Mental Health*, 23(2), 143–153. <https://doi.org/10.2989/17280583.2011.634544>

Constantinou, C. S., Georgiou, M., & Perdikogianni, M. (2017). Medical Students' Attitudes and Beliefs towards Psychotherapy: A Mixed Research Methods Study. *Behavioral sciences (Basel, Switzerland)*, 7(3), 55. <https://doi.org/10.3390/bs7030055>

Das, J. K., Salam, R. A., Arshad, A., Finkelstein, Y., & Bhutta, Z. A. (2016). Interventions for Adolescent Substance Abuse: An Overview of Systematic Reviews. *The Journal of adolescent health: official publication of the Society for Adolescent Medicine*, 59(4S), S61–S75. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2016.06.021>

Dear, B. F., Fogliati, V. J., Fogliati, R., Johnson, B., Boyle, O., Karin, E., Gandy, M., Kayrouz, R., Staples, L. G., & Titov, N. (2018). Treating anxiety and depression in young adults: A randomised controlled trial comparing clinician-guided versus self-guided Internet-delivered cognitive behavioural therapy. *The Australian and New Zealand journal of psychiatry*, 52(7), 668–679. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0004867417738055>

Digiuni, M., Jones, F. W., & Camic, P. M. (2013). Perceived social stigma and attitudes towards seeking therapy in training: a cross-national study. *Psychotherapy (Chicago, Ill.)*, 50(2), 213-223. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0028784>

Elkins, A.L., Swift, J.K., & Campbell, K. (2017). Clients' perceptions of personal psychotherapy or counselling for therapists. *Counselling Psychology Quarterly*, 30, 211 - 224. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09515070.2016.1196342>

Fandie, K. (2015). Students' attitudes towards counselling: a cross-cultural study. [Master's thesis]. University of the Free State, Bloemfontein

- Fay, V., Fay, N., & Walla, P. (2016). Attitudes of psychology students toward expressive therapies. In C. Duregger (Ed.), *Cogent Psychology* (Vol. 3, Issue 1, p. 1241459). Informa UK Limited. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311908.2016.1241459>
- Fazlagić A., Rakić-Bajić G. Stav studenata prema psihoterapiji. [Attitude of students towards psychotherapy] *Pons*. 2011; (8) 1: 48-52.
- Flisher, A. J., De Beer, J. P., & Bokhorst, F. (2002). Characteristics of students receiving counselling services at the University of Cape Town, South Africa. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, 30(3), 299–310. <https://doi.org/10.1080/030698802100002000>
- Franzoi, I. G., Sauta, M. D., Carnevale, G., & Granieri, A. (2022). Student Counseling Centers in Europe: A Retrospective Analysis. *Frontiers in psychology*, 13, 894423. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.894423>
- Furnham, A., & Wardley, Z. (1990). Lay theories of psychotherapy: I. Attitudes toward, and beliefs about, psychotherapy and therapists. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 46(6), 878–890. [https://doi.org/10.1002/1097-4679\(199011\)46:6%3c878::AID-JCLP2270460630%3e3.0.CO;2-T](https://doi.org/10.1002/1097-4679(199011)46:6%3c878::AID-JCLP2270460630%3e3.0.CO;2-T)
- Gervas, R., Bueno, G., Garcia-Ullan, L., de La Mata, R., & Roncero, C. (2020). Is There a Stigma towards Mental Illness among Medical Students? - A Systematic Review of the 1997-2018 Literature. In *Journal of Evolution of Medical and Dental Sciences* (Vol. 9, Issue 05, pp. 299–303). Akshantala Enterprises Private Limited. <https://doi.org/10.14260/jemds/2020/67>
- Giovazolias, T., Leontopoulou, S., & Triliva, S. (2010). Assessment of Greek university students' counselling needs and attitudes: An exploratory study. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling*, 32(2), 101–116. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10447-010-9092-2>.
- Hill, C. E., Satterwhite, D. B., Larrimore, M. L., Mann, A. R., Johnson, V. C., Simon, R. E., ... Knox, S. (2012). Attitudes about psychotherapy: A qualitative study of introductory psychology students who have never been in psychotherapy and the influence of attachment style. *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research*, 12(1), 13–24. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14733145.2011.629732>
- Huțul, T.-D., Pachița, I.-C., Karner-Huțuleac, A., & Gherguț, A. (2022). Attitudes towards Psychotherapy in Relation to Self-Stigma of Seeking Help and Coping Style. The Role of Interactions with Disabled People. *Logos Universality Mentality Education*

Novelty: Social Sciences, 11(2), 32-44.
<https://doi.org/10.18662/lumenss/11.2/68>

- Hysenbegasi, A., Hass, S. L., & Rowland, C. R. (2005). The impact of depression on the academic productivity of university students. *The journal of mental health policy and economics*, 8(3), 145–151.
- Jacobi, F., Höfler, M., Siegert, J., Mack, S., Gerschler, A., Scholl, L., Busch, M. A., Hapke, U., Maske, U., Seiffert, I., Gaebel, W., Maier, W., Wagner, M., Zielasek, J., & Wittchen, H. U. (2014). Twelve-month prevalence, comorbidity and correlates of mental disorders in Germany: The Mental Health Module of the German Health Interview and Examination Survey for Adults (DEGS1-MH). *International journal of methods in psychiatric research*, 23(3), 304–319. <https://doi.org/10.1002/mpr.1439>
- Jakovčić, I., Živčić-Bećirević, I. (2009). Stavovi studenata prema traženju stručne psihološke pomoći [Attitudes of students towards seeking professional psychological help]. *Socijalna psihijatrija*, 37, 3-10.
- Jokić-Begić, N., Kamenov, Ž., & Korajlija, A.L. (2005). Kvalitativno i kvantitativno ispitivanje sadržaja stigme prema psihičkim bolesnicima [Qualitative and quantitative examination of the content of stigma towards mentally ill patients]. *Socijalna psihijatrija*, 33(1):10-19.
- Knapstad, M., Sivertsen, B., Knudsen, A. K., Smith, O. R. F., Aarø, L. E., Lønning, K. J., & Skogen, J. C. (2021). Trends in self-reported psychological distress among college and university students from 2010 to 2018. *Psychological medicine*, 51(3), 470–478. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0033291719003350>
- Komiya, N., Good, G. E., & Sherrod, N. B. (2000). Emotional openness as a predictor of college students' attitudes toward seeking psychological help. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 47(1), 138–143. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0167.47.1.138>
- Lauber, C., Ajdacic-Gross, V., Fritschi, N. et al. Mental health literacy in an educational elite – an online survey among university students. *BMC Public Health* 5, 44 (2005). <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2458-5-44>
- Lindinger-Sternart, S. (2014). Help-Seeking Behaviors of Men for Mental Health and the Impact of Diverse Cultural Backgrounds. In *International Journal of Social Science Studies* (Vol. 3, Issue 1). Redfame Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.11114/ijsss.v3i1.519>

- Löffler-Stastka, H., Blüml, V., Ponocny-Seliger, E., Hodal, M., Jandl-Jager, E., & Springer-Kremser, M. (2010). Einstellungen von Medizinstudenten zu Psychotherapie: Veränderungen nach Unterricht über Psychische Funktionen in Gesundheit und Krankheit [Students' attitudes towards psychotherapy: changes after a course on psychic functions in health and illness]. *Psychotherapie, Psychosomatik, medizinische Psychologie*, 60(3-4), 118–125. <https://doi.org/10.1055/s-0029-1216369>
- Nam, S. K., Chu, H. J., Lee, M. K., Lee, J. H., Kim, N., & Lee, S. M. (2010). A meta-analysis of gender differences in attitudes toward seeking professional psychological help. *Journal of American college health: J of ACH*, 59(2), 110–116. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07448481.2010.483714>
- Osborn, T. G., Li, S., Saunders, R., & Fonagy, P. (2022). University students' use of mental health services: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *International journal of mental health systems*, 16(1), 57. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13033-022-00569-0>
- Pastner, B., Alexopoulos, J., Rohm, C., Preusche, I., & Loeffler-Stastka, H. (2014). Development of therapeutic attitudes: attitudes of trainees in training. In *European Journal of Educational Sciences (Vol. 01, Issue 01)*. European Scientific Institute, ESI. <https://doi.org/10.19044/ejes.v1no1a12>
- Pfeiffer, S., & In-Albon, T. (2023). Gender specificity of self-stigma, public stigma, and help-seeking sources of mental disorders in youths. *Stigma and Health*, 8(1), 124–132. <https://doi.org/10.1037/sah0000366>
- Poreddi, V., Thimmaiah, R., & Math, S. B. (2015). Attitudes toward people with mental illness among medical students. *Journal of neurosciences in rural practice*, 6(3), 349–354. <https://doi.org/10.4103/0976-3147.154564>
- Pušara, M. (1996). Stavovi prema psihoterapiji. Diplomski rad, Filozofski fakultet, Univerzitet u Novom Sadu [Attitudes towards psychotherapy. Diploma thesis, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Novi Sad].
- Qiu, L., Xu, H., Li, Y. et al. Gender differences in attitudes towards psychological help-seeking among chinese medical students: a comparative analysis. *BMC Public Health* 24, 1314 (2024). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-024-18826-x>
- Rief, W., & Anna Glombiewski, J. (2017). The role of expectations in mental disorders and their treatment. *World psychiatry: official journal of the World Psychiatric Association (WPA)*, 16(2), 210–211. <https://doi.org/10.1002/wps.20427>

- Rutkowska, E., Furmańska, J., Lane, H., Marques, C. C., Martins, M. J., Sahar, N. U., Meixner, J., Tullio, V., Argo, A., & Bermeo Barros, D. M. (2023). Determinants of psychotherapists' attitudes to online psychotherapy. *Frontiers in psychiatry*, 14, 1196907. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyt.2023.1196907>
- Sheldon, E., Simmonds-Buckley, M., Bone, C., Mascarenhas, T., Chan, N., Wincott, M., Gleeson, H., Sow, K., Hind, D., & Barkham, M. (2021). Prevalence and risk factors for mental health problems in university undergraduate students: A systematic review with meta-analysis. *Journal of affective disorders*, 287, 282–292. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2021.03.054>
- Strauss, B., Spangenberg, L., Brähler, E., & Bormann, B. (2015). Attitudes Towards (Psychotherapy) Groups: Results of a Survey in a Representative Sample. *International journal of group psychotherapy*, 65(3), 410–430. https://doi.org/10.1521/ijgp_2014_64_001
- Ten Have, M., de Graaf, R., Ormel, J., Vilagut, G., Kovess, V., Alonso, J., & ESEMeD/MHEDEA 2000 Investigators (2010). Are attitudes towards mental health help-seeking associated with service use? Results from the European Study of Epidemiology of Mental Disorders. *Social psychiatry and psychiatric epidemiology*, 45(2), 153–163. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00127-009-0050-4>
- Tenjović, L. & Srna, J., (2015). Stigma i stav prema traženju profesionalne psihološke pomoći. 64–69. [Stigma and attitude towards seeking professional psychological help. Book abstracts of XVII Empirical research in psychology, Institute of Psychology, Laboratory for Experimental Psychology, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade, 64–69.]
- Voracek, M., Jandl-Jager, E., & Springer-Kremser, M. (2001). Medical students' attitudes towards psychotherapy: an intervention-based pre-post comparison. *Wiener klinische Wochenschrift*, 113(11-12), 416–423.
- Wills, T. A. (1992). The helping process in the context of personal relationships. In S. Spacapan & S. Oskamp (Eds.), *Helping and being helped: Naturalistic studies* (pp. 17–48). Sage Publications, Inc.
- Young, R. A. (2009). Counseling in the Canadian mosaic: A cultural perspective. In L. Gerstein & P. P. Heppner (Eds). *International handbook of cross-cultural counseling: Cultural assumptions and practices worldwide* (pp. 359-368). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Zhou, X, Edirippulige, S, Bai, X, and Bambling, M. (2021) Are online mental health interventions for youth effective? A systematic review. *J Telemed Telecare*. 27:638–66. [http://doi: 10.1177/1357633X211047285](http://doi:10.1177/1357633X211047285)

***Internalizing Unequal Access to Higher Education in High School
Students' Perspectives on Studying for the Bacalaureate
Examination in a City in Northwest Romania***

Crina Tomoiagă

*MA Student, Department of Educational Sciences, West University of Timișoara, Romania, email
address: crina.tomoiaga02@e-uvv.ro*

Leyla Safta-Zecheria

*Lecturer, Department of Educational Sciences, West University of Timișoara, Postdoctoral
Researcher at the Faculty of Theatre and Film, Babeș-Bolyai University, Romania & External
Research Affiliate at the Inequalities and Democracy Workgroup, Democracy Institute, Central
European University Budapest/Vienna, email address: leyla.safta@e-uvv.ro*

Abstract: The present paper investigates the differences in how meaning is ascribed to studying for the Bacalaureate examination by 12th grade students attending a technological and theoretical track high school in Northwest Romania. Building on ten semi-structured interviews with high school students preparing for the Bacalaureate examination, the present paper argues that the unequal access to high quality academic education in high schools is internalized by students through the ways in which they relate to this exam. Technological and theoretical track students both aspire to attend higher education at some point after graduating. However, whereas theoretical track students view the Bacalaureate as a necessary step that will likely validate their learning efforts already confirmed through their previous educational pathways, technical track students view the Bacalaureate as a serious potential obstacle and major event that will determine their future educational and professional pathway and that makes their aspirational horizon appear uncertain. Students internalize the different preparation received and chances for passing the examination through the ways in which they relate to learning in preparation of the exam. Whereas theoretical track students discuss preparing for the exam as a positive emotional experience, negative emotions prevail in how students from the technological track discuss the same process. Moreover, whereas the aspirational horizons of theoretical track students seem clearly delineated and are discussed as being within their reach, the opposite is true for technological track students that view their academic future as desirable, yet uncertain, and who face pressure to seek paid employment soon after graduation. Our paper seeks to contribute to the debate surrounding the subjective dimension of the reproduction of socio-educational inequalities in the Romanian educational system.

Keywords: Access to higher education, educational inequality, high school tracks, students' meaning making practices, students' perspectives on learning.

Introduction

Writing for the *Prospects* journal at the beginning of the 1980s, Romania-based sociologist of education Fred Mahler (1981) discussed the relationship between reproduction and social change in the Romanian education system in light of Romania's educational policies aimed at integrating education with production and research. In Mahler's view (1981), this policy could contribute to overcoming the school-related dynamics that led to the reproduction of social inequality through the unequal opportunities that students had upon graduation. Published in English in an international journal edited by the UNESCO, Mahler's position can be read as a reply from within state socialism to the widely circulating theory of cultural and social reproduction of inequalities through education of Bourdieu and Passeron (published in French in 1970). For Mahler, the Romanian education system of his time held the potential to overcome the reproduction of inequalities through, among other points, granting all high school graduates the right to access higher education. However, despite his declared optimism, he was cautious on the point of how successful this transformation was in practice, because as academic educational aspirations were increasing, technological high schools were becoming centers of negative selection in which students who did not perform well enough academically came to be placed. This negative selection of student participation in technological upper secondary education was for Mahler (1981) a transitory phenomenon that would in time be overcome, as long as the possibility for sitting the Baccalaureate examination remained open for all graduating upper secondary students irrespective of the track they had followed.

More than forty years onwards, we open with a short discussion of Mahler's thoughts, as he outlines features of state socialist educational policies that still haunt the system today, despite the rapid expansion of higher education immediately during the transition years (Eisemon et al, 1995). Despite this expansion, Romania remains one of the EU countries with the comparatively lowest levels of tertiary educational attainment (Eurostat, 2024).

According to Mulescu & Ruth (2021), the Romanian pre-university educational system is structured as follows: the early education (nurseries and kindergartens, ages 0 -6), followed by primary education (the equivalent of ISCED 1: ages 6 -11; grades preparatory – 4th grade), lower secondary education (or 'gimnaziu'; ages 11- 14; grades

5th to 8th), followed by upper-secondary education in theoretical, vocational or technological high-schools. (grades 9th – 12th /13th). Students are required to sit national examinations after 8th grade and the exam results heavily impact the possibility of accessing the high school of their choice. Students who score high grades in these exams go on to theoretical high schools (Miulescu & Ruth, 2021: 769). Students that graduate high school can in principle access higher education, provided they pass the Baccalaureate examination. The grading system operates with a scale from one to ten, where one is the lowest mark and ten is the highest mark. The Baccalaureate exam is considered passed if the average of the marks obtained in the three exam subjects is at least six and the student obtains a minimum mark five in each examination. Students who have been in vocational education for three years also have to attend the last two years of secondary education to take the Baccalaureate exam, as there is no alternative pathway into higher education⁷.

Today pathways through and access to higher education are still riddled with socio-economic inequalities. Even though Romanian higher education facilitates a limited number of means-tested scholarships for socio-economically disadvantaged students, and a limited number of public funded places for Roma students and students with disabilities (Mihuț, 2022), additional living costs may push economically vulnerable students into dropping out of university (Bădescu, Sum & Mihuț, 2018:22).

However, the main driver of higher education-related inequalities is the unequal access to university education. The most significant barriers that still limit access to higher education are the high rates of school drop-out and the low rates of enrollment for the Baccalaureate examination (secondary school leaving examination), as well as the relatively low rate of passing the Baccalaureate examination (Mihuț, 2022: 35). Early school leaving disproportionately affects children and young people from poor families, rural areas, marginalized groups, including Roma children and young people (Popa, 2020).

In terms of the training tracks completed by students at secondary school level, data from a recent European Commission report (2023) shows that only just over half of

⁷ Unlike in Romania, in the Finnish education system, students who complete vocational education without taking the national matriculation examination can also access higher education, as it is stated in the Law of Applied Sciences University no. 932/2014. This is possible without the national matriculation exam, but with the professional diploma. Thus, whether in secondary or vocational education, students have the possibility to attend university.

the students from technological secondary schools obtained the Bacculaureate diploma, gaining potential access to university education. On the other hand, the marks in this exam and, therefore, the chances of the student going on to higher education are the result of a combination of economic, social and geographical factors that are not widely publicized. The recent report, *Nonparticipation of High School Students in the Bacculaureate Exam - June 2023 session*, a research report released by the Ministry of Education (Ministerul Educației, 2023a), highlights the myriad of factors that lead to Bacculaureate non-participation and restrict students' access to higher education. These include school absenteeism, difficulties with school transportation for commuter students, learning difficulties accumulated since secondary school, material and financial difficulties of the families and finally, their plans after graduation (Ministerul Educației, 2023a). Unequal access of students to university education is therefore maintained and perpetuated by the unequal participation in the national Bacculaureate examination. However, it may also be perpetuated by the ways in which the students internalize their own positionalities in relation to this exam.

This form of assessment plays its full role in selecting and prioritizing students, highlighting the discrepancies between educational institutions, training pathways and students' access to higher education. At the same time, passing this exam is the only way that allows students to access university education (Ministerul Educației, 2023a) and implicitly to continue their educational path. However, the inequality of opportunities for students to pass the Bacculaureate is supported by the current configuration of the upper secondary education system, but also by social factors. Thus, as not all students have equal chances to pass the Bacculaureate, the chances to access university education are also unequal.

Moreover, due to the high levels of educational inequalities of previous educational levels, the low educational attainment is unequally distributed. This is a product of a system that considers schools in socio-economically disadvantaged areas as inefficient, whereas highly selective schools are viewed as efficient (Țoc, 2018: 158). Furthermore, opportunities and performance are strongly correlated with the cultural capital of parents as visible in the number of books owned in a household (Botezat, 2019), the socio-occupational status of parents and the resources available to the school (Țoc, 2016).

On a general note, the education system is one of the most important social stratification structures (Domina et al. 2017), which are defined as “social structures that divide people into categories” (Massey, 2007 apud Domina et al., 2017). From this perspective, the configuration of upper secondary education in Romania emphasizes the hierarchy of educational institutions, further developed at the level of the hierarchy of sections (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). Within the Romanian education system, secondary and dual or vocational technological secondary education operate (Bocoş and Jucan, 2022). According to the law on pre-university education no. 198/2023, the tracks that segment the curriculum horizontally and on the basis of which the high schools operating in Romania are classified, are: theoretical, vocational and technological. In turn, each of these tracks is divided into profiles and specializations, which make it possible to differentiate even more sharply the educational paths followed by students with apparently similar schooling up to the end of the eighth grade. Depending on the grade obtained in the National Assessment that students take at the end of the 8th grade, they can choose which high school or VET school to attend. However, Gheba (2018) draws attention to the fact that the centralized student allocation mechanism “sorts” students into high schools according to the grade obtained, without taking into account other student characteristics. In addition, theoretical high schools are much more sought after because of the specializations they offer, while technological high schools end up being accessed by students who did not obtain grades high enough to enter a theoretical high school. One of the lines along which this unequal distribution of educational attainment happens is the rural/urban divide that is visible in consistently lower grade averages in National Assessment (an exam that is sat after the 8th grade, the results of which are used to rank students for high school entrance), as well as in enrolling in university after successful completion of the Baccalaureate examination (Florian & Țoc, 2020: 4-5).

Therefore, it can be said that the Baccalaureate examination is a larger-scale replication of the National Assessment that is nevertheless conducted on unequal grounds for the participating students. Formally, educational performance-based segregation has been explicitly prohibited through the *Ministry of Education Framework Order nr. 6134/2016 Regarding the Prohibition of School Segregation in Pre-University Education Units (Ordinul nr. 6134/2016 privind interzicerea segregării școlare în unitățile de învățământ preuniversitar)*, Article 7. However, Article 7c establishes that high school admission procedures are not affected by this legislation, de facto allowing for systematic

separation of high-achieving and low-achieving students into high school tracks. Most notably, this is visible in the most recent ranking of high schools in relation to the results of the National Assessment and Baccalureate, in which the similarity between admission grades based on National Assessment averages and Baccalureate grades is clearly visible. Moreover, the first technological high school in the ranking can be found in position 266 and interestingly manifests a clear tendency of improvement of students grades from admission to graduation (for the data see Bacplus, 2024).

Moreover, the national report *The State of Pre-University Education for the 2022-2023 School Year* (Ministerul Educației 2023b, original title in Romanian: *Raport privind starea învățământului preuniversitar din România 2022 - 2023*) shows that "by training tracks, the lowest pass rate [for the Baccalaureate examination] is recorded in technological high schools and the highest in theoretical high schools". Moreover, the European Commission report for 2023 indicates that only 56.6% of the total number of candidates enrolled from this track passed the exam. Furthermore, Gheba (2018) suggests that the precondition for passing the Baccalaureate is ensured by attending a theoretical high school itself. Thus, secondary school, and then the training track followed by the students, accentuates and perpetuates the educational inequalities between students in terms of their chances of success in the Baccalaureate examination.

From a different angle, educational inequality prevalent in the Romanian educational system is internalized by both high-achieving students that attend so-called 'top ranking' high schools (Țoc, 2018), as well as those who are underperforming (Borș, 2020). As Borș (2020) has shown, the ways in which students with low socio-economic status discuss school learning reveals the fact that they see themselves as being 'the problem' through internalizing a deficit-oriented discourse promoted by teachers. In this context, structural features that shape learning, such as the need of support or communication, or contradictory demands on the time of students due to care responsibilities are ignored, and learning is internalized as an act of individual responsibility that makes students appear as 'lazy' in their own eyes (Borș, 2020). From different contexts, we know that the internalization of cultural values in relation to appropriate classroom behaviors also happens in relation to how parents who are differently positioned in class terms (working class and middle class) coach children differently in relation to appropriate classroom behavior (Calarco, 2014), an aspect that is also reflected in their classroom behavior, facilitating the expression of views and

needs in middle class students, while working class students are encouraged to refrain from these behaviors (Calarco, 2011).

Furthermore, another aspect that has been stressed in relation to the reproduction of inequalities through education, namely the participation in paid extra-educational activities. On the one hand, as Hatos (2006: 227f.) has shown, private tutoring classes are a vehicle by which economic resources come to be normalized at the end of high school in an unequal competition for access to higher education. In the time since Hatos' study, a further vehicle for reproducing inequalities through education has developed, namely the participation in extracurricular activities (Savu, Lipan & Crăciun, 2020).

In this paper, we seek to look at the ways in which high school students from different high school tracks internalize their unequal access to higher education through the ways in which they discuss preparing for the Bacculaureate examination. The present paper is based on ten semi-structures interviews with ten 12th grade high school students from one theoretical and one technological high school from the same city in Northwest Romania. The research aimed to identify the differences between the perspectives of students from the two tracks, theoretical and technological, regarding the Bacculaureate examination as an educational experience – pointing to how the unequal access to higher education in relation to the unequal possibilities of succeeding to pass this exam are discussed and experienced by the students in advance of the examination.

Methodology

The research question that we explored is "*How do the perspectives of 12th grade students on learning for the Bacculaureate exam differ according to their high school track?*". As it can be seen above, the current configuration of secondary education in Romania, branched into three tracks, each in turn divided into different profiles and specializations, directed the purpose of this research. We anticipated that the unequal access to higher education is reflected in the ways in which students reflect on the process of preparing for the Bacculaureate exam, as well as in how they relate to the (un)likeliness of passing the examination in relation to their aspirational horizons.

1. *Secondary research questions*

To approach our research question, we formulated two more specific secondary questions that guide the analysis presented in this paper:

Q.S.1. How do students' meaning making processes surrounding the Bacculaureate examination as an educational experience differ depending on the high school track attended?

This secondary research question refers to the ways in which students understand their experience in relation to and ascribe meaning to the Bacculaureate exam in relation to their own past (biographical) and future (aspirational) educational path. This question attempts to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the meaning making processes of students in relation to the Bacculaureate exam.

Q.S.2. How do students project their aspirations in relation to the Bacculaureate exam, depending on the high school track?

The second secondary research question aims to investigate students' aspirations and look at how they relate to their own aspirations. Furthermore, this question explores a possible link between the subjective experience of preparing for the Bacculaureate exam and what students aspire to in terms of their educational and career aspirations.

2. *Research design*

Given the research purpose stated above, as well as the secondary research questions described, the research design used is a qualitative one, the research method used in order to carry out the study is the semi-structured interview because it "directly solicits the perspectives of the people we want to study" (Saldana, 2011, p.75). Moreover, we considered the interview method appropriate to answer the research question, "How do the perspectives of 12th grade students on learning for the Bacculaureate exam differ according to their high school track?" because it offered us the possibility to investigate in depth and contrast the subjective experiences of students who have been differently positioned within the educational system.

3. *Participants*

Ten twelfth grade students participated in this study. Two high schools were chosen as emblematic for the two different tracks (theoretical and technological), within the school context convenience sampling was practiced. The first author introduced the

possibility of participating in the study in class and was contacted by students who were willing to participate in the study. The interviews took place in the spring of 2024, therefore the students were preparing for their Baccalaureate examination (held in summer 2024) at the time of taking part in the interview. We chose the timing because at the time of interview, the students had not had the experience of sitting the Baccalaureate examination, so their discussions of this exam in the interviews reveals how they connect their past and present educational experience in an unequally structured system with the positioned anticipation of results in the examination, as well as how this positioned anticipation structures their aspirational horizons.

Five of them studied at a technological track high school, specializing in Electronics and Automation, and the other participants studied in a different, theoretical track high school, specializing in Natural Sciences. Both high schools were based in a large city in the Northwest of Romania.

Demographically, the total number of participants amounted to seven women and three men. All participating students were eighteen years old at the time of research and lived in urban areas. Whereas the theoretical track students were all female, the technological track students were both male (3) and female (2). This reflected the convenience sampling technique used and interest and availability to consent to participating in the study. As such, the disbalanced gender composition did not, unfortunately, allow for a thorough investigation of relevant gender differences in relating to learning and education, that should form an object of a future study.

4. Semi-structured interviews

Data was co-generated through carrying out individual semi-structured interviews that followed a previously elaborated interview guide consisting of 29 open-ended questions plus demographic questions. The interviews were conducted by the first author and both authors were involved in the elaboration of the interview guide, as well as in the data analysis and interpretation process. The questions in the interview guide were formulated after browsing several scientific resources on social inequalities perpetuated by educational inequalities.

The interview guide contains introductory questions, thematic questions, transition questions to the next topic, and final questions. The thematic questions are each subordinate to a secondary research question presented above. Thus, the question

Could you describe what you feel when you think about the Baccalaureate? develops the secondary research question *How do students' meaning making processes surrounding the Baccalaureate examination as an educational experience differ depending on the high school track attended?*

5. Steps in the research process

To gain access to research participants, we contacted the head teacher in each class of students from the technological track and presented to the whole class the purpose of the research and the way it would be carried out. Given that most of the students in the class commute and do not live in the city where the high school was based, we agreed with the students to conduct the interviews in the high school. After this first meeting, in two other days this paper's first author went to the high school and conducted the individual interviews with the five students who had agreed to participate.

In the case of the interaction with the theoretical high school track participants, the first author spoke with five female students and was able to set up interview appointments according to their preferences. All five meetings were held outside the school.

The first author assured all participants of the confidentiality and anonymity of their answers, as well as of the processing of the information provided solely for the purposes of the research. Informed consent was obtained from all participating students prior to the actual interview. All 10 interviews were recorded using a personal cell phone, with an average duration of 40-45 minutes (30 minutes the shortest and 60 minutes the longest). Transcription of the interviews was done using the Voice Typing function within the online application Google Docs and was edited retrospectively.

The data was analyzed through inductive coding. The interview guide was structured around thematic areas (emotions, motivation, interactions, aspirations, beliefs, attitudes). Within these thematic areas, we coded the data into core codes and sub-codes from the perspective of how they related to the main research question. The codebook followed the design outlined by Mihas & Odum Institute (2019). The final codes and sub-codes are as follows:

- a) Representing learning as an intellectual activity: Through this code we investigated how students discussed the intellectual aspects of their learning in

preparation for the Bacculaureate examination. The sub-codes reflecting ways of representing learning employed by the students were:

- Difficult effort
 - Benefit.
- b) Emotions associated with learning: Through this code we investigated how the students emotionally related to the process of learning in preparation for the Bacculaureate examination. The sub-codes reflecting emotions associated with learning were:
- Negative emotions
 - Positive emotions
- c) Anticipated exam performance: Through this code we investigated how students discussed their perceived likeliness of passing the Bacculaureate examination:
- (Hope of) passing the exam with minimum marks
 - (Aspiration to) high scores in the examination
- d) Private tutoring ('meditații'): Through his code we investigated how students discussed their access to, need for private tutoring, as well as the goals they set for engaging in private tutoring.
- e) Meanings attributed to the Bacculaureate exam: Through this synthetic code we investigated how the students attributed meaning to the Bacculaureate examination. The code brings together aspects from all other codes in relation to the research questions. The two sub-codes that describe the meaning attributed to the Bacculaureate examination by students are:
- Directing the future
 - Possibility of self-validation
- f) Aspirational horizon: Through this code we investigated how meaning making surrounding the Bacculaureate examination shapes students' aspirations after graduation, in relation to the following sub-codes:
- Income
 - Educational aspirations
 - Professional aspirations.

We structured our interpretation of the data following these codes. In this paper, we focus on the codes "Meanings attributed to the Bacculaureate exam" and "Aspirational

horizons” of students – since these codes show synthetically how the Bacalaureate examination is perceived unequally by the soon-to-be graduates of different tracks within the Romanian high school system.

Analysis and interpretation

1. Meanings of the Bacalaureate exam

The specific question *How do students’ meaning making processes surrounding the Bacalaureate examination as an educational experience differ depending on the high school track attended?* revealed significant differences in how participating students from different tracks anticipated the Bacalaureate examination. Three out of the five students studying in the theoretical track, specializing in Natural Sciences, perceive the Bacalaureate exam as an opportunity for self-validation of their own intellectual abilities and of the information they have acquired throughout their secondary schooling. Moreover, they also describe the exam as an opportunity to offer proof of gratitude to teachers, revealing a moralizing dimension of the anticipated results. They want to get high exam grades to reaffirm their own intellectual abilities, already demonstrated through the high grades previously obtained in the National Assessment (after 8th grade). From the students’ perspective, the high marks also represent the efforts made by the class teachers, as well as the realization of the teachers’ expectations regarding the performance of the students in the Natural Sciences specialization. All these students want to go to a *good university and degree program*. In this case, from the students’ perspectives, the university admission does not appear conditional on passing the exam, but on obtaining an excellent grade. This is due to the fact that students in the theoretical track viewed as self-evident that they would pass the Bacalaureate examination without any difficulty. Moreover, as admission criteria to many BA degree programs in Romanian higher education take into account the results obtained in the Bacalaureate examination as part of the admission average, in contexts with competitive admission requirements the grades obtained in the Bacalaureate examination are relevant. Thus, the following extracts from the transcripts of the interviews illustrate the meanings attributed by the students to the Bacalaureate exam:

(...) but it's simply also something I do for myself, after so many years of studying, I wouldn't want to mess up and get a low grade. And in gratitude to the teachers who have been there for us.

(L – student of the theoretical track, specializing in Natural Sciences)

I want to demonstrate that, although the Baccalaureate exam is not so complex, at least in terms of critical thinking, I want to demonstrate that I can learn a very large volume and that I can organize myself in such a way that I can learn so much.

(I – student in the theoretical track, specializing in Natural Sciences)

At the same time, three of the five students in the technological track, specializing in electronics and automation, consider the Baccalaureate exam as a moment that can largely determine their immediate and even distant future: on the one hand, the possibility to study at university, and the need to build an alternative route for their professional future, on the other hand.

Here we can also see the difference between students' perspectives about the Baccalaureate exam as they relate it to access to the university: the students from the technological track perceive the passing of the exam as the most significant step for their educational future, whereas the participants from the theoretical track perceive the exam as an intermediate step towards their future. As it has been shown previously, students can apply for university admission only if they have passed the Baccalaureate examination. At the same time, all the five interviewed students want to access university studies. Yet, they feel that the grades obtained in the Baccalaureate examination might become an obstacle in this regard. That's why they feel mostly negative emotions in relation to the examination. This is also why they make an extra effort trying to assure that they will pass the examination, by taking private (tutoring) lessons.

Moreover, to the question *What relevance does the Baccalaureate exam have for your plans?* one of the three students uses an absolutist language, emphasizing the role he attributes to the Baccalaureate exam regarding the shaping of his future path, as can be seen below:

Well, ... what can I say... I mean it's important because it affects my life, that's why it's important, that's about all, it doesn't really help me to grow.

(D – student in technological track, Electronics and Automation specialization)

All ten participants want to pursue university studies, but the ways in which they discuss their chances are not the same. The study reveals that students from the technological track perceive the Baccalaureate exam as a compelling moment due to the uncertainty of passing the exam with the minimum grade. Furthermore, technological track students are additionally confronted with the uncertainty of accessing university at all after the examination.

Nevertheless, the interviews also bring to light the fact that students in the technological track feel that they have to ensure that they pass the Baccalaureate exam, more specifically, that they obtain the minimum passing grade. For this reason, they turn to private tutoring services and are subjected to an additional financial effort. In comparison, in the case of students in the theoretical track, passing the exam with high marks is ensured by the educational institution, through the quality of the educational services they receive. However, some of the theoretical students use private tutoring services, but only in preparation for highly competitive university admission examinations, e.g. for degrees in medicine.

Moreover, one of the research participants from the technological track describes that many of her classmates are commuters and therefore unable to attend the extra exam preparation classes offered by teachers at school, as can be seen below:

We only solved subjects for Romanian when we had tutoring at school with the Romanian teacher, but during in the Romanian classes, when all the children could be there, we didn't do it. In tutoring, she would give us a subject. But in tutoring there were 5-6 students. Not everyone can stay, because the tutoring is after school, and many colleagues are commuters and have to leave.

(S – student of the technological track, Electronics and Automation specialization)

As Webb et al. (2015) pointed out, students' expectations to attend university are affected by neighborhood factors, particularly for regional students. In this case, for these students, commuting implies a restriction of the available learning time in the subjects

for the exam, as well as physical and psychological exhaustion. Therefore, commuting students are more likely to experience fatigue, need for rest, and thus learning for the examination is restricted to a smaller number of hours, and certain opportunities are unavailable such as accessing tutoring sessions provided by the school. It can be seen how the qualitative and quantitative differences in the preparation offered to students at school, students' financial situation or geographical factors accentuate the differences between students in terms of their chances of passing the Baccalaureate and furthermore their chances of accessing higher education. Thus, the influence of socio-economic factors on the perpetuation of educational inequalities and on access to higher education is highlighted.

2. Higher education and students' aspirations

The student body of the high schools where the participating students are studying is the result of an unequal distribution of the results obtained in the National Assessment exam and conversely of unequal access to resources that were mobilized to facilitate preparation for this exam. Students who entered the technological track did not obtain high enough marks to enter a theoretical high school, and this may have been a result of the lack of resources to invest in private tutoring, as well as the unequal quality of education in the rural areas where a significant number of the students came from. Therefore, the inductive data analysis outlined secondary insights that were not anticipated through the research questions. This was visible in the fact that technological track students would live in rural areas and commute to attend high school in an urban area, as opposed to theoretical track students that lived in the city in which they went to high school. Thus, from the reports of the participating students from the two tracks, they appeared to differ in terms of socio-economic background. This was visible in the way the students from the technological track internalized pressure to become independent financially and how this pressure then translated into different aspirations for the time after they would graduate high school. The following extracts are illustrative:

I'm going to get a job. If I go abroad, I'm still going to get a job. (...) It's useless to say what I want it to be. I want it to be an easy life, but it won't be easy at all.

(D – student of the technological track, Electronics and Automation specialization)

After the Bacculaureate, I have plans to go and work abroad and so on, to go during the summer, to go and work, to make money for the future. For myself, for the house...

(R – student of the technological track, Electronics and Automation specialization)

Then I started to work full-time [while still attending secondary school], to help my family to support myself and I started disengaging from school [tasks].

(S – student of the technological track, Electronics and Automation specialization)

As is apparent from the data, quoted above, that most students from the technological track did not feel that they had ownership over their educational trajectories and felt that they needed to earn money to make a living through getting a job and were well aware that this will have costs in terms of their potential and current intellectual attainment. Similar to how Goldthorpe (2006: 169f) working class students engage in ‘strategies from below’ in relation to education and social mobility: in order to preserve their class position they leave education early or deprioritize it in order to earn money, rather than maintain their engagement in education, despite being aware that this might have costs in terms of not accessing upwards mobility pathways through education. On the other end, students who come from middle class backgrounds access ‘strategies from above’ (Goldthorpe, 2006: 169f) securing their position by remaining on educational pathway. This trend was also visible in our sample, where aspirations were shaped by the presence of a need to earn money quickly among several of the technological track students and a disengagement from financial concerns and a focus on shaping their own educational trajectory among theoretical track students.

Related to the specific question *How do students project their aspirations in relation to the Bacculaureate exam, depending on the high school track?* relevant differences were identified between the two groups of students from the technological track, Electronics and Automation specialization and the theoretical track, Natural Sciences specialization. Thus, for the students participating in the research from the theoretical track, the Bacculaureate exam is perceived as a mediating, intermediary element in relation to educational and professional aspirations. All five students described with determination both the future educational path, i.e. the desired university and degree program, and the anticipated professional perspective. When asked *What do you imagine your life will look*

like in ten years' time? four out of five students gave a clear description of the profession they would have, but also of the level of education they would have attained. Here is an illustrative answer of one student:

I will probably have my bachelor's and master's degree. I will be working on my PhD. I think I will have a career in graphic design.

(AN – student of the theoretical track, specializing in Natural Sciences)

Therefore, higher education is not an option for these students, but a self-evident path for them. As they anticipate high exam grades for the Baccalaureate, it is natural for them to anticipate high performance also in academic contexts. Furthermore, none of the students mentioned terms such as *money* or *salary*, it is obvious that participants from the theoretical track consider that they have the resources that allow them to project high educational and professional aspirations.

In contrast, for the students in the technological track, the link between the meanings attributed to the Baccalaureate exam and the way in which educational and professional aspirations are projected is evident. All five students aspire to higher education, but all of them realize that access to university is conditioned by passing the Baccalaureate exam. Also, it can be noticed that students' desire to access higher education is placed differently in their aspirational hierarchy. For these students, finding a job after high school is the first point to which they refer, and later they express their intention to attend university. Moreover, the subsequent educational path conditions the projection of professional aspirations, so that for three of the five students the professional horizon is described with uncertainty and lack of clarity. At the same time, the other two students seem to project their future with more certainty.

Thus, we can notice successive constraints on the aspirational horizons that have as their initial point the Baccalaureate exam, for three students participating in the research from the technological track. The following sentence is representative of the above:

I don't know, to go to college, if I pass the Bacalaureate, of course. I don't know, make something of myself. I'd really like to be a physical therapist. I don't know, I'd like to be able to end up having money to help other people.

(S – student of the technological track, Electronics and Automation specialization)

At the same time, the interdependence between anticipated performance and the projection of educational and career aspirations can be observed, which reinforces the results of more recent studies. Thus, the interaction between school performance and students' aspirations projection (Astleithner et al., 2023, Miko & Hatos, 2024) were also highlighted by the present research. Moreover, in line with Reay's (1998) assertions regarding the influences of family and educational background on decisions about pursuing higher education, the results of the study reveal how this interaction differs according to the students' track and specialization. Thus, the context of the Bacalaureate exam highlights the profound uncertainty, on the one hand, and the categorical determination, on the other hand, shown by the students regarding the design of their own educational and professional aspirations.

Concluding discussion

All interviewed students aspired to continue their studies after graduating from high school, immediately or at a later point in time. This aspiration took the form of a carefully laid out plan in the case of students attending a theoretical track, whereas in the case of students attending a technological track, it was noted as an unlikely desirable outcome of their present educational trajectory. Our paper reveals a relationship between the ways in which students from different high school tracks perceive the Bacalaureate examination, their previous experiences and their aspirations. This interdependence points to the mechanisms by which educational inequality operates through the Romanian educational system in the form of performance-based selection for high school admissions that in turn is reflected in the unequal chances of passing the Bacalaureate examination and of accessing higher education. Moreover, the paper shows how educational inequality is internalized emotionally and intellectually in how students relate to learning in preparation for the Bacalaureate exam.

In this line, it is relevant that the difference in the way in which students relate to the Baccalaureate exam may reflect their different socio-economic backgrounds, a point that is suggested by the ways in which technological track students were aware of financial constraints and felt responsible for earning a living soon after and in one case even during their high-school studies. Moreover, they conceptualized this in relation to not only their own needs, but also those of their families. Students from the technological track currently have limited access to financial resources and the immediate need for income is evident. In comparison, students in the theoretical track did not explicitly mention terms such as money or income, which emphasizes that they do not feel the need for financial resources. For them, educational aspirations represent the first element of the aspirational horizon described by them, followed by professional aspirations. These students are confident and accurate in describing their aspirations, which indicates the financial and social support available to them. It can be seen in both groups of students that aspirations for higher education are to some extent driven by access to financial and social resources. It is therefore evident that socio-economic status is an element that can significantly influence the educational aspirations of graduates (Järvinen et al., 2023).

Therefore, students from both tracks have aspirations for higher education, but their different socio-economic backgrounds increase the unequal chances of access in terms of the resources they can mobilize to access higher education. However, given the small sample and qualitative design of the inquiry, our analysis can merely point to the fact that inequality and class positions should be taken into account in a next step when designing a more comprehensive study of high-school students' educational aspirations and how they relate to both the unequal structure and performance based selection operating in the system, as well as socio-economic inequalities related to students' families' class and educational backgrounds.

Moreover, the difference in the anticipated performance on the exam is relevant: students in the technological track want to pass the baccalaureate with the minimum grade required (six), whereas students in the theoretical track anticipate results as close as possible to the maximum grade (ten). While students in the technological track describe the exam experience as a decisive moment for their future educational and professional path, students in the theoretical track perceive the exam rather as an intermediate step in their path. Considering the socio-economic difference as a secondary information provided through inductive analysis of the data, these results are in line with

those conducted by Berger and Archer (2018). They emphasize that students from different socio-economic backgrounds relate differently to the goals they want to achieve.

It also reaffirms the results of Borş (2020), which draws attention to the fact that students with lower socio-economic status relate differently to school learning than students with higher socio-economic status. Moreover, it also related to Goldthorpe's (2006) observations regarding social mobility strategies 'from below', aimed at preventing downward social mobility through earning a living, and 'from above', in terms of securing access to upward social mobility through education. Disadvantaged students, in our case attending the technological track, saw it as their priority to earn a living and as a desirable outcome to do so as a prospective university graduate, students attending the theoretical track saw university education as a 'natural' next step in their career path.

Furthermore, this is also reflected in the difference in chances of accessing higher education of participating students from the two tracks. Since students in the technological track also consider the possibility of not passing the exam, the chances of being able to go to the university of their choice is not seen as likely, only as a relative possibility. Thus, the Baccalaureate exam is also a sorting mechanism, ensuring unequal access to higher education. It is interesting that although aspirational horizons differed to the perceived likeliness of passing the examination, all students intended to eventually attend higher education if they succeeded in fulfilling the prerequisites. This finding may inform policymaking in the future that could help facilitate access to higher education for technological track high school students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. However, this point should be taken with caution as it may also reflect the particularities of our sample of interviewees. As participants were selected based on interest to discuss their learning in preparation for the Baccalaureate examination, it might also signal that aspirations to attend higher education were uncharacteristically overrepresented in both samples since academically minded students are more likely to engage in being interviewed to discuss their learning.

Moreover, the study highlights secondary aspects that can significantly deepen the difference in the chances of passing the Baccalaureate exam between students from the two tracks. Qualitative differences in the learning experiences offered to students from the two tracks in schools are thus observed. The different reasons why students use tutoring illustrate precisely these differences: students in the technological track use tutoring/private tutoring to ensure that they will pass the Baccalaureate exam with the

minimum grade required. At the same time, students participating in the theoretical track access private tutoring in order to ensure that they pass the entrance exam for the desired university. On the other hand, as the interviews with students in the technological track show, it is more difficult for their commuter peers to attend the extra tuition hours provided by their teachers at school. Therefore, the shorter learning time, physical and mental fatigue are elements that may contribute to reducing commuter students' chances of passing the Baccalaureate exam and, consequently, of attending higher education.

Finally, this paper is meant as an exploratory small-scale study and should be followed by a more targeted approach to the relationship between socio-economic background, educational biographies and pathways and perspectives on learning for the Baccalaureate examination that could involve quantitative data collection methods and/or a larger and more diverse sample of interviewees. Such a study could set the stage for better understanding how higher education access could be improved for socio-economically and educationally disadvantaged young people.

References:

- Astleithner, F., Vogl, S. & Kogler, R. (2023). *Occupational aspirations at the end of compulsory schooling: The interplay of parents' educational background, work values and self-concepts in the reproduction of inequality*. *Österreich Z Soziol* 48, 333–358 <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11614-023-00541-3> ;
- Bacplus (2024) Clasamentul Liceelor la Bacalaureat și Admitere. <https://www.bacplus.ro/top-licee>
- Bădescu, G., Mihaș, G., & Sum, P. (2018). *Reforma învățământului superior din România: propuneri de schimbări pentru un sistem onest, eficient și incluziv*. Policy Brief.
- Berger, N., & Archer, J. (2018). *Qualitative insights into the relationship between socioeconomic status and students' academic achievement goals*. *Social Psychology of Education*, 21(4), 787-803.
- Borș, O. M. (2020). *Poziționarea elevilor cu status socio-economic scăzut față de învățarea școlară—studiu de caz*. *Revista de Pedagogie*, 68(1), 51-70.
- Botezat, A. (2019). *Factori determinanți ai analfabetismului funcțional. O analiză a datelor PISA pentru România*. In G. Bădescu (Ed.), *Școala din România din perspectiva datelor PISA* (ed. I, pp. 125-158). Editura Presa Universitară Clujeană.

- Bourdieu, P., & Passeron, J. C. (1990). *Reproduction in education, society and culture* (Vol. 4). Sage.
- Bourdieu, P., & Passeron, J. (1970). *La reproduction: Elements pour une theorie du systeme d'enseignement*. Paris: Minuit
- Calarco, J. M. (2011). "I need help!" Social class and children's help-seeking in elementary school. *American Sociological Review*, 76(6), 862-882.
- Calarco, J. M. (2014). Coached for the classroom: Parents' cultural transmission and children's reproduction of educational inequalities. *American Sociological Review*, 79(5), 1015-1037.
- Domina, T., Penner, A., & Penner, E. (2017). *Categorical inequality: Schools as sorting machines*. *Annual review of sociology*, 43, 311-330. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-060116-053354> ;
- Eisemon, T. O., Mihailescu, I., Vlasceanu, L., Zamfir, C., Sheehan, J., & Davis, C. H. (1995). *Higher education reform in Romania*. *Higher Education*, 30, 135-152.
- European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, (2023). *Monitorul educației și formării 2023: România*, Publications Office of the European Union. <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/9188> ;
- Eurostat (2024) Educational attainment statistics. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Educational_attainment_statistics
- Florian, B., & Țoc, S. (2020). *Policy note: Educația în timpul pandemiei. Răspunsuri la criza nesfârșită a sistemului educațional românesc*. Bucharest. Available at: <http://snspa.ro/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Policy>.
- Gheba, A. (2018). *Admiterea la liceu în România: o analiză din perspectiva mecanismelor de repartizare*. *Sfera politicii*, 26(197-198), 102-126;
- Goldthorpe, J. H. (2006). *On Sociology Second Edition Volume One*. In *Stanford University Press eBooks*. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781503624795>
- Järvinen, T., Tikkanen, J., af Ursin, P. (2023). *The Significance of Socioeconomic Background for the Educational Dispositions and Aspirations of Finnish School Leavers*. In: Thrupp, M., Seppänen, P., Kauko, J., Kosunen, S. (eds) *Finland's Famous Education System*. Springer, Singapore. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-8241-5_15 .

- Kosunen, S., Haltia, N., Saari, J., Jokila, S., & Halmkrona, E. (2021). *Private supplementary tutoring and socio-economic differences in access to higher education*. Higher Education Policy, 34, 949-968. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41307-020-00177-y>.
- Legea Educației Naționale (LEN), Nr.198/2023 din 5 iulie 2023. Disponibil la https://edu.ro/sites/default/files/_fi%C8%99iere/Minister/2023/Legi_educatie_Romania_educata/legi_monitor/Legea_invatamantului_preuniversitar_nr_198.pdf (accessed 2 Jun 2024);
- Legea Universităților de Științe Aplicate (Finlanda), nr. 932/2014 din 14 noiembrie 2014. Disponibil la <https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/alkup/2014/20140932>. (accessed 20 September 2024).
- Mahler, F. (1981). *Integrating education with production and research in Romania*. Prospects: Quarterly Review of Education, 11(4), 403-419.
- Mihas, P., & Odum Institute. (2019). *Learn to build a codebook for a generic qualitative study*. SAGE Publications. Sage Research Methods Datasets Part 2. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781526496058>
- Mihut, G. (2022). *Romania: public-private divide in a dual-track system*. International Higher Education, 109, 34-35.
- Mikó, S.-M., & Hatos, A. (2024). *Navigating Aspirations: Understanding What Drives Romanian Adolescents' Career Choices*. Revista Românească Pentru Educație Multidimensională, 16(2), 466-496. <https://doi.org/10.18662/rrem/16.2/867> ;
- Ministerul Educației (2023a). *Neparticiparea elevilor de liceu la examenul de bacalaureat - sesiunea iunie 2023. Raport de cercetare*. Centrul Național de Politici și Evaluare în Educație available at https://www.ise.ro/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Raport-neparticipare-BAC_ses-iun-2023-isbn.pdf ;
- Ministerul Educației (2023b). *Raport privind starea învățământului preuniversitar din România 2022 - 2023*, available at <https://www.edu.ro/rapoarte-publice-periodice> ;
- Ministerul Educației (2024/2010). *Metodologia de organizare și desfășurare a examenului de bacalaureat -2011, Anexa 2 la ordinul MECTS nr. 4799/31.08.2010, privind organizarea și desfășurarea examenului de bacalaureat -2011*. Disponibil la <https://www.edu.ro/bacalaureat> (accessed 14 Jun 2024);
- Miulescu, M. L., & Ruth, K. (2021). *Youth at risk of early leaving—A comparative view on the Romanian and German cases highlighting family circumstances and personal*

- challenges as major risk categories and a foundation for support strategies.* Journal of Education and Work, 34(7-8), 765-788.
- Popa, C. E. (2020). *Particularities of early school leaving in Romania.* Expert Journal of Economics, 8(2).
https://economics.expertjournals.com/ark:/16759/EJE_805popa39-46.pdf
- Reay, D. (1998). *'Always knowing' and 'never being sure': familial and institutional habituses and higher education choice.* Journal of education policy, 13(4), 519-529
<https://doi.org/10.1080/0268093980130405> ;
- Saldana, J. (2011). *Fundamentals of qualitative research (Understanding qualitative research)*, Oxford University Press.
- Savu, A., Lipan, Ș., & Crăciun, M. (2020). *Preparing for a "good life": extracurriculars and the Romanian middle class.* East European Politics and Societies, 34(2), 485-504.
- Țoc, S. (2018). *Clasă și educație: inegalitate și reproducere socială în învățământul românesc.* București: Pro-Universitaria.
- Țoc, S. (2016). *Familie, școală și succes școlar în învățământul liceal românesc.* Calitatea vieții, 27(3), 189-216.
- Webb, S., Black, R., Morton, R., Plowright, S., & Roy, R. (2015). *Geographical and place dimensions of post-school participation in education and work.* NCVET, Adelaide.