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Gender and school – related experience differences in students’ perception of teacher interpersonal behavior in the classroom

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Abstract

This study, based on the learning environment researches, is focused on the dynamic of students’ perceptions of teacher interpersonal behaviour in the classroom. Participants in this study were 525 Romanian students (11 - 19 years old, age mean = 14.34, SD = 2.24) from 23 classes (fifth to eleven). The data were collected by the first Romanian translation of the Questionnaire on Teacher Interactions (Frazer, 1998). The research found significant differences in perceptions of the teachers, according to the students’ gender, class membership, and transition pathway. The results are useful for intervention programs aiming to improve the quality of learning environment.

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Keywords: Perceived teacher interpersonal behaviour, student – teacher interaction, gender differences, class differences.

1. Introduction

The teacher – student relationship, in all educational systems, is a key feature of an effective instructional environment that has extensively studied from many perspectives.

The present changes which are produce in the Romanian society, including the Romanian educational system, have important effects at all its levels, concerning also the relationship teacher-student. The need to align the Romanian educational system at the European system in what concerns the values, norms and rules, involves giving up on some educational methods and adopting others – fact which reflects in the teacher’s interpersonal behaviour and, as a result, in students’ perception towards him. The new social reality, the new configuration of contemporary knowledge and the new educational philosophy sustain the change of teacher’s contemporary role as an authority competent in his knowledge field into the role of a partner in a complex process of interpersonal communication, consultant and even adviser in the life – career development problems. The identification of the profiles of teacher’s interpersonal behaviours in the classroom and its perception by the students is a necessary demarche in this new social and existential context. The knowledge offered by this demarche can serve both to the understanding of direction of school’s climate and culture change and the configuration of some intervention models.
for increasing the quality of school environment. Based on this knowledge, the intervention programs can be better differenced after two necessary directions for increasing the quality of learning environment: 1. the streamline of instructional process and 2. the establishment of a positive learning environment which could assure the personal and professional fulfilment of both, students and teachers, committed as equal partners in the educational communication.

The research reported in this paper is based on the models used by most of the researches reported in the literature specialized on learning environment.

2. Conceptual framework for the study of the students’ perceptions of teacher’s behavior in the classroom

Many researches aiming to explore the teacher – student’ relationships are based on the conceptualizations of two important constructs: teacher’s interpersonal behaviour and students’ perception of school environment.

2.1. The multidimensionality of teacher’s interpersonal behavior

Teacher interpersonal behaviour in classroom, appreciated as a “key aspect of the learning environment” (Ferguson & Fraser, 1999, p.370), was described according to the model drafted for educational settings by Wubbels, Creton, and Hooymayers (1985, see Wubbels & Levy, 2003, Wubbels & Brekelmans, 2005).

Wubbels, Creton, and Hooymayers (1985) drafted this model by adapting the Leary’s (1957) model of communication to the context of education. In Leary’ (1957) model, humans’ behaviour is ordered by the two independent dimensions, the Dominance - Submission axis and the Hostility – Affection axis. In the adapted model of teacher’s interpersonal behaviour, Wubbels et al. (1985, see den Brok, Brekelmans & Wubbels, 2006, p.203) labelled the two dimensions of the Leary model as Influence (Dominance–Submission) and Proximity (Opposition–Cooperation). Influence signifies the degree of control over the communication process (Dominance–Submission) and Proximity, the degree of empathy and cooperation felt by the communicators (Opposition–Cooperation). The two dimensions structure eight categories of teacher behaviour, specifically: leadership, helpful/friendly behaviour, understanding behaviours, giving students freedom, uncertain, dissatisfied, admonishing and strict behaviour (den Brok, Brekelman & Wubbels, 2006).

These eight types of teacher’s behaviour have different position in the system configured by the two dimensions and by the four poles of the communication’s process (Dominance – Cooperation or Submission – Opposition). According to their position in the coordinate system, the eight types of teacher behaviour are labelled: DC, CD, CS, SC, SO, OS, OD, DO, each of them with some typical behaviour. The sector characterized by dominance and/or cooperation (DC/ CD) reveals the leading and helpful/friendly teacher’s behaviour, the sector characterized by cooperation and/or submission (CS/SC) is represented by the understanding and students’ freedom supportive behaviour, the sector characterized by submission and/or opposition (SO/OS) is represented by the uncertain and dissatisfied teachers’ behaviour and the sector characterized by dominance and/or opposition (DO/OD) comprises the admonishing and strict teachers’ behaviour. In the DC sector, the Dominance aspect dominates the Cooperation (and teacher shows his/her tendency to be a leader) while in the CD sector, dominates the cooperation (the teacher shows helpful and friendly behaviour rather than dominant). In the CS sector in which the cooperation dominates, teachers show in their relationship with the students: interest, empathy, confidence, patience, openness, understanding meanwhile in SC sector, in which the submission dominates, teachers present the tendency to support students’ freedom (they give to the students more opportunity to work independently, give freedom and responsibility and more approvals). In SO/OS sector, where submission dominates teachers show uncertain behaviour and when opposition prevails they appear as dissatisfied (ask for silence, criticize etc). In the DO/OD sector, where opposition dominates, teachers appear as admonishing (get angry, correct, punish) and when dominance prevails, teachers appear as “strict” (judging, setting norms and rules, asking for students’ submission) (Wubbels & Brekelmans, 2005, p.8).

The multidimensionality of teachers’ interpersonal behaviour has important implications especially in school environments. Consequently, the teachers’ interpersonal behaviour has to be analyzed and discussed in terms of patterns. Wubbels & Brekelmans (2005) identifying eight interpersonal profiles that have been found with the help
of the Model for Interpersonal Teacher Behaviour, defined the interpersonal behaviour’s profile or pattern as a “particular combination of eight scale scores resulting from the administration of the QTI” (Wubbels & Brekelmans, 2005, p.12) These profiles were characterized in terms of the teacher’s style, although the authors recognized that there are only the descriptions of a single teacher in one particular class.

2.2. Students’ perception of their teachers – subject of controversial debate?

Students’ perception of their teacher’s behaviour and of their relationship with the teacher are important not only for their school achievement but for a more large perspective. As in the specialized literature is state: “early relationship with the teachers are also important in determining whether or not a child will learn self-regulation skills, emotion regulation, take others’ perspective, and develop relationships” (Macklem, 2008, pp. 68 - 69)

Studies on students – teacher’s relationship, as they are perceived by the students during the school years, showed that some gender and learning experience’ related changes impact the students’ perceptions of their teachers (Goodenow, 1993).

Students’ perceptions of the teacher’s interpersonal behaviour in the classroom have been measured in learning environments researches on many purposes: to study educational interventions and the determinants of classroom environments (den Brok, Brekelmans & Wubbels, 2006) or to evaluate their impact on students’ academic achievement, achievement motivation and cognitive and affective development (Lee, Fraser & Fisher, 2003).

Wei, den Brok & Zhou (2009) pointed out that, according to Shuell’s (1996) psychological model of perceptions, “the way in which learners perceive, interpret and process information in the instructional situation, influence what students will learn in the classroom” (p.157). According to this conception, the authors consider that the measures of student’s perceptions in the assessment of the learning environment become both valuable and necessary.

Interpersonal perceptions involve, according to Kenny’ (1994) model, the personal beliefs about the partners in the interaction’s process in real situations. Student perceptions have been viewed as combinations of students’ personal assumptions about teachers’ characteristics, students’ observations of concrete teachers’ behaviour in class and students’ self-perceptions. The PERSON model of Kenny (1994), states as sources of variance in each perceiver’s judgment: perceiver’ Personality, Error, Residual, Stereotype, Opinion and Norm (quoted in: den Brok, Brekelman & Wubbels, 2006)

Wei, den Brok & Zhou (2009) mentioned both, the critic and the favourable attitudes toward measuring of students’ perceptions. As critic attitudes, the authors mentioned those of Aleamoni (1999) based on the fact that student’s perception are hard to be differentiate and are influenced by teacher popularity, grading leniency or student background characteristics. As favourable attitudes, the authors mentioned those of De Jong and Westerhof (2001) based on their finding that the effects of teachers’ popularity and grading leniency tended to be overrated. (Wei, den Brok & Zhou, 2009).

2.3. Questionnaire on Teacher Interaction (QTI) - a valuable model for evaluation of students’ perception of teacher interpersonal behavior.

A worldwide instrument used to evaluate student – teacher perceived relationship and to map teacher interpersonal behaviour is the Questionnaire on Teacher Interaction (QTI) (Fraser, 1998).

All the studies confirmed that the data obtained from this questionnaire provide valid, reliable and useful information about the teacher-student interactions (Lee, Fraser & Fisher, 2003).

The QTI was originally developed in The Netherlands by Wubbels et al. (1985) with 77 items. Later it was reduced to 64 items by Wubbels and Levy (2003) for use with US samples. A 48-item version was also developed by Fisher and his colleagues since 1995 (quoted in: Kokkinos, Charalambous & Davazoglou, 2009) for use within the Australian educational context, and this version has been validated and used in numerous studies.

Researches involving the QTI have spread widely in recent times. According to Fraser and Walberg (2005), the QTI has been translated into and validated in at least 15 languages (English, French, German, Hebrew, Russian, Slovenian, Swedish, Norwegian, Finnish, Spanish, Mandarin Chinese, Singaporean Chinese, Indonesian, Malay and Korean). After the Fraser and Walberg’ (2005) review, many other studies were reported (e.g. Turkish and Greek version of QTI) (Telli, den Brok, Cakiroglu, 2008; Kokkinos, Charalambous & Davazoglou, 2009)
In Romania this is the first research based on the first translation of the QTI in Romanian. This study investigated the impact of gender, class membership and transition to the next level of schooling on students’ perceptions of their teachers.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Objectives and research questions

We wanted to explore how QTI – Romanian version depicts the student – teacher relationship in Romanian school environment.

In this article, we examine whether the usual conceptual framework for the study of students - teacher relationship is an adequate conceptualization when it is applied on the Romanian educational context.

The objectives of the study reported in this paper were: 1. to investigate the profiles of students' perceptions of teacher interpersonal behaviour in Romania; 2. to investigate if there are gender, class and transition pathway differences in Romanian students’ perceptions of their teacher interpersonal behaviour; 3. to check the validation of a Romanian version of QTI (in terms of reliability and construct validity).

The following research questions were addressed: 1. What correlations exist between students’ perception of each of the eight dimensions of teacher interpersonal behaviour as these are perceived by Romanian secondary and high school students?; 2. How do secondary school students in Romania perceive their teachers’ interpersonal behaviours in comparison with the high schools students?; 3. Are there any statistically significant differences between students’ perceptions of their teachers’ interpersonal behaviours according to their gender, class and transition pathway?; 4. Is the Romanian version of QTI a valid instrument to measure students’ perceptions of their teachers?

3.2. Sample

The sample of this research consisted of 525 students on three secondary and two high schools from 23 classes in the same geographical area in the Romania.

The sample was selected based on teachers’ availability to contribute to the study. A total of 23 teachers from five public secondary and high schools from two close geographical areas, respectively Bucharest (urban area) and the Ilfov district (countryside area) agreed to participate to the study.

The schools from which we collected data were from medium (Grade 5 – 8) to large sized schools (Grade 5 - 12), schools that are typical for Romania in terms of its size and gender ratio.

In terms of students’ gender, there were 289 male (55%) and 236 female students (45%).

In terms of grade level, 87 participants (16.6%) were fifth graders, 81 participants (15.4%) were sixth graders, 76 (12.8%) – seventh graders, 69 (13.1%) – eight graders, 75 (14.3%) – ninth graders, 69 (13.1%) – tenth graders and 77 (14.7%) – eleventh graders. The age of students was on average of 14.34 years (SD = 2.24).

In terms of school location, 272 participants (51.8%) were attending urban schools and 253 students (48.2%) were attending rural schools.

In terms of transition pathway, 87 students (16.6%) were fifth graders (transition from elementary school to secondary school), 75 (14.3) were in the nine grade (transition from secondary to high school), 216 (41.3%) were in no transitional secondary school classes (6 to 8 grade) and 146 (27.8%) were in no transitional high school classes (10 and 11 grade).

3.3. Instrument

Data on students’ perceptions of the interpersonal teacher’s behaviour was gathered with the QTI – Romanian version (QTI – R).

The Australian version of the QTI (48 items) was translated into Romanian using the usual procedures: translation, back-translation, and confirmation of interpretative validity of the translated version.
Before completing the translation, every item has been checked in terms of its content validity and cultural relevance for the Romanian educational context. A panel of university students and school teachers participated at these discussions. All the items were found relevant.

As a final step of the translation, two English-speaking academics checked it, to make sure that the Romanian sentences transmitted the same meaning as the English sentences. The final translation was translated from Romanian back into English independently by two bilingual university students. The back-translations did not suggest that rewording was needed for any items.

A pilot study was conducted to ensure that the translation of the questionnaire was appropriate and that students were interpreting correctly all the items. In order to check the comprehensibility and clarity of the items, two students from each class (32 students totally) were interviewed after the completion of the questionnaire (by the university students involved as volunteers in this research). The Romanian translation of the QTI has the same number of items and scoring procedures as the original scales. Answers were given using a five-point scale consisting of Never, Sometimes, Often, Almost always, and Always.

4. Results

4.1. Psychometrics of QTI - Romanian translation

To determine internal consistency of the eight scale of QTI-R, the Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient (Cronbach, 1951) was computed. The results are presented in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>No. of items</th>
<th>Alpha reliability</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>3.70</td>
<td>.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping/friendly</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>3.54</td>
<td>.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>3.64</td>
<td>.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student responsibility/freedom</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>2.03</td>
<td>.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertain</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>1.98</td>
<td>.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissatisfied</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>2.55</td>
<td>.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admonishing</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>2.37</td>
<td>.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strict</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>3.41</td>
<td>.70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Table 1 shows, the highest alpha reliability was obtained for the scales of Leadership and the lowest reliability for the Strict scale. Reliabilities for five of the eight QTI – R scales are satisfactory, except for the Strict scale for which the coefficients was .40 and after removal of two items (items 44 and 48, respectively) had values of 0.47. The reliability coefficient for the Students responsibility and Freedom scale was improved (0.56) after the removal of item 26 and 46, and the alpha for the Dissatisfied scale was improved (to .61) (after removal of item 35). The reliability coefficient for the dimension Strict remained low if any of its items are deleted, so, all six items of this scale were removed from the present analyses. Because of the reduced reliability of Students responsibility and Freedom scale (even after removal of the two items) the results obtained with this scale must be interpreted with caution.

As Wei et al. (2009) pointed out: “A special point of attention in research using the QTI in new cultural contexts or new languages is establishing its construct validity” (p. 157). In order to check on construct validity of our instrument, the correlations between scales were determined.
According to the circumpex model, “the correlation of each scale should be greatest with the scale next to it in the model and should become lower as the scales become further apart until the lowest correlation (greatest negative) is with the opposite scale.” (Scott & Fisher, 2004, p.181)

As we can see in the table 2, Leadership, Helping/friendly and Understanding scales’ scores, correlate positively and highly. Uncertain, Dissatisfied and Admonishing scales’ scores correlate positively but weaker than the others scores do. Scales’ scores for DC/CD sectors correlate negatively with the scales’ scores for SO/OS and OD sectors. A special situation occurred in the Student responsibility and freedom. This scale is positively correlated with the Uncertain (r = .45), Dissatisfied (r = .29) and Admonishing (.30) scales, and negatively with the Leadership scale’s score (r = -.12).

In spite of all this, according to Lee, Fraser & Fisher (2003) we consider that the inter-scale correlations from this Romanian sample are consistent with the circumpex nature of the QTI.

4.2. Students’ perceptions about their teachers

As indicated in Table 1, students in this sample perceived their teachers as having a cooperative behaviours (Leadership, Helping/Friendly, and Understanding) rather than opposite behaviours (Uncertain, Dissatisfied, Admonishing, Strict). The mean score for the Leadership scale (approximately 4, which correspond to “Almost always” imply that students perceived relatively strong leadership towards their teachers during the lessons. For the Helping/Friendly and Understanding scale, the average item mean scores are relatively high (between ‘Often’ and ‘Almost Always’), implying that teachers are perceived as helping, friendly and understanding.

The mean score for the Student Responsibility and Freedom scale (corresponding to ‘Sometimes’) reflects the teachers’ tendency to not allow their students’ too much freedom or responsibility in their lessons but this results have to be interpreted with cautions because, as we specified already, its reduced reliability. The Strict scale mean of 3.41 should be interpreted with caution too, because of its reduced reliability.

The Uncertain, Dissatisfied and Admonishing scales show relatively low average item means (1.98, 2.55 and respectively 2.37), indicating that these behaviours are less perceived by the students.

4.3. Differences in students’ perceptions of their teachers

In order to examine the presumed differences in students’ perceptions of their teachers, a series of inter - groups’ comparisons with T – test and one-way ANOVAs were carried out. All subsequent analyses are based on the 43 - item version of the QTI - R. We used as independent variables: gender (two levels: male vs. female), grade level (11 levels: Grade 5 to Grade 11), and entry grade or transition pathway (four level: 5th grade = 1; 9th grade = 2; 6, 7, 8, grades = 3; 10, 11 grade = 4). The dependent variables were the seven scales of interpersonal behaviour measured by the QTI - R, with Strict behaviour’s scale eliminated because of its low internal reliability.
4.3.1. Gender differences in students’ perceptions of their teacher

To examine the gender differences in students' perceptions of teacher interpersonal behavior, we compared the means-scores of the teacher’s behavior dimensions perceived both by girls and boys. Aiming this comparison, a T-test procedure was used.

Table 3 shows the scale item means, male and female differences, standard deviations, and t-values.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Item mean</th>
<th>Mean difference (M-F)</th>
<th>T</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>-.16</td>
<td>2.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>3.79</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping/ friendly</td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>3.46</td>
<td>-.175</td>
<td>2.55*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding</td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>3.63</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.48 Ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>3.66</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student responsibility</td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>2.10</td>
<td>.164</td>
<td>2.74**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>1.94</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertain</td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>2.07</td>
<td>.196</td>
<td>3.86**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>1.87</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissatisfied</td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>2.62</td>
<td>.196</td>
<td>2.77**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>2.46</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admonishing</td>
<td>Males</td>
<td>2.43</td>
<td>.134</td>
<td>2.14*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>2.29</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p<0.05, **p<0.001 males (n = 289); females (n = 236)

As the Table 3 depicts, some gender differences in males and females students’ perception of their teachers were found significantly different, according to the t coefficients.

According to the results, female students perceived more positively the leadership and the helping friendly behaviors of their teachers while the male students perceived that their teachers displayed more uncertain, dissatisfied, admonishing and student responsibility behaviors. The Understanding behavior was perceived the same both by the boys and the girls.

4.3.2. Class differences in students’ perceptions of their teachers

When analyzed (by one way analysis of variance - ANOVA) the differences in the perceived teacher’s interpersonal behavior according to the students’ grade level, although the statistically significant coefficients F were found, the eta squared obtained were small (.03 to .12), so we can say that there is practically no significance in these differences.

The instrument’s ability to differentiate between students’ perceptions of different classes was measured using one way the analysis of variance (ANOVA) with class membership as the main effect. The eta² statistic was calculated to provide an estimation of the strength of association between class membership and the dependent variable.

4.3.3. The school transition pathway and the students’ perceptions of their teachers

In order to test the presumption about differences in students’ perception of teacher according to their status (of post transition class or no-transitional class) a series of MANOVA and ANOVA’s were performed.

The effect on scores of the seven valid scales of teacher’s interpersonal behaviour measured by the QTI – R (as the dependent variables) that could have the interaction between the transition pathway, gender and school location was computed. The transition pathway was measured as a four level variable (1. transition from primary to secondary school (5th grade students); 2. transition from secondary to high school (9th grade students); 3. no transitional secondary classes (6, 7, 8 grader students) and 4. no transitional high school classes (10, 11 grader students).

The MANOVA results showed significant main effects on at least one of the teacher’ behaviour dimensions, from all the presumed factors but combined effects only from 1. gender x school location; 2. gender x transition pathway; 3. school location x transition pathway; and 4. gender x school location x transition pathway (the F
coefficient ranged from 3.12 to 16.60, statistically significant at p ranged from p < .04, to p < .001, and Partial Eta Squared, ranged from .02 to .09).

Although the MANOVA yields a total of seven effects (three main effects, three two-way interactions, and one three-way interaction) only some of these are relevant to the present study’s research questions (the effect of school’s location on students’ perception of teachers behaviour was not taken into account as a subject of this analysis).

Table 4 shows the main and combined effects of gender and transition pathway for each of seven scales. The ANOVAs identified that the gender was significant for six of seven scales (except understanding scale); the transition pathway was significant for all 7 scales, and the transition x gender interaction was significant for 5 of seven scales (except uncertain and admonishing scale).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Transition pathway</th>
<th>Gender x Transition</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>Partial Eta squared</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leadership</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>17.25</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>p&lt; .01</td>
<td>.02 to .09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helping/friendly</td>
<td>11.83</td>
<td>10.98</td>
<td>4.97</td>
<td>p&lt; .001</td>
<td>.02 to .06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding</td>
<td>.25 Ns</td>
<td>15.75</td>
<td>2.73</td>
<td>p&lt; .04</td>
<td>.02 to .09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student responsibility</td>
<td>17.32</td>
<td>7.18</td>
<td>4.76</td>
<td>p&lt; .01</td>
<td>.02 to .09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertain</td>
<td>17.93</td>
<td>14.10</td>
<td>1.67 Ns</td>
<td>p&lt; .01</td>
<td>.02 to .08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissatisfied</td>
<td>14.16</td>
<td>3.90</td>
<td>3.73</td>
<td>p&lt; .01</td>
<td>.02 to .03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admonishing</td>
<td>4.15</td>
<td>9.69</td>
<td>.29 Ns</td>
<td>p&lt; .04</td>
<td>.02 to .05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When comparing the 5th grader students’ perception of teachers (post-transition from primary to secondary school) with the 9th graders students’ perception of teachers (post transition from secondary to high school level) we can notice that middle school students perceive more the positive aspects of teacher behaviour and that high school students perceive more the negative aspect of teachers’ behaviour (table 5).
Table 5. Item Mean for differences in students’ perceptions of their teachers measured by the QTI according to gender and to transition pathway.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>Transition from primary to secondary school (5th grade students)</th>
<th>Transition from secondary to high school (9th grade students)</th>
<th>No transitional secondary classes (6, 7, 8 grade students)</th>
<th>No transitional high school classes (10, 11 grade students)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding</td>
<td>4.03</td>
<td>3.86</td>
<td>3.64</td>
<td>3.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student responsibility</td>
<td>2.01</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>2.53</td>
<td>1.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertain</td>
<td>1.82</td>
<td>1.71</td>
<td>2.14</td>
<td>1.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissatisfied</td>
<td>2.41</td>
<td>2.28</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>2.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admonishing</td>
<td>2.17</td>
<td>2.05</td>
<td>2.18</td>
<td>2.12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Secondary school environment was perceived to be more favourable than high school in terms of more Leadership, Helpful/Friendly, Understanding and Student Responsibility/Freedom teacher behaviours and less Uncertainty and Dissatisfied and Admonishing teacher behaviours.

5. Discussion and conclusions

The purpose of the present study was to investigate the gender and school-related experiences differences in students’ perceptions of their teachers.

Overall, the results suggest that the teachers in this Romanian sample were perceived as helpful, friendly, good leaders, enthusiastic, and understanding, and rather lower than moderately, admonishing and dissatisfied.

As far as the first research question is concerned (What correlations exist between the students’ perception of each of the eight dimensions of teacher interpersonal behaviour as perceived by Romanian secondary and high school students), the pattern of interscale correlations confirmed the circumplex nature of the QTI – R as in many other studies in different cultural context (Australian, Chinese, Indian, Turkish, Greek) (Kokkinos, Charalambous & Davazoglou, 2009; Wei, den Brok & Zhou, 2009).

As far as the second research question is concerned (How do secondary school students in Romania perceive their teachers’ interpersonal behaviours compared with the high school students?) the answer of this study was that secondary school students perceive more favourable than high school students the school environment, in terms of more Leadership, Helpful/Friendly, Understanding and Student Responsibility/Freedom teacher behaviours. These results are consistent with other studies in other countries (Lee, Fraser & Fisher, 2003, Macklem, 2008).

The third research question (Are there any statistically significant differences between students’ perceptions of their teachers’ interpersonal behaviours according to their gender, class membership and transition pathway?) received a reliable answer as we presented in the results section. These findings are in line with previous research (Levy et al., 2003; Telli, den Brok and Cakiroglu, 2008; Kokkinos, Charalambous & Davazoglou, 2009).

A big research question was whether the Romanian version of QTI is a valid instrument to measure students’ perceptions of their teachers. The present study was the first one that used in Romania the QTI, so, a reliable answer will be obtained on further data analyses gathered in this research.

In summary, this study makes some significant contributions to national research (regarding the use of the QTI – R, the translation and cross-validation with Romanian students).

Considering the above presented results, certain limitations should be kept in mind. First, there are concerns with the unreliability of Strict scale and low reliability of Students responsibility and Freedom scale. Second, the sample size for this study was small, especially in terms of the number of classes. Future studies should include a larger sample size from more parts of the country. On the other hand, future studies could include more variables (such as
affective, cognitive and behavioural outcomes) and more covariates variables (teacher’ perception of their behaviours and students’ school background) (Wei et al. 2009, p.171).

We can conclude that the results of the present research have important implications for classroom practice and for school counselling programs. The school counselling programs could include the insights from similar and local studies in order to advise teachers in their effort to improve their interpersonal behaviour and to provide to their students a more positive and supportive school climate.

References

Telli, S., den Brok, P., Cakiroglu, J. (2008). Teacher – student interpersonal behavior in secondary science classes in Turkey. The Journal of classrooms interaction; 42.2