THE NEED FOR PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE UNIVERSITY ENVIRONMENT*

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Abstract
The chosen theme is a topic of interest in the educational field, concretely indicating the concern for improving interactions between teachers and students in the school environment. The topicality of this topic is supported by the current context of the educational sector, which has multiple challenges related to adapting to social, technological and cultural changes.

Starting from the premise of the students' need for personal development, we focused, in this material, both on theoretical aspects (related to self-esteem, as an important dimension in personal development, on active listening, as a key element in the development of the relationship between the teacher and student, to empathy, as an essential feature in personal development), as well as on the results of an investigative approach regarding the need for personal development in the university environment.

Among the questions that came to our attention, we list: Is it necessary to carry out personal development activities for students? What are the reasons why students would need a personal development program? What recent events have led students to identify the need for personal development?

By applying a questionnaire, we reached a series of conclusions that allowed the identification of some aspects regarding the importance of personal development skills in teaching activities. Research data has demonstrated that establishing positive teacher-student relationships is a central part of teachers' professional roles. In addition, providing a high level of emotional support, responding sensitively to students' emotional, social, and academic needs, and applying personal development tools, are major aspects of classrooms.

Key words: Personal development, Empathy; Self-esteem, Active listening, Commitment.

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1. Introduction

The transition from traditional to online education in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic has been a major source of stress among teachers and students. The quality of interaction with students varies from excellent relationships to conflictual relationships (Frunzaru, 2021).

There are many stressors that produce stress reactions and sometimes even anxiety reactions. Anxiety has several forms in which it presents itself differently:

• Excessive worry - it is normal to worry, all people do it, but if over the course of several months, we notice that we worry about insignificant things, then we have a problem, a typical symptom of this situation is the feeling of chronic fatigue from which we feel we can no longer escape;

• Sleep problems - it is normal to have insomnia from time to time, it often happens when an important event in our life is about to happen. When we notice that these insomnias do not disappear, we wake up tired as if we have not slept at all, we must ask for the help of a specialist;

• Panic attacks - they often appear out of the blue, we feel like we can't breathe, we feel dizzy;

• Obsessions and compulsions - we are possessed by obsessive thoughts, by the compulsive need to do some rituals in an attempt to control our fears.

Adapting to a new school situation involves various emotional changes:

• feelings of uncertainty: entering a new and unfamiliar environment can cause feelings of uncertainty and anxiety about what to expect and how to behave;

• adapting to the new routine: changing the schedule and daily routine may initially be difficult for the student, which may cause frustration or confusion;

• developing social relationships: interacting with colleagues can be an exciting but challenging experience at the same time.

Stress increases anxiety reactions. During critical periods of stress and overload, a generalized increase in emotional discomfort is observed (Vindel, 2022).

Studies emphasize the importance of some skills students need to learn: motivation, self-regulation, perceived usefulness, confidence in using different technologies, attitude, self-efficacy, communication skills, and research and critical thinking competence.

Beyond these attributes of readiness for learning, qualities such as: resilience, flexibility and positivity made it possible for students to survive the transition from the physical classroom to the virtual learning space (Crea & Sparnon, 2017).

Research related to school readiness often focuses on cognitive and academic skills as the primary elements of student development. A more comprehensive approach integrates social skills as a fundamental aspect of development. Social adaptation and social-emotional regulation require skills of effective communication, active listening, showing empathy, conflict management, cooperation.

A good socio-emotional development allows the prevention of maladjustment and fatigue. Chronic fatigue syndrome is a condition characterized by exhaustion or lack of energy, even apathy that manifests itself over a longer period of time and that is not resolved by rest, but that affects the quality of life and daily activities.

People with chronic fatigue often suffer from mental disorders such as anxiety and depression, which also leads to destabilization of social relationships. If these causes are not treated effectively and at the right time, they can have serious long-term consequences on our body. Here they are:

• Problems in retaining information - deprivation of rest time brings with it a decrease in learning ability and low school results. That is why the rest period must be respected as it has an essential role in structuring new information to the already acquired;

• Problems in focusing attention on activities - lack of attention not only affects us in retaining information but can put our lives in danger by increasing the risk of injury;

• Problems in controlling fits of anger - diminished self-control leads to violent outbursts, without the ability to manage our negative emotions, to keep them under control; against the background of fatigue our mind amplifies these situations so that they seem very serious;

• Problems in maintaining body weight - we are more prone to weight gain, even producing the risk of obesity; Due to inadequate, insufficient sleep, we are prone to obesity because our entire body is turned upside down due to the chaotic sleep schedule.

In this context, in order to combat fatigue and manage stress levels, we must pay more attention to mental health. The development of pupils'/students' socio-emotional skills must be at the center of teachers' concerns. High self-esteem is key to mental health and well-being.

2. Self-esteem - important dimension in personal development

Self-concept represents the totality of perceptions that people have about their qualities and characteristics, it does not necessarily represent an objective vision of what we are, but is a result of the way we perceive ourselves (Zlate, Crețu, 2005, pp. 146 -151).

The self-image materializes reflexively against the background of a sense of identity and continuity of the person. The way we perceive ourselves depends on the degree of self-appreciation and self-respect we acquire (http://www.cdt-babes.ro/articole/imaginea-de-sine-stima-de-sine-si-increderea-in-sine.php).

The need for self-esteem derives from a self-evaluative need of the individual, who wants to be recognized for the status he has or to which he aspires, for his skills, knowledge, performances, qualities to be appreciated (Marsh and Martin, 2011, pp. 59-77). The relationship is bidirectional: a good school self-image leads to good performance, and good performance in turn leads to a positive self-image.

The teachers' task is to identify these characteristics of low self-esteem and to develop the child's ability to change his negative attitudes towards himself. High self-esteem is good because it helps you develop the skills to deal with adversity and put the negative into perspective.

Among the methods of increasing self-esteem, we can mention:

• Good self-knowledge, identification of strengths and acceptance of weaknesses;

• Awareness of one's strengths, values and needs;
• Development of a responsible behavior;
• Capitalizing on the mistake as an opportunity to learn;
• Formulation of realistic objectives, according to the "small steps" rule;
• Cultivating the feeling of gratitude;
• Developing empathy
• Centering, focusing on the positive;
• Outlining some constructive criticisms, etc.

3. Active listening – key element in developing the relationship between teacher and student

What is active listening and what does it aim for? Active listening is a method, an act of communication, through which a person listens carefully to what the interlocutor trained in the conversation conveys, expressing understanding and interest in the communicated message, his perspectives and needs.

Active listening beneficial to interpersonal and social relationships is the emotional support offered to the narrator, his understanding. When the interlocutor shows interest in his inner, emotional experiences, in the feelings and thoughts that dominate and torment him, the relationship between the two participants in the conversation becomes stronger. The interlocutor does not feel judged or guilty for having decided to share those tormenting thoughts, on the contrary, he finds a support, a joy, in the simple fact that he is listened to and understood: "The speaker is looking for a close and benevolent soul who will listen to him and he understands his pain" (Stoica-Constantin, 2004, p. 128).

Teachers must encourage students to adopt the concept of active listening, to teach them how to manage, in turn, such a conflict situation, which they will certainly encounter in society, not only in school. As suggestions for addressing appropriate questions, we mention:
• using short or medium questions, easy to follow and remember;
• the use of words that the interlocutor understands and prefers;
• reformulating questions that the interlocutor did not understand;
• providing feedback and time.

This form of listening aims to facilitate and improve communication, but also the relationship between teacher and students, thus creating a warm environment of mutual understanding and empathy.

4. Empathy – essential trait in personal development

Empathy is one of the key elements of emotional intelligence, and in recent years one of the lines of research that has generated the most interest has been the analysis of the role this construct plays in the educational context. Addressing empathy in education is a topic of utmost importance considering the need to start its development from an early age and considering the benefits obtained (Assmann & Detmers, 2016).

Over the past decade, there has been an increasingly clear trend to treat empathy as a multidimensional composite containing cognitive and affective aspects (Baron-Cohen & Wheelwright, 2004).

Both components are essential to respond appropriately to other people's emotional-expressive behavior.

On the other hand, a three-component model is proposed and postulates that an empathic response requires (Batson, 2011):

• The ability to discriminate and identify the other's emotional states – cognitive empathy;

• The ability to adopt the other's perspective or role – sentimental empathy;

• Evoking a common affective response – action empathy.

Developing empathy can bring numerous personal and relational benefits, improving the quality of life and contributing to a more empathetic and supportive society. A lack of empathy can have negative consequences in both your personal and professional life. High levels of empathy are associated with more cooperative behavior, empathy increases altruistic behavior, empathic people have greater emotional stability, and finally, empathy functions as a protective factor against violence (Hein *et al.,* 2016).

Through empathy, the teacher creates a friendly, safe and protected space in which the person listened to feels motivated to feel, recognize and express more aspects of his inner world or his emotions (Assmann & Detmers, 2016).

Britton and Fuendeling (2005) mention, for example, that empathy is learned through observation, that is, in the reproduction of acts based on visual information received, therefore, it is important to have material that reinforces other tactics with those that can be encouraged and developed. Observation has a good relationship with analysis because alone it cannot generate understanding of one feeling or emotion of another.

We support the importance of the bond between teacher and student in the classroom, based on empathy, thus generating trust, safety and more opportunities to identify with others outside their first social circle. The role of the teacher is to motivate the students to be empathetic to each other and to maintain a good interpersonal relationship.

Attributes such as empathy and active listening must always be present so that the teacher can facilitate learning (Gómez, Cilleros, Marcos, 2022).

5. Openness towards commitment

Attitudes are value judgments about something (objects, situations, people, etc.), which influence the actions taken. Attitudes develop starting from the information that exists and from the experience gained in previous simian situations (Montañés, 2022, p. 87).

Generally, commitment is defined as a person's level of dedication and involvement in a particular goal or objective. It can be applied in various contexts, such as in personal relationships, career or everyday activities. "Commitment is an

important form of personal development, because it produces well-being, creates positivity, everything that gives meaning to life" (Fernández-Abascal, 2022, p. 134).

Engagement is influenced by a number of factors, both internal and external. Internal factors are those factors that are related to the individual and that influence commitment. These factors include: motivation, self-confidence, personal values. External factors are those factors that are related to the environment in which people live and work. These factors include: leadership, organizational culture, reward and appreciation.

Internal and external factors interact with each other to influence commitment. For example, people who are motivated and self-confident are less likely to feel demotivated and lose interest, even when leaders and organizational culture are negative.

6. An investigative approach
6.1. Research methodology

The purpose of this study was to identify the need for personal development of students. The questions that stood out to us were the following: Is it necessary to carry out personal development activities for students? What are the reasons why students would need a personal development program? What recent events have led students to identify the need for personal development?

The premise from which I started was the following: There is a high level of fatigue and anxiety among students, which denotes the need for personal development programs in the academic environment.

Research objectives

a) Identification of students' perception of personal development activities: necessity, reasons, events that triggered awareness of the need for personal development activities;

b) Outline some qualities and directions of actions that should be affirmed by the teacher who pursues the personal development of the pupils/students.

The micro-research was carried out within the University of Craiova, and the sample included a number of 240 students. I applied a questionnaire as a research method. We present the recorded results below.

6.2. Results and discussion

We will analyze and present the results recorded after applying the questionnaire.

The first item of the questionnaire sought to identify the level of stress among students. To the question Do you experience feelings of anxiety?, the responses recorded were as follows:
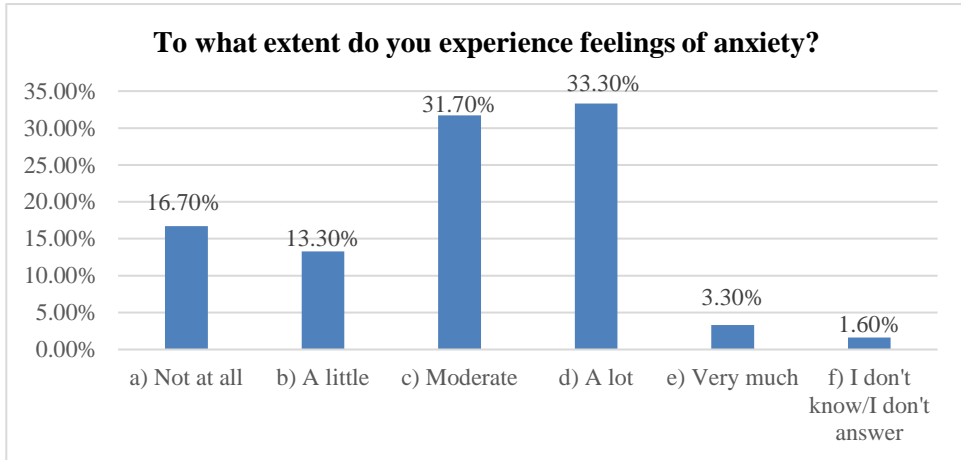
Figure 1. Extent to which subjects experience feelings of anxiety

Most of the students feel anxious to a great extent (33.3%) and moderately (31.7%), Appropriate percentages are also recorded for the question How do you assess the degree of tiredness accumulated in general during a day of attending classes? (figure 2):
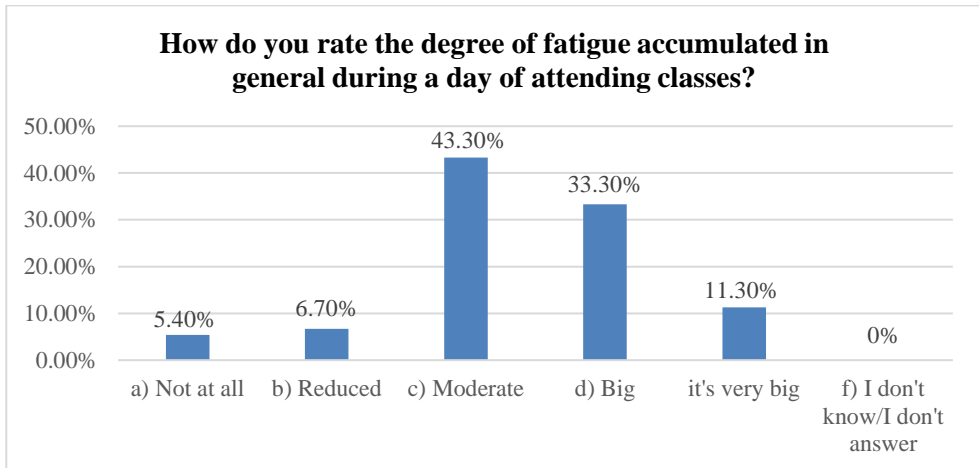

Figure 2. The degree of fatigue accumulated during one day of attending classes

These data confirm the need for personal development programs in the academic environment. Most of the surveyed students appreciate that it is necessary to carry out personal development activities in the faculty. 55% chose the option Much, and 35% - Exclusively, 1.6% of the students considered that these activities are little necessary (figure 3).
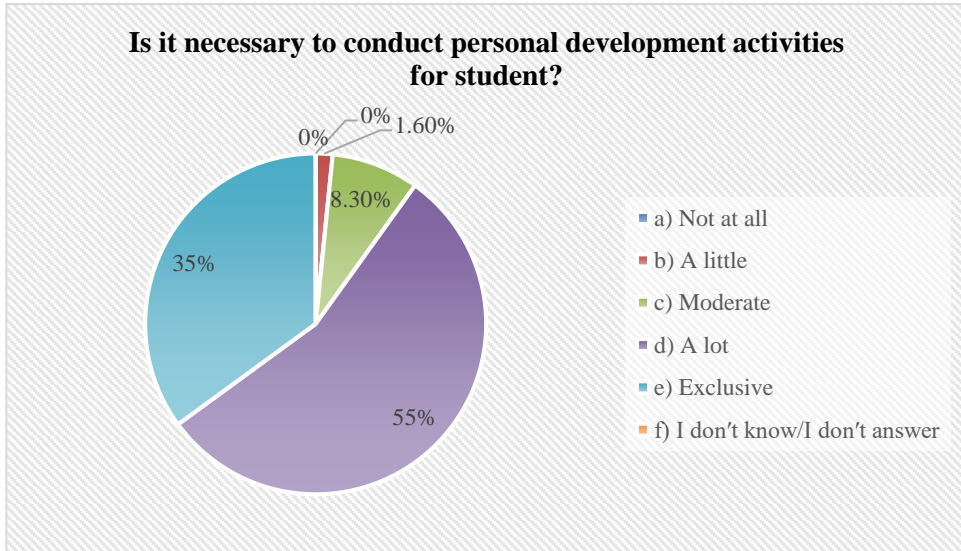
Figure 3. The attention given by students to personal development activities

In the item List the reasons why you would need a personal development program, then number them according to their importance for you, the following data were recorded (figure 4):
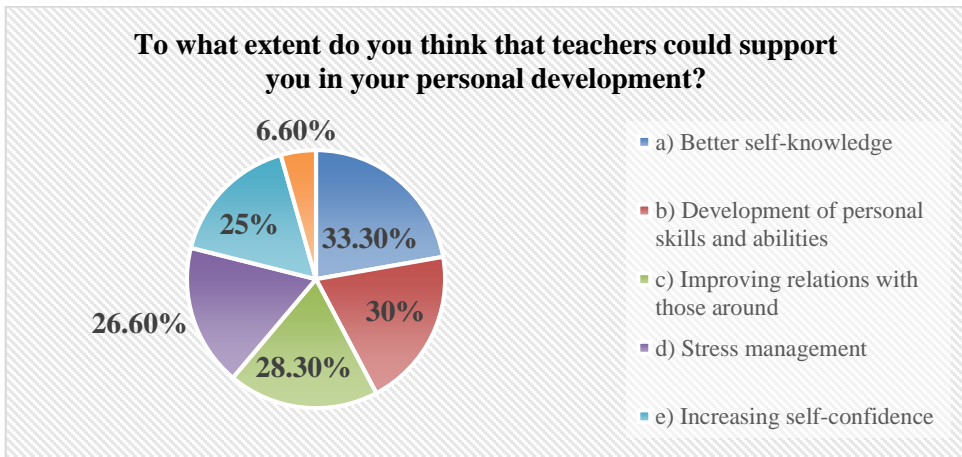
Figure 4. Aspects that could be developed by teachers, in the view of students

Another item of the questionnaire focused on the identification of recent events that helped the boys to identify the need for personal development. Here are some of the most frequently mentioned events:
- Fear of public speaking
- Enrollment in a new faculty
- Lack of self-confidence

• A concert
• A personal development book
• Conflict with a close person
• Carrying out practice during the faculty
• Participation in a conference
• Difficult situations
• Health problems
• Student symposia and course projects
• Olympic competitions in the city
• Conflicts with friends

Below are some of the subjects' responses:

• The pressure to deliver quality results in a limited time made me feel increased anxiety and difficulty managing stress.

• Lack of motivation and professional satisfaction at the current workplace

• I saw in my child, some complexes that I also had in my childhood.

• When I had a project to do and I felt that I wasn't communicating enough with my team, I realized that I should have more confidence in myself to express my ideas

• A recent event that helped me identify the need for personal development was attending a conference where I met people with outstanding skills and knowledge in my field. I realized that there are many things I still don't know and that there is always room for improvement and personal growth;

• A recent event that helped me identify the need for personal development was when I was put in a situation where I felt that I failed to handle a certain situation in college;

• I recently attended a webinar on managing stress and anxiety. It was an eye-opening experience for me as I realized how much these aspects of my life can influence and how much they can affect my mental and emotional health as well as my performance in different areas of life. Participating in this webinar made me reflect more deeply on how I manage stress and anxiety in my daily life and opened my eyes to techniques and strategies I can implement to deal with these challenges in a way healthier and more efficient. Thus, this recent event helped me to identify the need to work more on personal development, especially in terms of managing emotions and stress;

• When I have to present a project in front of several people, I get very emotional.

Another item of the questionnaire asked the subjects to identify at least five qualities that they think the teacher who follows the personal development of the pupils/students should have, then to number them according to the importance they give them. We present, in fig. 5, the most valued 5 qualities, as they resulted from data processing:
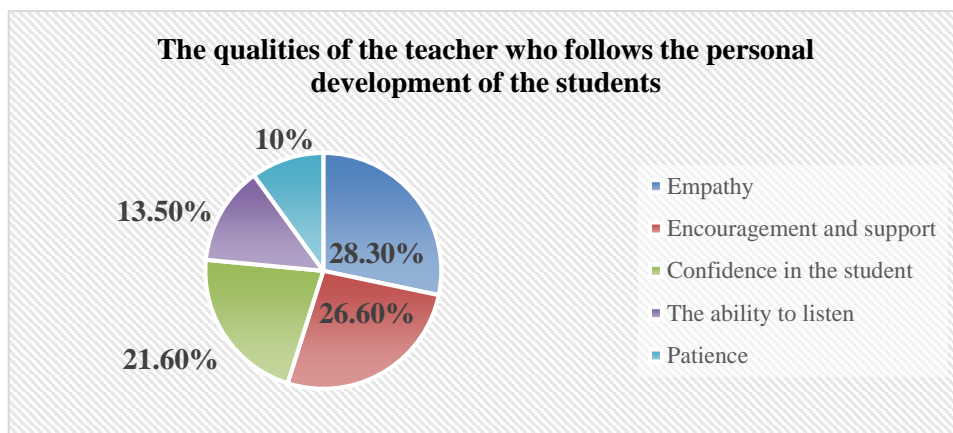
Figure 5. Basic qualities of the teacher

We were also interested in the extent to which students are aware of the need and commitment to involvement in the personal development process. To the question Do you consider that your personal development depends primarily on you?, the answers were as follows (figure 6):
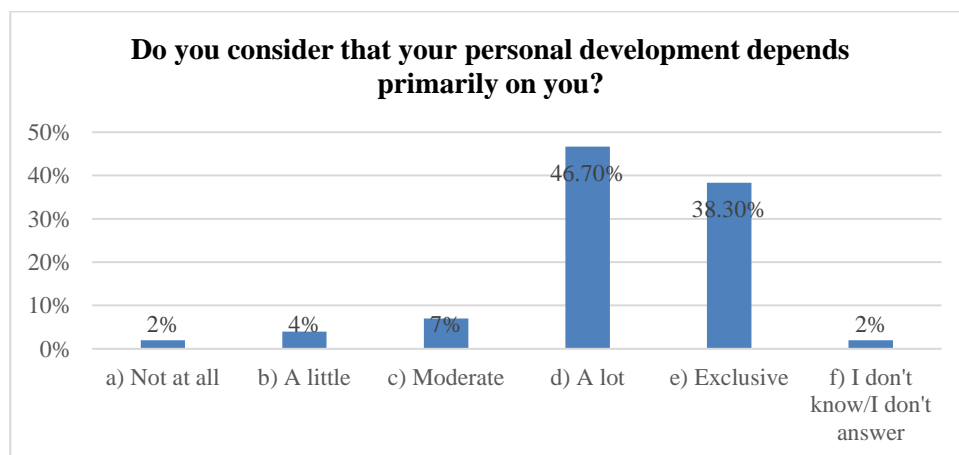

Figure 6. Subjects' opinion regarding the role of the individual in his own development

As can be seen from the previous graphs, future teachers believe that personal involvement in their own development matters a lot (46.7%) and exclusively (38.3%). Only 4% are of the opinion that their own role matters too little, leaving this goal to other people.

Regarding the extent to which the teachers could support your personal development, the results recorded following the answers provided by the subjects are presented in the figure 7:
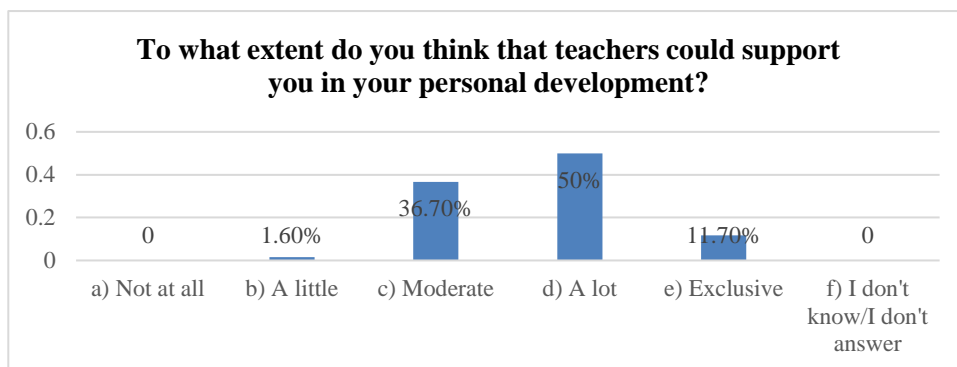
Figure 7. The teacher's contribution to the students' personal development

Another item asked the subjects to identify actions or qualities of the teacher that contribute to de-tensioning in the classroom, then to number them according to the feedback given. Following the answers of the subjects, we were able to make a ranking of the first 10 actions or qualities of the teacher, as can be seen in the graph no. 8:
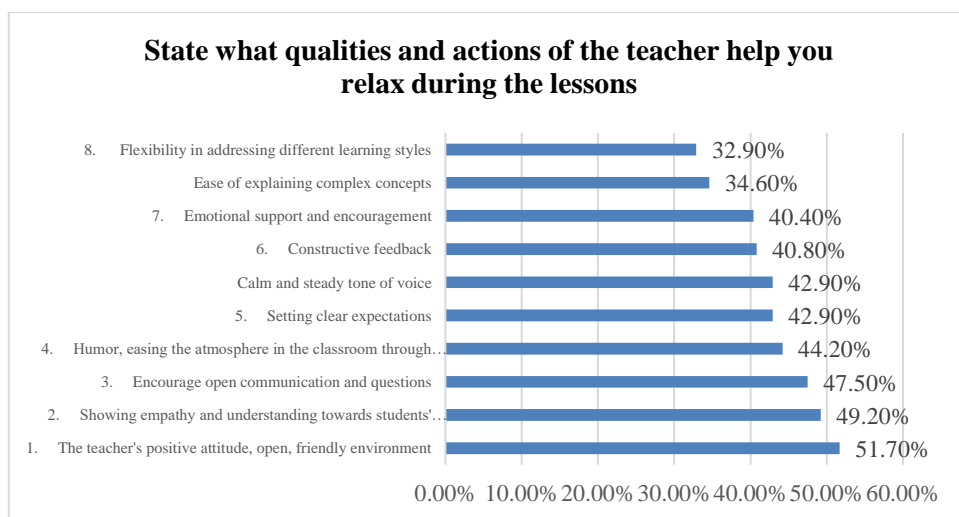

Figure 8. Actions or qualities of the teacher in building a relaxing climate in the classroom

Among the directions of action offered by the students, starting from the question How should the teacher approach the student during classes, when he is stressed?, we list, in order of importance:

- Calmly;
- With patience;
- With empathy;

• To try to explain the mistake, starting from the premise that we learn from mistakes;

• With understanding;

• To provide support and encouragement by listening and offering solutions or resources to cope with stress;

• To provide practical suggestions for managing stress;

• To maintain an atmosphere of trust and support during difficult times.

The subjects' options regarding the fields considered to be the most relevant for their own personal development program are shown in the figure no. 9:
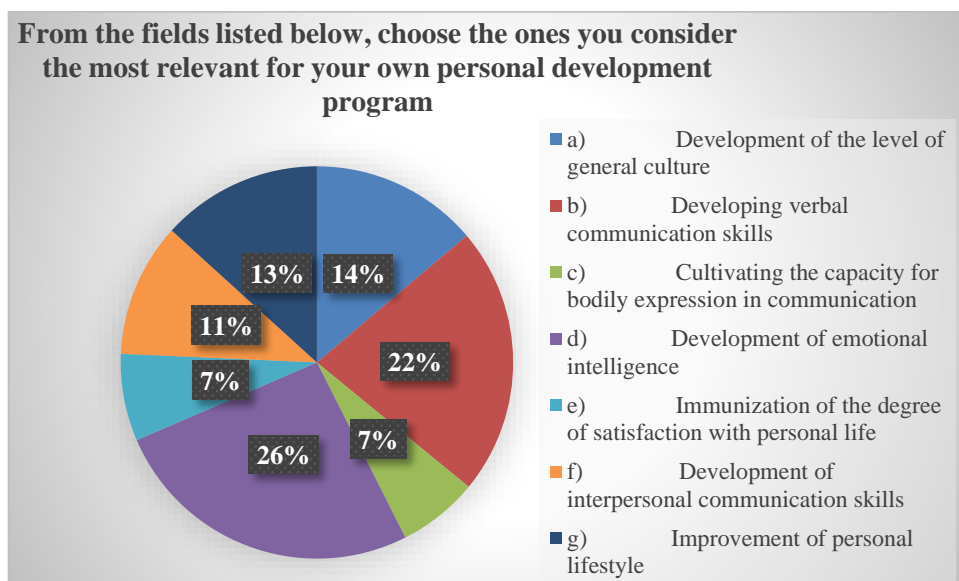

Figure 9. Subjects' choices regarding the areas considered to be most relevant to their own personal development program

7. Conclusions

The recorded data show that most of the students feel tired and anxious, which confirms the need for personal development programs in the academic environment.

The teacher plays a fundamental role in the development of any pupil/student. This development is a process that the teacher must work on together with the students.

Establishing positive teacher-student relationships is a central part of teachers' professional roles. In addition, providing a high level of emotional support, responsive responses to students' emotional, social, and academic needs, and consideration of their interests is an aspect of high-quality classrooms.

To achieve this, the ability to read students' (non)verbal signals is vital. For example, teachers' cognitive empathy will help them better identify from a student's

facial expressions whether the student is sad about a bad grade, angry about a fight with friends, or bored with certain learning activities.

The positive attitude of the teacher, an open, friendly environment, encouraging open communication and questions, the appeal to humor as a way of de-escalating the atmosphere in the classroom, the formulation of clear expectations, a calm and steady tone of voice, constructive feedback, emotional support and flexibility in addressing different learning styles, all of which are courses of action valued by students in the academic environment.

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