TEACHING APPROACHES WHEN WORKING WITH STUDENTS WITH LOW SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS: DO TEACHERS GIVE STUDENTS AUTONOMY TO LEARN?

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Abstract. *As PISA 2018 results show (OECD, 2018, 2019), students with high SES achieve better results in all countries than their peers with low SES. The impact of personal background circumstances on student performance is partly mediated by other factors, e.g. students' access to educational resources, differences in the opportunity to learn, and grade repetition and tracking. Meanwhile, Jensen (2009) claims that the major factor affecting the achievement of students living in unfavourable conditions is not their living environment, but rather the school and the teachers. Jensen (2013) notes that the best strategy to help students with low SES achieve success in learning is to provide such conditions that they are involved in the learning process. Therefore, the present article explores how teachers employ self-determination theory when working with students with low SES. The participants in the quantitative survey were selected from five schools of one District Municipality in Lithuania characterized by low SES. The sample consisted of 95 teachers and 183 students. The results concerning the teachers demonstrate that the teachers working with low-SES status students have the moderately autonomy-supportive style, yet they tend to employ the controlling motivating style alongside the autonomy-supportive one. In the students' opinion, they have a fairly close relationship with their teachers and feel understood by them. The students also maintain that the teachers give them choices, encourage them to ask questions and express confidence in their abilities. However, it can be determined that the teachers rarely seek to empower children to learn independently.*

Keywords: *self-determination theory; socio-economic status; student; teacher; teachers' motivating style.*

Introduction

International studies on students' achievement confirm the indisputable influence of socio-economic status (SES) on students' academic performance. In Lithuania, as in other countries (e.g. Israel, Luxembourg, Germany, Hungary, etc.), we can see that students with high SES achieve better results than their peers with low SES (OECD, 2018, 2019). An overview of works that examine the relationship between student achievement and their social status reveals several trends. Certainly, individual, family, and environmental contextual factors have a significant impact on a child's educational achievement (The Institute for Public Policy & Economic Development, 2016). The latest research (Hair, Hanson, Wolfe, & Pollak, 2015) reveals that we can already see systemic structural differences in some brain parts (caudal and incisal cortex, and hippocampus) of 4-year-old children with low SES, which can explain about 20 percent of the low achievement of these children. Meanwhile, Jensen (2009) claims that the major factor affecting the achievement of students living in unfavourable conditions is not their living environment, but rather the school and the teacher. Namely, Jensen (2013) notes that the best strategy to help students with low SES achieve success in learning is to provide such conditions that they are involved in the learning process. He identifies seven factors related to students' participation in the teaching/learning process and closely associated with their socio-economic status. They include the children's (1) health and food; (2) vocabulary; (3) effort and energy; (4) mindset; (5) cognitive capacity; (6) relationships; and (7) stress level. Hence, having responded to a child's primary needs (health, food, comfort, and rest), the school community (and the teacher) can help these students by creating a positive atmosphere in educational institutions; emotionally supporting the children, encouraging them to put in greater effort, developing their cognitive capacity, as well as actualizing their effort and energy to learn.

According to researchers (Hornstra, Mansfield, Van der Veen, Peetsma, & Volman, 2015), teachers are key actors whose main task is to motivate students to learn. Teachers can differ in the way they try to motivate students to learn, and their motivational strategies can vary from 'controlling' to 'autonomy-supportive'. Therefore, the object of this research is the teachers' style of teaching as defined by the self-determination theory. The purpose of the research is to explore how teachers employ self-determination theory when working with students with low SES. The used research methods were theoretical analysis and interpretation of scientific literature, anonymous questionnaire survey. In this survey two measuring instruments are used: Problems in Schools Questionnaire (PIS) for teachers (Deci, Schwartz, Sheinman, & Ryan, 1981) and Learning Climate Questionnaire (LCQ) for students (Black & Deci, 2000).

Literature Review

Self-determination theory (SDT) assumes that healthy motivation needs to be intrinsic in nature and that the basic psychological needs (competence, autonomy and relatedness) are prerequisites for intrinsically motivated behaviour (Van Nuland, Taris, Boekaerts, & Martens, 2012). According to researchers (Reeve, 2012; Reeve, Ryan, & Deci, 2018), all students, irrespective of their socio-economic status or cultural background, possess inherent growth tendencies (e.g. intrinsic motivation, curiosity, psychological needs) that provide a motivational foundation for high-quality classroom engagement and positive school functioning. Satisfaction of the three basic needs – to feel related to others, to feel competent, and to feel autonomous – enables students to be curious, active, strive for excellence, and connect to the social environment. Obviously, the learning environment must support and facilitate rather than shape, change or control the inner resources of the student's motivation. How can this be achieved?

According to Gagne and Deci (2005), central to SDT is the distinction between autonomous motivation and controlled motivation. Autonomy involves acting with a sense of volition and having the experience of choice. In contrast, being controlled involves acting with a sense of pressure and a sense of having to engage in actions. Research shows that teachers' motivating style is closely related to children's involvement in the teaching/learning process (Appleton, Christenson, & Furlong, 2008; Reeve, 2012). Encouraging children to learn, teachers usually use a motivational style, which can be autonomy-supportive or controlling (Deci et al., 1981). Certainly, teachers with an autonomy-supportive style rely on different instructional behaviours to motivate their students than do teachers with a controlling style (Reeve & Jang, 2006). Researchers (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991) note that autonomy support occurs when somebody with power (e.g. a teacher) accepts another's (e.g. a student's) perspective, recognizes his/her feelings, and provides him/her with appropriate information and possibilities of choice, thus reducing the use of demands and pressure. For instance, an autonomy-supportive teacher provides students with essential information and encourages them to use it independently when solving a problem.

According to Reeve and Jang (2006), teachers' instructional behaviours (listening, creating time for independent work, giving the student opportunities to talk, praising signs of improvement and mastery, encouraging the student's effort, offering progress-enabling hints when the student seems stuck, being responsive to the student's questions and comments, and acknowledging the student's perspective and experiences) correlate positively with students' experiences of autonomy. A controlling teacher, on the contrary, pressurises the student to behave in a particular way, as well as employing certain awards and punishments.

In this case, the teacher tells students how to solve a problem in a particular way, utters directives/commands, makes 'should/got to' statements, and asks controlling questions. It is evident that this type of teacher relies more on extrinsic strategies (such as 'learning for the teacher').

Depending on the motivating style chosen by the teacher, student engagement (active and conscious learning) and learning outcomes can be quite different. Research results demonstrate that teachers' autonomy-supportive style is associated with higher student motivation, effective student engagement and positive learning results (Gunnell, Crocker, Wilson, & Mack, & Zumbo, 2013; Jang, Kim, & Reeve, 2016). Meanwhile, teachers' controlling style is related to lower motivation, ineffective, superficial learning and low learning achievement of students (Haerens, Aelterman, Vansteenkiste, Soenens, & Van Petegem 2015; Hein, Koka, & Hagger, 2015). Moreover, Deci et al. (1981) found that students of autonomy-supportive teachers are more intrinsically motivated and have higher self-esteem than those of teachers who are more control orientated.

It is noteworthy that according to the STD, students' inner desire for meaningful learning is not a self-contained or automatic process (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Imposing external control might even disrupt students' natural tendency to learn (Van Nuland et al., 2012). Thus, the behaviour of the teacher (a motivating style of autonomy or control) during the teaching process can strengthen or inhibit students' active participation. Besides, according to Hornstra et al. (2015, p. 386-387), beliefs expressed by teachers are very important and there could be differences between students' needs and strengths, and different ways to meet those needs: "The views held by teachers also suggest that students' needs or the ways to fulfil them not only depend on their ethnicity or culture, but that these could also depend on other characteristics, such as ability levels, SES or behavioural characteristics".

It is also important to note that the very purpose of the teacher and the concept of education are very important when it comes to teachers' motivating style. On the one hand, when there is a strong emphasis on performance, feelings of enthusiasm and interest in class, there is danger of them being replaced by experiences of anxiety, boredom and alienation (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). On the other hand, teachers employing the autonomy-supportive style should themselves work in the supportive environment (Reeve, 2009). Teachers guide students in their learning process and bring the educational approach of the school into act in the classroom. Finally, researchers emphasize that the assumptions of the school community are important not only in the narrow sense (the school itself), but also in the wider sense (e.g. teacher training). The study findings of Stroet, Opdenakker and Minnaert (2015) imply that long-lasting effects can be expected of teacher training only when these are tailored to fit the educational approaches of schools.

Research Methodology

Participants and Procedures. The research data were collected in May and October 2018. The participants in the quantitative survey were recruited from five rural schools of one District Municipality in Lithuania. The students of these schools live in an unfavourable social, economic and cultural environment. For several years the educational achievements of these students have remained low and below the Lithuanian average (*Lietuva. Švietimas šalyje ir regionuose 2016. Mokinių pasiekimai,* 2016; *Lietuva. Švietimas šalyje ir regionuose 2017. Mokytojas*, 2017). Anonymous paper-and-pencil questionnaires were distributed to students and teachers during on-site visits to each school. Prior authorisation was requested from management staff at the schools involved in the study, as well as the parents and/or guardians of the students. The questionnaires for students were completed in the classroom under the supervision of the authors of this article, who explained how the students should complete the instruments and remained available to answer any questions that might arise during the process. It was emphasized that the participation of students and teachers was voluntary and anonymity was guaranteed. This research procedure was carried out in accordance with the recommendations of the Academic Ethics Code approved by the Presidium of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences.

The research sample consisted of 95 teachers and 183 students from grades 5 through 11. Students of grade 12 did not take part in the survey because of preparation for the the matura examinations. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics on the teachers and students in this sample.

Table 1 Descriptive statistics of the research sample

The sample of teachers (N = 95)				
	Age groups			
	Less than 29 years	30–39 years	40–49 years	50–59 years	60 years and up
Frequency	–	14	27	38	16
Percent	–	14.7	28.3	40	16.8
	Teaching experience of teachers			
	Less than 5 years	6–10 years	11–20 years	21–30 years	31 years and up
Frequency	4	4	23	26	38
Percent	4.2	4.2	24.2	27.4	40
	Qualification categories of teachers			
	Teacher	Senior Teacher	Teacher-Methodologist	Teacher-Expert
Frequency	8	60	25	2
Percent	8.4	63.2	26.3	2.1

The sample of students (N = 183)				
	Grade 5–8	Grade 9–11	Boys	Girls
Frequency	92	91	90	93
Percent	50.2	49.8	49.2	50.8

Instruments. The teachers' questionnaire was divided into two sections. The first section concerned the socio-demographic characteristics of the teachers, such as their age, years of teaching experience, and qualification categories. The second section consisted of the Problems in Schools Questionnaire (PIS) (Deci et al., 1981). The teachers were presented with eight vignettes, each of which contained four items. Each item represented a different level of teachers' autonomy support: highly controlling (HC), moderately controlling (MC), moderately autonomy-supportive (MA), or highly autonomy-supportive (HA). Possible responses ranged on a seven-point Likert-like scale from 1 (very inappropriate) to 7 (very appropriate) with an intermediate score of 4 (moderately appropriate). The teachers' HC, MC, MA, and HA scales were computed by averaging the eight responses for each. Finally, the teachers' motivating style score was computed as follows: $2(HA) + MA − MC − 2(HC)$. Overall scores ranged from -18 to 18. A high score represents an orientation toward autonomy, while a low, or a negative, score indicates an orientation toward control.

To verify the internal consistency of the Lithuanian version of the Problems in Schools Questionnaire, we calculated Cronbach alpha. It was determined that Cronbach alpha for the present study was above 0.70, which is an acceptable level of reliability in educational research (DeVellis, 2003). Table 2 shows its value for each scale.

Table 2 **Internal consistency for each subscale of the Problems in Schools Questionnaire**

Subscales	Number of items	Cronbach α	Cronbach α (Reeve, Bolt, & Cai, 1999)
Highly controlling (HC)	8	0.73	0.79
Moderately controlling (MC)	8	0.77	0.77
Moderately autonomy-supportive (MA)	8	0.70	0.78
Highly autonomy-supportive (HA)	8	0.82	0.69

The first section of the students' questionnaire concerned the socio-demographic data: gender and grade. The second section consisted of the short version of the Learning Climate Questionnaire (LCQ) (Black & Deci, 2000). This questionnaire consisted of 6 items answered on a seven-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) with an intermediate score of 4 (moderately agree). The scores on the 6-item LCQ were calculated by averaging the individual item scores. Higher scores indicate greater perceived autonomy

support. The Cronbach's alpha score, which measures the internal consistency of the items, was satisfactory ($\alpha = 0.90$).

The Problems in Schools Questionnaire for teachers and the Learning Climate Questionnaire for students were downloaded from the website https://selfdeterminationtheory.org/. Additionally, written permission to use these measures was obtained from E.L. Deci. The questionnaires were translated from English into Lithuanian by the second author of this article.

Data Analysis. The statistical analyses were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics 22.0. The following methods were applied to analyse the research data: descriptive statistics, Kruskal-Wallis test (a non-parametric test that compares three or more independent samples), and Mann-Whitney U Test (a non-parametric test that compares two independent samples). p-values less than 0.05 indicated a statistically significant correlation. Cronbach's alpha was used to assess the internal consistency of the questionnaires. Shapiro-Wilk test was employed to determine if the data were normally distributed. The results of this test showed that the data of the Problems in Schools Questionnaire and the Learning Climate Questionnaire were non-normally distributed (Table 3).

Table 3 **Results of the Shapiro-Wilk Normality Test**

	Shapiro-Wilk statistic	Asymp. Sig.
Problems in Schools Questionnaire		
Highly controlling (HC)	0.987	0.570
Moderately controlling (MC)	0.972	0.066
Moderately autonomy-supportive (MA)	0.952	0.004
Highly autonomy-supportive (HA)	0.903	0.0001
Learning Climate Questionnaire		
My teachers encouraged me to ask questions	0.917	0.0001
I feel that my teachers provide me choices and options	0.914	0.0001
I feel understood by my teachers	0.928	0.0001
My teachers conveyed confidence in my ability to do well in the course	0.924	0.0001
My teachers try to understand how I see things before suggesting a new way to do things	0.928	0.0001
My teachers listen to how I would like to do things	0.944	0.0001

Research Results

In the present article, the teachers' motivating styles were assessed in two ways: (1) the teachers' self-reporting on their own behaviour; and (2) the students' self-reported perceptions of their teachers' autonomy support. First, we will discuss the teachers' motivating style from their point of view. Table 4 presents

the descriptive statistics for each motivating style. The 95 teachers who participated in the research had composite scores of the motivating style ranging from -0.50 to 12.50 (median – 4.50; mean – 4.77; SD – 2.37).

Having analysed the scores of the teachers' motivating style, it appeared that 4.2% of teachers were characterized by a moderately controlling style, 75.8% of the teachers demonstrated a moderately autonomy-supportive style, and 7.4% of the teachers, a highly autonomy-supportive style. The results of Kruskal-Wallis test revealed that the age and years of teaching experience of the teachers did not affect their motivating style. However, it was determined that a highly controlling style was more characteristic of the teachers that had the qualification category of a senior teacher ($\chi^2 = 8.374$; $p < 0.05$).

Table 4 **Descriptive statistics of each subscale of the Problems in Schools Questionnaire**

	Min	Max	Median	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Highly controlling (HC)	1.63	5.88	3.75	3.67	0.93	-0.12	-0.30
Moderately controlling (MC)	1.88	6.75	5.13	5.09	0.92	-0.61	0.80
Moderately autonomy-supportive (MA)	2.75	6.25	5.00	4.90	0.84	-0.70	0.16
Highly autonomy-supportive (HA)	3.50	7	6.38	6.16	0.70	-1.24	1.97

When analysing the expression of the teachers' motivating style in a particular situation, differences became apparent. For instance, in a class management situation (C vignette: "Donny loses his temper a lot and has a way of agitating other children. He doesn't respond well to what you tell him to do and you're concerned that he won't learn the social skills he needs. The best thing for you to do with him is ..."), the moderately autonomy-supporting style (56.6% of teachers) emerged, yet a significant proportion of teachers (28.9%) had the moderately controlling style. In another situation (H vignette: "Your child has been getting average grades, and you'd like to see her improve. A useful approach might be to... "), the teachers were characterized as moderately autonomy-supportive (50.6% of the teachers) or highly autonomy-supportive (45.8% of the teachers). Such results suggest that in situations involving the educational process and rated by the teachers as the participants in the process, the teachers tended to demonstrate the controlling style, whereas in situations which were rated by the teachers assuming the parental role, the teachers revealed the autonomy-supportive motivating style.

The student survey aimed at identifying to what extent the teacher raised the students and their autonomy, or how much control over the students he/she demonstrated (The Learning Climate Questionnaire (LCQ)). The students' responses (Table 5) revealed that the teachers were characterized by a partly autonomy-supportive style.

Having generalized the research results, it was determined that nearly three quarters of the students felt that the teachers provided them with choices and options for learning. Almost two-thirds of the students felt they were understood by the teachers and that the teachers conveyed confidence in their ability to do well in the course and encouraged them to ask questions. Half of the students agreed that the teachers tried to understand how they saw things before suggesting a new way to do things. However, it is noteworthy that nearly two-fifths of the students indicated that the teachers did not show interest in how the students would like to perform tasks.

*Table 5 **Descriptive statistics of the Learning Climate Questionnaire***

	Min	Max	Median	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
My teachers encouraged me to ask questions	1	7	5.00	5.04	1.54	-0.53	-0.28
I feel that my teachers provide me choices and options	1	7	5.00	5.15	1.40	-0.60	0.06
I feel understood by my teachers	1	7	5.00	4.95	1.48	-0.45	-0.26
My teachers conveyed confidence in my ability to do well in the course	1	7	5.00	5.02	1.45	-0.55	-0.12
My teachers try to understand how I see things before suggesting a new way to do things	1	7	5.00	4.57	1.76	-0.38	-0.77
My teachers listen to how I would like to do things	1	7	4.00	3.99	1.71	-0.01	-0.75

The boys and the girls expressed a statistically significant opinion about the teachers' motivating style, which did not convey statistically significant differences. However, differences emerged when comparing the opinions of the students of grades 5–8 and 9–11 (Table 6). The younger students (of grades 5–8) mentioned that the autonomy-supportive style was more characteristic of their teachers.

Discussion

Discussing the results of the research, we acknowledge that we have found very few studies on teacher motivating styles and the education or achievement of low-SES students. We recognize this as a limitation of this work. However, it is clear that the basic psychological needs of low-SES students are the same as those of other students. In learning, all children want to be autonomous, competent and build harmonious relationships. These basic needs are universal; they represent innate requirements rather than acquired motives. Needs, when satisfied, promote well-being, but when thwarted, lead to negative consequences (Reeve, Deci, & Ryan, 2004). Therefore, the role of teachers becomes particularly important, as responding to the essential needs of students, they simultaneously enable them to learn actively and meaningfully, as well as feel good, whereas in the absence of such a response, they reinforce indifference, bad feeling and destructive behaviour. Reeve and Jang (2006, p. 216) maintain that "when autonomously motivated, students' intentional behaviours emerge out of an internal locus of causality, high volition, and a sense of choice over their actions; when controlled, students' intentional behaviours emerge out of an external locus of causality, high pressure, and a sense of assignment or being told what to do".

The results concerning the teachers demonstrate that the teachers working with low-SES status students have the moderately autonomy-supportive style, yet they tend to employ the controlling motivating style alongside the autonomy-supportive one. In the students' opinion, they have a fairly close relationship with their teachers and feel understood by them. The students also maintain that the teachers give them choices, encourage them to ask questions and express confidence in their abilities. However, it can be determined that the teachers rarely seek to empower children to learn independently because, according to the students, they struggle to understand how a student intends to complete a task before suggesting another way; too few teachers ask students how they want to complete the tasks.

Hence, we can see that in this study the teachers working with students of low SES should pay attention to the motivational style they apply. The study of Hornstra et al. (2015) shows that teachers find it harder to teach at-risk students in autonomy-supportive ways. Besides, Reeve (2009) mentions a recurring paradox in the contemporary K-12 classroom: "although students educationally and developmentally benefit when teachers support their autonomy, teachers are often controlling during instruction" (p. 159). The reasons for the adoption of such a motivating style are threefold: influences of outside agents (school policies, administrators, parents, societal expectations, or cultural norms), influences arising from and during classroom dynamics (e.g. students' listless reaction to a learning activity) and thirdly, influences of the teacher himself/herself

(personality dispositions and beliefs about the nature of student motivation). Thus, the motivation style of a teacher is influenced by his/her own factors, the classroom environment and school factors. We agree with the statement of Hornstra et al. (2015) that teachers must examine the factors that influence their beliefs about students (e.g. SES, ability levels, cultural background).

We would also like to draw attention to a few other aspects that are very important to us. First, according to Rodriguez (2013), the teaching and learning process often tends to be viewed as a simple linear system. It seems that the teacher creates one or another set of conditions, whereas the learner acquires knowledge and abilities, and both participants of the educational process can see each other's achievements through certain forms of assessment. However, the researcher claims that teaching is an interactive and reciprocal system that connects the teacher, the learner and their interaction system. We believe that the teacher must understand the system of the pedagogical process and know what to do, how to do it and why they are doing it.

As already mentioned, the results of our students' survey show that the teachers quite rarely seek to empower children to learn independently (they make too little effort to understand how a student intends to accomplish a task; they hardly ask students how they want to complete the task). It is in these student responses that we can see signs of where our teachers need to "grow". According to Reeve (2009, p.162), "three conditions make any approach to motivating students an autonomy-supportive one: (a) adopt the students' perspective; (b) welcome students' thoughts, feelings, and behaviours; and (c) support students' motivational development and capacity for autonomous self-regulation". It is the observation, understanding and nurturing of students' thoughts, feelings or perspectives that are essential in enabling them to learn. This respectful relationship with students is extremely significant and is connected with the students' motivation and engagement at school (Stroet et al., 2013). Meanwhile, bearing in mind the general perspective of SDT, the power, control and use of salient extrinsic rewards to motivate behaviour can be deleterious to intrinsic motivation and can thus have negative consequences for performance in interesting and personally important activities (Gagne & Deci, 2005).

Secondly, it is evident, that the effect of intrinsic motivation on performance might have a long-term effect (i.e. it takes multiple years to develop) (Van Nuland et al., 2012). So, teachers must have patience.

Thirdly, in scientific works, the autonomous and supportive environment (not the controlling one) is called the student-centred environment. This concept must be properly understood in the Lithuanian context. The educational literature concerning Lithuania is dominated by the differences in the concepts of teaching and learning. It has to be stated that the flaws of the above-mentioned separation are also noticed by foreign experts. They claim that Lithuania has no consensus

on what constitutes good teaching (Shewbridge, Godfrey, Hermann, & Nusche, 2016; OECD, 2017). However, according to Engeström and Sannin (2012), there is no learning without teaching – teaching and learning go together. We cannot avoid mentioning the extensive Danish student survey conducted a few years ago (Andersen & Andersen, 2017), which analysed the impact of teaching on students' academic achievement emphasising their engagement and responsibility (understood as applying a student-centred teaching strategy). The researchers determined that the overall use of a learner-centred strategy had a negative impact on their academic performance, and that this effect was greater on learners from unfavourable socio-economic contexts. The results of the study raise a number of controversial issues and encourage further research. However, one explanation for these results may be a change in the teaching practice where teachers transfer all responsibility for learning to students, regardless of their differences. On the one hand, when working with children with low SES, their individual conditions and characteristics must be taken into account. The school community and the teachers working with such a child must first respond to their basic needs (taking care of health and nutrition if necessary), as well as additional learning support before, during and after school or holidays, i.e. all additional pedagogical tools that aid children's preparation for learning (vocabulary expansion, growth, mindset, stress management, etc.) are important. On the other hand, decades of research has confirmed that direct and explicit instruction is significantly more effective and efficient than partial leadership for all students starting their education (Clark, Kirshner, & Sweller, 2012). Thus, when teachers teach new content and skills (especially for lower achievers), it is more effective to use guidance, practice and feedback rather than asking students to discover the most important aspects.

Finally, in our opinion, it should be noted once again that the motivating style of a teacher is intrinsically related to the relationship. The controlling style is characterized by "tension and pressure to make sense" (Gagne & Deci, 2005), while the autonomy-supportive style welcomes students' thoughts, feelings, and behaviours. Hence, such a respectful glance (relation) to low-SES students accordingly formulates the guidelines for the pedagogical work of the school community, where it must purposefully seek the active, conscious and positive engagement of students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds in the teaching/learning process.

Conclusions

The research results indicate that teachers working with low SES students have a moderate autonomy-supportive style. In the students' opinion, they have a fairly close relationship with their teachers and feel understood by them.

However, it can be determined that the teachers rarely seek to empower children to learn independently. When comparing the data according to grades, the results of the study also show a tendency that the teachers give less autonomy to older students than to younger ones. A statistically significant difference was found between the responses of the students of different grades.

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