

ARGUMENTS FOR EMPOWERMENT INTERVENTIONS FOR TEACHERS IN EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS

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Abstract

The general purpose of the study was to explore the results of the intervention in terms of qualitative analysis of the reports of the participants in the intervention at a period of 6 months after the completion of the training. To achieve the objective, a semi-structured interview was adapted using a model (Toma, 2010) previously used to collect data also about an empowerment intervention. Open-ended questions were asked covering issues related to the conceptual dimensions, general themes and practical applications of strengthening the intervention. The target group consisted of 13 female participants working as teachers in the pre-university environment. Participants reported progress in the direction of correct and efficient self-assessment, capitalization of individual resources, modelling of core beliefs through new affirmations learned and orientation towards decision and action.

Keywords: human resources, affirmation, education, gender, women, teacher, semi-structured interview, qualitative analysis.

Résumé

L'objectif général de l'étude était d'explorer les résultats de l'intervention en termes d'analyse qualitative des rapports des participants à l'intervention à une période de 6 mois après la fin de la formation. Pour atteindre cet objectif, un entretien semi-structuré a été adapté à l'aide d'un modèle (Toma, 2010) précédemment utilisé pour collecter des données également sur une intervention d'autonomisation. Des questions ouvertes ont été posées sur des questions liées aux dimensions conceptuelles, aux thèmes généraux et aux applications pratiques du renforcement de l'intervention. Le groupe cible était composé de 13 participantes travaillant comme enseignantes dans un environnement préuniversitaire. Les participants ont fait état de progrès vers une auto-évaluation correcte et efficace, la capitalisation des ressources individuelles, la modélisation des croyances fondamentales à travers de nouvelles affirmations apprises et l'orientation vers la décision et l'action.

Mots clés: saffirmation, éducation, genre, femmes, enseignant, entretien semi-structuré, analyse qualitative.

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Rezumat

Obiectivul general al studiului a fost de a explora rezultatele intervenției prin prisma analizei calitative a relațiilor participantelor la intervenție la o perioadă de 6 luni după finalizarea trainingului. Pentru realizarea obiectivului s-a adaptat un interviu semi-structurat folosind un model (Toma, 2010) utilizat anterior pentru a colecta date tot despre o intervenție de tip empowerment. Au fost formulate întrebări cu răspunsuri deschise care au vizat aspectele reținute referitoare la dimensiunile conceptuale, la temele generale și aplicațiile practice de consolidare ale intervenției. Grupul țintă a fost format din 13 persoane de gen feminin care lucrează ca profesori în mediul preuniversitar. Participantele au relatat progrese pe direcția autoevaluării corecte și eficiente de sine, valorificării resurselor individuale, modelarea convingerilor de bază prin noile afirmații învățate și orientarea spre decizie și acțiune.

Cuvinte cheie: resurse umane, afirmație educație, gen, feminin, profesor, interviu semi-structurat, analiză calitativă

Overview

Teachers as facilitators of the education process are in a position to manage a relevant volume of knowledge that they transfer through specific strategies to the students they interact with, balancing the balance of knowledge in favour of the student. Thus, teachers are in an interaction in which the management of power and control over information content and relationships in the educational organizations environment. There they operate in a complex network of colleagues, students and parents they must develop effective strategies for adaptation to the environment.

As empowering women teachers is a current objective of interventions aimed at gender equality, we proposed a self-consolidation intervention through empowerment strategies for women teachers working in the pre-university environment. Empowerment-based educational strategies have been used in schools since the 1970s through the practice of the Brazilian pedagogue Paulo Freire (Freire, 1970) but they were mainly aimed at students from disadvantaged groups.

The concept of learning-oriented development, in which the emphasis is on motivation and dedication / commitment, also included the idea that power also generates energy for action (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). From this perspective empowerment means the intensification of total power or energy (Kuokkanen & Leino-Kilpi, 2000, p. 239).

In 1996 Spreitzer tested the *empowerment model* proposed by Conger & Kanungo (1988) and Thomas & Velthouse (1990) and - following the research - there were positive correlations between empowerment on the one hand and education, support, information on the other: if the employee is informed about the organizational goals a deeper identification with them, a greater motivation and efficiency will occur. At the same time, negative correlations were obtained between insecurity regarding conflicting expectations and roles and *empowerment*.

Starting from the model proposed by de Conger & Kanungo (1988) and Thomas & Velthouse (1990) which outlines the process of empowerment as one of

personal growth and development having as determinant dimensions characteristic of the person (beliefs, opinions, perceptions and relationships with the environment) as well as individual environmental variables (gender, common interests, social roles) we aimed to detect aspects related to the perception of females of experiences of gaining or losing power in the educational environment in which they work as teachers or educational counsellors after participating in a program aimed at shaping self-strengthening affirmations based on empowerment strategies and the formulation of affirmations. Other studies identified gender barriers in Romanian educational organizations (Ichim & Balahur, 2020), fact for which we considered it would be of interest to develop a short effective intervention for teachers on enhancing women power in preuniversity education and to collect their opinion on its effects.

Methods and participants

The intervention elements developed during two days aimed at assisting women working in education to formulate affirmations to strengthen the core beliefs of self and others, form a positive attitude, increase hope and openness to change. The intervention subsumed aspects related to the establishment of self-strengthening affirmations according to the intervention model proposed by Gershon & Straub (2007).

The general purpose of the study was to explore the results of the intervention in terms of qualitative analysis of the reports of the participants in the intervention at a period of 6 months after the completion of the training. To achieve the objective, a semi-structured interview was adapted using a model (Toma, 2010) previously used to collect data also about an empowerment intervention. Open-ended questions were asked covering issues related to the conceptual dimensions, general themes and practical applications of strengthening the intervention.

Categories were created for a more efficient exploration of the data and some keywords were assigned to the categories and the passages considered relevant from the participants' answers were selected. The codes related to the categories were synthesized based on the literature (aspects related to empowerment and affirmation building), from the categories of questions asked in the interview and from the inductive analysis of data by paraphrasing or cumulation where appropriate. (Friebertshäuser & Prengel, 2003, p. 584). The answers were analysed individually and thematic categories were made by defining keywords.

The target group was formed of a total of 13 graduates of psychology or social and humanistic sciences of female gender, who work in urban areas located schools either as teachers or as counsellors in pre-university education. The age average was $m = 30.1$ and the standard deviation $\sigma = 4.4$ and the average of seniority in education of $m = 4.6$ and $\sigma = 4.4$. Their socio-economic level is medium to high.

The *semi-structured interview* was conducted with each participant. It consisted of 6 items (see appendix) with questions that require semi-structured and unstructured (in-depth) answers. The expected change is expected to be observed at the level of the trainees' attitude through the targeted conceptual dimensions and the consolidation exercises carried out during the 2 days of the course. The main aspects followed by the interview were:

1. The assimilated (known) concepts about the idea of „empowerment” by the trainees after its completion;
2. The part of the training that had the greatest emotional impact (retained in the episodic memory) and the novelty element identified;
3. The perception of the traits of a person who has assumed power through „empowerment” techniques;
4. Arguing the topics of the course chosen by the participants as the most useful and with the greatest impact;
5. The changes that have occurred in the lives of the participants from the end of the training until the time of the interview;
6. The period of time in which the trainees continued the exercises to reinforce the personal changes they started during the course;

Starting from the analysis of the participants' answers, thematic categories were established in relation to which the thematic analysis of the text segments and coding were performed.

The answers of the 13 participants were collected and labelled in four categories:

- I - Motivation* – personal strength, individual resources and positive self-esteem;
- II - Cognition* – affirmations, positive attitude and core beliefs;
- III - Emotion* – positive emotions (joy, satisfaction, contentment);
- IV - Behaviour* – putting into practice the affirmations in order to achieve the goals, networking, change.

The summary of the results of the interviews conducted with the 13 trainees can be followed in the tables below. The conceptual category to which we assigned the answers of the participants (I-Motivation, II-Cognition, III-Emotion and IV-Behaviour) as well as the frequency with which the subsumed answers appeared in the 13 participants in the study were highlighted.

Also at the content level, three dominant aspects were identified, hereinafter referred to as topics that the participants argued.: *sources and resources of power (power and self - PS), the formulation of affirmations (A) and the system of core beliefs - about oneself, the world and the ways of interacting with the world and its resources (core beliefs - CB)* and which have been related to the identified conceptual categories.

Discussing of results and conclusions

Following the qualitative analysis of the answers, it can be seen that the intervention was seen as motivational (I) and cognitive (II) in order to reformulate some cognitions (II) and change some behaviours (III). The qualitative analysis and interpretation of the text shows that at most key points the subjects' answers are distributed on all three identified thematic categories: sources and resources of personal power (PS), construction of affirmations (A) both appeared in 13 of the participants and the system of core beliefs (CB) with 12 choices. This fact shows the involvement of participants in understanding and assuming the concepts and techniques studied. In the training, experiential learning was widely used using examples and role-playing games. Role play was the most appreciated technique by the study participants. This together with the exercises of modifying the core beliefs was chosen by the majority of participants (70% appreciated the role play and 84% appreciated the practical exercises of changing the limiting beliefs and 92% appreciated the affirmation-building exercises).

The concepts identified in the participants' reports place in the first place the aspects related to PS and A (100%) followed by the most well-known concepts by the students after completing the training come to satisfy the expectations prior to the course. As such, the concepts retained and known by the trainees after completing the training are also part (both quantitatively and as a qualitative significance) of the category of „sources and resources of assumed personal power”.

Regarding the traits of the person who feels in control, strong and ready for action, most of the attributes reported by all participants were in the theme of PS (balanced, self-controlled; confident in herself and in the world; positive attitude; optimism, strong, confident, motivated, creative, loving, responsible, supportive, determined) and A (activism; mobilization; active, responsible role, total involvement; the power to act to achieve the goal; adapting to the new; motivation to achieve the goals). As categories, the traits of the person who feels that she has acquired power subsume a good motivation (I) associated with the action (IV) and cognition oriented towards success and solutions (II).

Regarding the way in which the participants in the intervention felt the effects on the general state of psychological well-being, it can be stated that they reported a better self-assessment regarding the awareness of their own resources, limits and possibilities (100% of the participants), developed better strategies to adapt to the situations they faced, including conflicts (62%) and developed more speed in analysing the situations they faced and in making decisions (70%).

Because one of the problematic aspects of the interventions aimed at increasing motivation, the last question of the interview was related to the extent to which the participants continued to practice repeating previous affirmations developed or building new affirmations when needed. The majority of students (92%) reported that they used the development of affirmations when faced with situations in which they felt they lost control, but only 62% of participants

practiced the affirmations learned and continued the exercises after the intervention for a period of at least two months.

Participants appreciated and strengthened through the exercise that for the development of personal power must be activated, used, consolidated and developed *sources and resources of personal power*, which they consider to be the link and foundation for changes in the structure of limiting beliefs, emotional behaviours and for the formulation of personal affirmations in accordance with the needs of personal development and the vision of the projection of possible selves.

From the interviewees' reports it results that they formed their skill, ability to identify, to modify limiting beliefs through the ability to formulate meaningful affirmations in the present time, synthesized in personal visions based on activating and developing the inexhaustible personal resources of assumed power (empowerment).

Limitations of the study and further directions of analysis

This study is a qualitative one and was based exclusively on the participants' reports without measuring quantitatively by psychometric tests the results of learning the aspects developed through the intervention to strengthen personal power. The number of participants was relatively low and although the reported results were positive for the psychological well-being acquired by them, especially at the level of interpersonal actions and professional activities, we cannot consider that it was generated by the intervention proposed by us, but certainly this had an effect. The time allocated to data collection was relatively short and therefore the interview was effectively channelled on the aspects learned and recalled from the training at a conceptual level and the motivational, cognitive and behavioural effects generated by it.

Regarding the subsequent directions of action at the level of the group of participants, females could be selected from groups with medium and low socio-economic status, given that the selected group consisted of females with medium to high socio-economic status. The analysis of the results should be completed with quantitative, psychometric tests related to the level of empowerment, psychological well-being and aspects related to the climate of the educational environment in which they operate. The accumulation of qualitative data should be continued by extending the semi-structured interview on the aspects of emotional self-regulation that have now been briefly investigated.

General conclusions

The empowerment intervention through the construction of affirmations was perceived by the participating females as effective for improving the psychological well-being related to decisions and interpersonal relationships in the educational environment. Participants reported progress in the direction of correct and efficient

self-assessment, capitalization of individual resources, modelling of core beliefs through new affirmations learned and orientation towards decision and action.

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Table 1. *Concepts retained and recalled regarding the idea of „empowerment” by the trainees after its completion:*

| Item no | Content elements | Category | Theme | Frequency |
|---------|---|----------|-------|-----------|
| 1 | strength, (psychological) power, power, lack of power; confidence; | I | PS | 5 |
| 2 | feeling, happiness, balance, fulfilment; | III | CB | 3 |
| 3 | affirmations; thinking, arguing, cognition; fundamental beliefs; | II | A | 6 |
| 4 | networking, change; | IV | CB | 3 |
| 5 | motivation, stimulation, improvement, adaptation; (self) development, satisfaction, personal achievement; | I | A | 4 |
| 6 | support system; communication; | IV | CB | 4 |

Table 2. *The aspects that were best retained and with the greatest impact in the training*

| Item No. | Content elements | Category | Frequency |
|----------|--|----------|-----------|
| 1 | “role-playing games”; | IV | 9 |
| 2 | the ability to construct and reconstruct clear, concise, magnetic, energetic affirmations; formulation of own affirmations, visions, thoughts, ideas, mental images with reference to the various ways of change, decision-making, personal plans, personal development strategies and goals we want | II | 12 |

| Item No. | Content elements | Category | Frequency |
|----------|---|----------|-----------|
| | to achieve; | | |
| 3 | the exercises of changing the wrong personal beliefs and their beneficial effect on the person in the next period; the idea of „wrong, limiting beliefs”. | II | 11 |
| 4 | the interaction with group members; making new friends; the idea of a „support system” that helps in one's own development; | IV | 9 |
| 5 | correlating Empowerment with the vision, policies, values and strategies of the organization; | II | 4 |

Table 3. *Traits of a person who has assumed power through „empowerment” techniques:*

| Item No. | Content elements | Category | Theme | Frequency |
|----------|--|----------|-------|-----------|
| 1 | balanced, self-controlled; confident in herself and in the world; positive attitude; optimism, strong | I, II | PS | 13 |
| 2 | able to enjoy the things she experiences every day; | III | CB | 5 |
| 3 | able to make changes and look to the future; | II, IV | A | 7 |
| 4 | adaptable; resilient; courage, motivation for change; | I, IV | A | 9 |
| 5 | confident, motivated, creative, self-confident, loving, responsible, supportive, determined; | I | PS | 13 |
| 6 | activism; mobilization; active, responsible role, total involvement; the power to act to achieve the goal; adaptation to the new; motivation to achieve goals; | IV, I | A | 13 |
| 7 | she accepts and loves herself and others in the first place; self-acceptance; | III | PS | 6 |

Table 4. *Arguing the topics of the course chosen by the participants as the most useful and with the greatest impact*

| Item No. | Thematic category | Category | Frequency |
|----------|---|----------|-----------|
| 1 | <i>Sources and resources of personal power (PS) - the importance of capitalizing on personal resources and reaching development potential. Aiming to achieve psychological well-being, optimism and hope.</i> | I, III | 13 |

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| Item No. | Thematic category | Category | Frequency |
|----------|---|----------|-----------|
| 2 | <i>Affirmation building (A)</i> – it is a real tool for achieving change, it capitalizes on the personality of the individual and gives results. Represents (reflects) new strategies for both therapeutic and personal intervention, being useful for any change undertaken in the points. | II, I | 13 |
| 3 | <i>The system of core beliefs (about oneself, the world and the ways of interacting with the world and its resources) (CB)</i> : – support a better analysis of reality, identify the limiting aspects generated by dysfunctional cognitions and offer the perspective on future actions | II, IV | 12 |

Table 5. *Changes that have occurred in the lives of students from the end of the training until the time of the interview (last 6 months):*

| Item no. | Content elements | Category | Theme | Frequency |
|----------|---|----------|-----------|-----------|
| 1 | more aware of herself, of her qualities and defects and of the possibilities of becoming; more confident, a better professional; use of resources; | I | PS | 13 |
| 2 | speed and efficiency in decision making; confidence in the future; | II | A | 8 |
| 3 | enriching strategies for ameliorating or overcoming conflict situations; strengthening and improving the capacity to adapt to any situation; | III, II | A, PS | 9 |
| 4 | the courage to try what she wants; making the decision to make a change; being responsible for the decisions taken; the desire to have more responsibilities, simultaneously with the creation of opportunities to assume them; | IV, II | PS, CB | 6 |
| 5 | increased tolerance in relationships with others; easier expression of feelings; optimism; positive attitude; feelings of security in what she undertakes; overcoming conflict situations much easier; | II | CB, A, PS | 4 |
| 6 | professional progress; faster adaptation to change; | IV, II | CB, A | 3 |

Table 6. *The period of time in which the training participants continued the exercises to reinforce the personal changes they started during the course:*

| Item no. | Degree of practice | No. of participants |
|----------|--|---------------------|
| 1 | Weekly exercises throughout the period and currently continue for 5-6 months | 3 |
| 2 | Weekly exercises for 3-4 months after training and then 2 if needed | |
| 3 | Weekly exercises in the first 2 months then as needed | 3 |
| 4 | Exercises in the first weeks to a month then as needed | 3 |
| 5 | Did not practice after training | 2 |
| | Total | 13 |