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Habilitation thesis

Abstract

This habilitation thesis presents the scientific contributions I have brought in several applied psychology areas and also in the field of my university career for the past 17 years. The motivation which has supported this long-lasting effort can be found in the appreciation I have always given to the quantitative side and measurement in psychology. On one side, my consideration comes from the Kantian assertion according to which the level of a science depends on the stage of its quantifications. On the other side, this consideration originates in my experience of a practitioner psychologist. The 20 years of career in the applied field of psychology, which forewent my present academic career, have given me the feeling that the destiny of the psychologist profession is directly dependent on the quality and variety of the instruments he or she uses. My belief that a practitioner evolves within his or her instruments has made me give a special attention to creating psychological instruments as a way of compensating the early difficulties in my own career.

The most important personal contribution in the field of Romanian applied psychology refers to my status of a psychometric instruments creator. The most important of them cover the major cognitive functions, memory and intelligence, namely the informational and operational sides of cognitive structure. *Battery of Working Memory - BWM* (Clinciu, 2012) is my most notable achievement so far, because it completely went through all the stages of creating a valid psychometric instrument. Operationalized in the ninth decade of the last century after the model proposed by Baddeley and Hitch (1974), pretested on a representatively local population for two decades, used as a basic instrument together with an intelligence battery in my PH thesis, then tested on a normative population of 1811 participants, BWM has gained the quality of a psychometric instrument which is largely known, accepted and used by the community of psychology practitioners in Romania.

The second instrument from the area of testing human cognitive abilities is the *Battery of Vocational Aptitudes – BVA*, which reunites eight categories of subtests around four fundamental cognitive components: spatial, numerical, verbal and graphical. Through regrouping, they provide a measurement of verbal and non-verbal intelligence on one side, and of fluid and crystallized component of intelligence on the other side. Though it is meant especially for being applied in the field of vocational guidance and career counseling, due to the fact that its structure is compatible with Holland's RIASEC model, BVA is an instrument to use anywhere if measuring general mental aptitude is required for puberty, adolescence and post-adolescence ages, and it is also useful in the field of recruiting human resources.

By comparison with BWM, BVA has got only half of the way of a psychometric instrument, namely it operationalizes the concept of *vocational ability* through proposing the eight component subtests and launches the pilot study of this psychometric product on a large population (N = 370). As its structure, which is analyzed factorially from both explorative and confirmative points of view, finds the expected theoretical model, now BVA is at the beginning of the most important stage, the one of being tested on a representatively national population. This is a stage that will happen in the future two years.

The researches in the field of education were materialized by creating two new instruments. One of these (Cliniciu, 2005) was destined to determine the mental maturity of the big preschool child who is at the beginning of schooling. Initially combining two convergent informational sources – effective psychological measurement and observation through a standardized card – this instrument which was firstly published in 2005, has known a large national spreading. Now I am in the position to redefine its structure in order to cover the entire area of growing ages in the kindergarten (3½ – 6½ years), introducing the child's standardized observation by one of the parents, as an additional source of information. Through Testcentral firm, that manufactures BWM, I am in front of completing the normative data gathering which are necessary to launch the standardized form of this instrument.

The second instrument in educational field is the *Questionnaire of School Maladjustment – QSM*. Its first form was launched in 2001 and was destined to the students of puberty and adolescence ages. This instrument could be studied right throughout its numerous uses. This fact allowed its change and use extension towards university areas through *QAM – Questionnaire of Academic Maladjustment*. Then, through the feedback resulted from its use, there appeared the possibility of its more accurate conceptualization and of a unitary redefinition of academic maladjustment phenomenology. Having been validated so far against other prestigious instruments (EPQ-Junior, NEO PI-R, SACQ – *Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire* or SSI – *Student-life Stress Inventory*), QSM/QAM is currently in front of cross-cultural validation, raising the interest of its usage for a multitude of researchers. In the field of education I can also put forward the team researches that led to building the *Questionnaire on School Climate*. As specific issues of research, I have approached the phenomenology of school maladjustment and stress (from kindergarten children to pupils, students and teachers), problems area of evaluation styles and school achievement where I have proposed a coherent method of identifying the three categories: school under-, over- and achieved students.

In the clinical field – the one in which I have capitalized the most expertise as a practitioner – I have contributed with three instruments destined to evaluate various facets of Self: *Self Perception – SP*, *Body Self Perception – BSP* and *Questionnaire of Evaluating Eating Disorders – QEED*. This habilitation thesis presents the basic used concepts, their way of operationalization, genesis of the afferent instruments and the results of the carried out validation studies.

My career plan derives directly from what I have presented above. Punctually, my intentions for the near future are connected to redefining the concept of working memory in order to be in agreement with the new research data. Through the structural redefining of BWM, it will diagnose the visual and auditory components of memory and in addition it will make the distinction between immediate memorizing and mnemonic learning. For BVA there must go through all the other left stages that are necessary to impose it in current psychological practice, namely applying it on representatively national samples and building the manual which will include the norms system.

Intercurrently I intend to autonomously develop the two instruments which give expression to graphical intelligence – the Draw a Man Test and Bender-Gestalt Standard Test. I have identified that this structural component of general intelligence, which is presented in a multitude of development scales and intelligence batteries, has an inadequate treatment, mainly as a result of scoring difficulties. The new Block Design Test may receive a special attention; it is conceived to give a quick, correct, and accurate expression to visuo-spatial-motor intelligence from the age of four years up to the adult ages. Launched and tested (with edifying results) for the extreme ages of kindergarten – high school continuum, the instrument needs the consistent logistics support of a firm producing tests.

As far as clinical psychology is concerned, I intend to reunite my researches so far with the questionnaires of Self Perception, Body Self Perception and Evaluating Eating Disorders to create data bases that are necessary to confirmative factorial analyze. This effort will end up by elaborating and (re)publishing the final version of these instruments in prestigious journals. Studying the way in which they measure in the areas of obesity, juvenal and adult diabetes, chronic renal insufficiency or of adolescence ages are already assumed research intentions.

From the didactic career point of view, my most pregnant achievements are connected to publishing or republishing the textbooks and books that support Psychology Fundamentals, Applied Statistics for Psychology and Multivariate Statistics, Psychodiagnosis and Psychological Evaluation. The progress in this direction will come from the improvement of the course textbooks and seminar learning aids, from building new applications, from updating the supplying with tests, questionnaires and other instruments for the applied side of these courses. Up to my retirement, I intend to further stay in the following structures: Quality Commission, Peer Evaluation Commission, Faculty Executive Board and University Senate, thus being able to get involved in university life as directly as possible.