| RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Importance of Peer Acceptance and Parenting Styles on the Preschooler's Shyness Reduction

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| ABSTRACT

Shyness among preschoolers is a topic that concerns many parents. In a world where the dare rules, shyness seems, in comparison, a handicap. But it is not so. It is a stage of development and a smaller force of expression. Often, shyness is born from a lack of confidence, and a lack of confidence from a lack of satisfying activities that show the child that he can, he just has to try. Parenting is particularly important in children's social development because how parents care for children can critically and permanently influence children's social functioning. The aim of the present study was to measure the effectiveness of an educational intervention program on the reduction of shyness among preschoolers, respectively the increase of the level of acceptance by peers. The results demonstrated, first of all, that preschoolers whose parents adopt an authoritative, respectively uninvolved parenting style have a high level of shyness, and secondly, our educational intervention program demonstrated its effectiveness in terms of reducing preschoolers' shyness and the acceptance of colleagues, obtaining an average effect.

| KEYWORDS

Educational intervention program, parenting styles, peers acceptance, preschoolers, shyness

1. Introduction

In the first years of life, children begin to learn new and different things with the help of parents and different stimuli from the environment and, with this, adapt to their current situation. Also, through preschool educational institutions, children participate in new environments, meet their peers and create a new social environment. In this way, children develop socially and emotionally and start learning new things. On the contrary, since environments in which environmental stimuli are insufficient do not adequately support children's social and linguistic development, this may also affect the child's social environment and school adjustment during future school life and, at the same time, may reduce school achievement of students (Yüksel et al., 2016).

Early childhood is considered a critical period in human life because experiences in the first years of life have a long-lasting effect on people. For this reason, the opportunities offered and the vulnerabilities experienced during early childhood are very important. Opportunities and vulnerabilities in social development from birth to age six cannot be examined in isolation; because knowledge about socialization factors is required (Westerberg, 2011). Quality of childcare (Peisner-Feinberg et al., 2001; Votruba-Drzal et al., 2004); friendship and peer relationships (Engle et al., 2011; Glick & Rose, 2011) and parenting (Rubin & Burgess, 2002; Watamura et al., 2011) are considered possible contributors to the social development of to the children.

2. Literature Review

Shyness is the most investigated subtype of social withdrawal during childhood and shares considerable conceptual overlap with a number of other similar constructs (e.g., behavioral inhibition, Kagan, 1997; anxious loneliness, Gazelle & Ladd, 2003). Shy children

experience an internal conflict between social approach and social avoidance motivations, whereby their desire to interact with peers is simultaneously inhibited by feelings of anxiety, worry, and fear of negative judgment (Jones et al., 2014).

For Hendin and Cheek (1999), the concept of shyness highlights a personality trait characterized by anxious feelings and inhibitions in social situations. Shyness is correlated with emotional experiences such as: guilt, embarrassment in various social contexts.

Dugas (1903) classifies shyness according to the affected psychic processes :

- Volitional shyness or clumsiness has two forms: motor inertia and motor agitation. The first is characterized by the inability to act or regulate motor acts, and the second involves the execution of useless acts quantitatively (too many) and qualitatively (inadequate).
- Intellectual shyness or stupidity has two forms: the first would be total shyness, nicknamed as intellectual paralysis and partial shyness. Total shyness consists of the impossibility of being attentive, which leads to the inability of intelligence to achieve meaning. The paralysis of intelligence is momentary and lasts until the stressful stimulus is removed. Partial shyness is characterized by the dispersion of attention, disorder and incoherence of ideas.
- Affective shyness has two aspects: complete loss of feelings and a disorder of contrary feelings. The shy children may have conflicting feelings about which they cannot choose.
- Spontaneous shyness which is the most intense and common form of shyness. It is a strong emotion that cannot be controlled, being similar to phobias. This type of shyness is determined only by physical or physiological causes, not by psychological causes. We can also call it the fear of crowds because it manifests itself only in the presence of people.

Consequently, shy children are prone to exhibit socially reticent behaviors (eg, watching other peers play without joining in) in both familiar and unfamiliar social contexts (Coplan et al., 2009). Certain researchers (Rubin et al., 2009; Walker et al., 2014) have demonstrated a strong link between shyness in early childhood and negative social outcomes, both concurrently and later in life (Rubin et al. al., 2009; Walker et al., 2014). Indeed, because they withdraw from social situations, shy children may miss important opportunities to practice and develop new cognitive and social skills (Jones et al., 2014). Additionally, shyness has been linked to difficulties in: social relationships (eg, peer exclusion, victimization), lack of social competence, and greater internalizing problems (Bohlin et al., 2005; Clauss & Blackfors, 2012).

2.1. Peer acceptance in kindergarten

Beginning in early childhood, the peer context is an important and unique resource for children's healthy social-emotional development (Rubin et al., 2015). Preschoolers who have harmonious peer relationships are more likely to display cooperative behaviors, show enthusiasm for the educational environment, and be accepted by their peers both in kindergarten and in the primary education cycle (Eggum-Wilkens et al., 2014).

Instead, other children are more likely to isolate themselves from others, withdrawing from opportunities for contact with peers (Coplan et al., 2013; Liu et al., 2014). Socially withdrawn preschoolers are at increased risk for developing a wide range of social-emotional difficulties, including internalizing problems (eg, anxiety) and negative peer experiences (eg, rejection) (Rubin et al., 2009).

Coplan et al. (2013) support the existence of certain subtypes of social withdrawal, each characterized by certain distinct temperamental, emotional, and motivational subtypes. Unsociability appears to be a relatively benign subtype of social withdrawal, particularly in early childhood. For example, unsociable preschoolers do not tend to differ from their nonwithdrawn peers on most indices of social-emotional functioning (Coplan et al., 2004; Spangler & Gazelle, 2009). However, there is some evidence to suggest that unsociability may be associated with negative peer experiences, including peer dislike and exclusion (Coplan et al., 2007; Coplan & Weeks, 2010).

Accordingly, children's social acceptance from peers has been associated with liking and prosocial behavior (Eisenberg et al., 2015). For example, Malti and colleagues (2012) found that being liked by peers is a significant predictor of children's development of sharing behaviors. There is at least some evidence to suggest that negative peer relationships may be a particular risk factor for socially withdrawn children and adolescents (Markovic & Bowker, 2015; Rubin et al., 2006).

2.2. Parenting style and its effects on preschoolers' shyness

The parenting style is made up of a series of elements that reflect the parent's attitudes towards the child, the strategies he adopts for raising and educating him, as well as the expectations he has from the child (Dalimonte-Merckling & Williams, 2020). Also, the parenting style provides the necessary context for the expression of the parent's behavior in relation to his child.

Parenting styles defined by Baumrind (1966) form the most common model for research. This model classifies parenting styles based on parental control and describes three different styles: authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive (Diaz, 2005). In several studies, these three parenting styles have been found to be predictive of children's developmental outcomes (Meteyer & Jenkins, 2009; Rinaldi & Howe, 2012). Because the key socialization agent in children's lives are parents (Grusec & Davidov, 2007) the dynamics behind authoritative, authoritative, and permissive parenting are central to the children socialization process.

In contrast, warm parenting, consisting of positive, nurturing, and supportive practices, has been shown to be associated with fewer behavior problems, better adjustment, positive peer relationships, and prosocial behavior in several studies (Garland, 2010; Sroufe, 2005; Strayer & Roberts, 2004). While parental overprotection and control have been found to be correlated with social anxiety, shyness, behavioral and social problems (Dong, 2010; Gadeyne et al., 2004), neglectful parenting style characterized by poor monitoring, and indifference (Harvey et al., 2011) has been found to be related to internalizing and externalizing behavioral problems, greater physical and relational aggression, and lack of self-control (Casas et al., 2006; Garland, 2010; Sclafani, 2004).

Rubin, Root, and Bowker (2010) report that parent–child interaction, parenting beliefs, and practices affect the development of social withdrawal in children. In particular, child-rearing attitudes viewed as interfering, destructive, and insensitive may increase socially withdrawn behaviors. Rubin, Coplan, and Bowker (2009) explain the relationship between children's withdrawn styles and parenting style as follows: "Parents who are overprotective and directive tend to overmanage situations for their children, restrain their children's behavior, stifle independence, and to control their children's activities" (p. 9).

Children of parents with an authoritarian parenting style have better self-discipline than others, better emotional control, more friends, and better school performance. However, this research excludes a very important thing, namely the fact that not only the educational style that the parent adopts influences the child, but the child also has a major influence on the parent-child dyad.

Following the research carried out by Baumrind (1991) based on interviews with parents, the confessions of children and the observation of parents show that preschoolers parents are part of the authoritarian style and see that they themselves and even as a result of some objective measurements as more sociable and that compete instruments better than those of the parents are non-authoritarian.

Whatever parenting style a parent adopts, the most important thing is that he remembers that discipline is used to teach and guide the child, not to punish, manipulate or control him, and violence is not to be done. Educating a child should not be in a parent's disciplinary methods, regardless of the parenting style used.

The aim of the present study is to measure the effectiveness of an educational intervention program on the reduction of shyness among preschoolers, respectively the increase of the level of acceptance by peers.

The hypotheses from which we started the approach of this research are:

Hypothesis 1: There is a significant association between the parenting style adopted by the parents and shyness of preschoolers.

Hypothesis 2: The proposed intervention program "Partners in the social development of preschoolers" will significantly contribute to reducing shyness among preschoolers.

3. Methodology
3.1 Participants
In this research, the participants were 34 preschoolers aged between 5 and 6 years, preschoolers from two groups of kindergartens with an extended program in Cluj-Napoca, Romania and their parents.

The participants were divided following the interpretation of the answers to the applied questionnaires into two groups: an experimental group - 17 children and a control group with 17 other children.

3.2 Measures
3.2.1. The Children"s Shyness Questionnaire (CSQ, Crozier, 1995)
This tool was created with the aim of assessing children's shyness . It contains 26 items which describing the emotional and behavioral aspects of shyness (e.g., item 1: "I find it difficult to talk to someone I don't know"; item 6: "I feel shy when I have to read aloud in front of the class"). In this research, this instrument was completed through systematic direct observation and was adapted for the age category of the participants included in this research.

Regarding the reliability and validity of this questionnaire, Findlay et al. (2009) reported an alpha coefficient of 0.77, and Coplan et al. (2013) reported an alpha α of 0.87.

3.2.2. PROMIS Peer Relationships Short Form (PROMIS PR-SF, DeWalt et al., 2015)
This questionnaire was developed by DeWalt and his colleagues in accordance with the PROMIS methodology. It comprises 8 items that assess perceptions of the quality of their relationships with colleagues on a Likert scale from 1 to 5, where 1 represents -never and 5- always. We used this questionnaire in our research to measure peer acceptance.

3.2.3. Parenting Style Four Factor Questionnaire (PS-FFQ , Shyny, 2017)
This questionnaire was mainly built as a tool to measure the four parenting styles of parents (authoritative, authoritarian, permissive and neglectful), helping the teachers, school counselors and psychologists to find out the real causes behind children's behavior - problems, poor academic results, etc. The questionnaire includes 32 items that are evaluated on a Likert scale from 1 to 5, where 1 represents never, and 5 - always. The theoretical range for the total score is from 32 to 160; higher scores reflect higher levels of each parenting style. Regarding reliability, Shyny (2017) obtained a Cronbach's alpha coefficient equal to .91 for the entire questionnaire and Heizomi et al. (2022) obtained for the Persian version a coefficient that varied between 0.6 and 0.71 for the subscales.

3.3 Procedure
To begin with, a meeting was held with the parents through which it was explained to the parents the purpose of involving the preschoolers in this study, offering them informed consent to express their agreement to participate.

Afterwards, the preschoolers participating in the research were evaluated by completing the instruments selected through the method of systematic direct observation, respectively of their parents.

Then, starting from the identified needs, we implemented an educational intervention program that contains five activities for preschoolers (two activities for preschoolers to accept each other more easily, respectively three activities to reduce shyness) and three activities for parents. The proposed educational intervention program took place over a period of four months (February-May) and the main methods and strategies used in carrying out the activities were: conversation, explanation, game, cooperative learning, problematization, exposition, storytelling, personal reflection, modeling, self-observation and learning through discovery.

In order to observe if there are improvements in the measured abilities, the data collection tools of the preschoolers participating in this study were re-applied.

4. Results
Regarding the first hypothesis of this study, in order to notice if there is a certain association between the parenting style adopted by one of the parents and the appearance of shyness among preschoolers, the correlation coefficient r Pearson was calculated.

Table 1. Correlation coefficients of the measured variables

	Mean SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Authoritarian style	M=13.8 SD=3.24	-				
2. Authoritative style	M=37.7 SD=4.31	-.17	-			
3. Permissive style	M=25.85 SD=3.96	.03	.28	-		
4. Uninvolved style	M=10.53 SD=2.21	.51**	.-20	.44**	-	
5. Shyness	M=40.3 SD=11.6	.58**	.07	.008	.68**	-

** Correlation is significant at a p<.001

Analyzing the results from the first table, it is noted that shyness appears in preschoolers whose parents adopt the authoritarian parenting style ($r_{(32)}$=.58, p<.001), respectively the uninvolved parenting style ($r_{(32)}$=.68, p <.001). Thus, parents who adopt the authoritarian parenting style most of the time want the instructions given by them to be respected by the child, because the parent decides what is best for him, they do not have an increased level of patience to tolerate anything the child, develop a strict program

for the child because the main beliefs of authoritarian parents are: "I strongly believe that the future of my child is in my hands" and "Only through punishment can a child be corrected" which curbs the child's ability to express emotions in an appropriate manner. In addition to these aspects, parents who adopt the uninvolved parenting style have no emotional connection with their child, deal with their own problems, giving more importance to their own needs and wishes without taking into account the child's needs or undesirable behaviors, and the most their frequent beliefs are: "I am busy and have little time to care for my child, so he/she is free to make decisions on his/her own" and "I have no control or demands on my child, so that I give him total freedom" which leads to a total invalidation of the children's emotions, developing some insecurity. So, the first hypothesis of this study is confirmed. In order to observe how much of the variability of shyness can be caused or explained by the relationship with parenting styles, the coefficient of determination R^2 was also calculated. Thus, after the calculation of the coefficient of determination, the following were noted: shyness is determined both by the authoritarian parental style obtaining a high effect (R^2=.34) and by the uninvolved parental style also obtaining a high effect (R^2=.47).

Table 2: Descriptive analysis of the results obtained in the pre-test phase depending on belonging to the experimental group

Group	Variable	N	M	Mdn	SD	Sum	Minimum	Maximum
Control	*Shyness*	17	27,17	26	6.8	462	19	42
	Peer acceptance		28,05	28	3.68	477	21	35
Experimental	*Shyness*	17	51,70	51	4.83	879	43	57
	Peer acceptance		11,76	12	3.47	200	8	20

After interpreting the results (see Table 2), we noticed that preschoolers in the experimental group have an increased level of shyness (M=51,70) compared to preschoolers in the control group (M=27,17). Thus, the preschoolers of the experimental group are easily embarrassed, especially when they are the center of attention. They are silent and only talk to one or two colleagues they feel close to. In addition, preschoolers in the experimental group also have a low level of peer acceptance (M=11,76) compared to preschoolers in the control group (M=28,05). Having an increased level of shyness, the preschoolers in the experimental group do not interact and relate with their peers, which is why they face difficulties in making friends, do not feel accepted by their peers, isolate themselves more, prefer solitary play and do not support each other in certain activities.

Table 3: Paired samples t-test results for the experimental group

Variables	Pre-test		Post-test		N	95% CI for Mean Difference	t	df
	M	SD	M	SD				
Shyness	51,70	4.83	27,6	6.6	17	19.47;28.64	11,11*	16
Peer acceptance	11,76	3.47	34,82	4.21	17	-26.62; -19.50	13,71*	16

*p<.01.

In order to measure the degree of effectiveness of the proposed educational intervention program on the measured variables, the t-test for paired samples was calculated (see Table 3), respectively the effect size was calculated. At the end of the proposed activities, the data collection tools were re-applied where the following improvements were noted: if at first it seemed difficult for them to talk to someone they did not know and they did not feel accepted by the other colleagues, after implementation of the proposed educational intervention program, we found significant improvements regarding preschoolers, namely the fact that it is no longer so difficult for them to talk to people they don't know, being more open to showing cooperative behaviors, showing enthusiasm to the educational environment and to be accepted by their peers.

After calculating the effect size, a d=.36 was obtained for the variable shyness and a d=.30 for the variable acceptance of colleagues, which means that the proposed educational intervention program had an medium effect.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The evolution of society brings to the fore the evolution of humanity from the earliest ages, i.e. from kindergarten. Social competence appears in this context as a necessity of personality development, a way of free expression, of which many of us have been deprived.

The development of social competence is a necessity in the preschool environment and not only its general objective. It represents the way in which the other sides of the personality are stimulated and formed. When the child is small, the influences are organized and structured by the adults who surround him: first the parents and the other adults in the family, then the teacher and the other children with whom he interacts. The closest human models being the parental ones. The child initially tries to identify with his two

parents. Among these factors, parenting is particularly important in children's social development because how parents care for children can critically and permanently influence children's social functioning. Therefore, previous research implicates the relationship between parenting styles and children's social skills (Bornstein & Bornstein, 2007; Purple, 2005).

The aim of this research consisted in the development and implementation of an educational intervention program regarding the reduction of shyness of preschoolers, respectively the increase of the level of acceptance by peers.

The results of the first hypothesis demonstrated the existence of a statistically significant correlation between the parenting styles adopted by parents and the appearance of preschoolers' shyness. Fallis (2018) demonstrated in his study that the parenting style had an effect on the socio-emotional development of children, especially all permissive parents had children with less social and personal development. Another research showed that permissive and authoritarian parenting style has a more negative impact than authoritative parenting style (Suteja, 2017). Every parent believes that the way they educate, guide and discipline their children is considered reasonable. However, sometimes parents are not aware that the method they use can hinder their children's development.

Additionally, authoritarian parents could shape children to become shy, have low social skills, and exhibit social behavior problems, while permissive parents could shape children to be free to behave without thinking about the consequences, not used to communicating and listening to others, which could lead to difficulties adapting to their social environment. A recent study by Aslamiyah et al. (2023) revealed a significant correlation between parenting style and the social and emotional development of preschoolers in Surabaya concluding that parents are the child's first educators and parental control is important based on the proportion of children, not adults. The impact of permissive and authoritarian parenting styles is explained in Baumrind's Theory: the way parents treat their children will have a great influence on children's psychosocial (Kuppens & Ceulemans, 2019; Nurlaila, 2017).

Regarding the second hypothesis, following the calculation of the effect size, our educational intervention program demonstrated its efficiency to some extent, obtaining an medium effect. We believe that early intervention in the reduction of shyness in preschoolers helps them acquire an increased level of social skills that lead to a higher level of the quality of relationships between colleagues, a conclusion also supported by Gazelle (2008) and Gazelle et al. (2017).

One of the limits of this research would be the small sample of participants. In order to demonstrate the effectiveness of the proposed educational intervention program, it should be applied to a larger sample of participants. Another limit would be the lack of insertion of endogenous variables such as emotional expressiveness, shame. A final limit is constituted by the instruments used that are not validated on the Romanian population, not being adapted for our population and their psychometric properties remaining unchanged.

The first future direction of research would be to reapply this educational intervention program in several kindergartens and insert some workshops for parents in collaboration with school counselors.

Another future direction of research would be to design another study to investigate whether parenting style, attachment style, shyness, and shame are predictors for the emergence of social anxiety in preschoolers when they reach elementary school.

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