

**PRRAEPGDA 2020****Personal and Regulatory Resources in Achieving Educational and Professional Goals in the Digital Age****THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY AND STUDENT ENGAGEMENT CONSIDERING THE PECULIARITIES OF THEIR SELF-REGULATION**

Olesia Vladimirovna Bubnovskaia (a)\*, Vitalina Vladimirovna Leonidova (b),  
Irina Aleksandrovna Oralova (b)  
\*Corresponding author

(a) Far Eastern Federal University, 8, Sukhanova street, Vladivostok, Russia, bubnovskaia.ov@dvfu.ru  
(b) Far Eastern Federal University, 8, Sukhanova street, Vladivostok, Russia

***Abstract***

The article reviews the analysis of relationships between the components of psychological safety and the properties of educational environment (EE) with regard to the personal involvement and peculiarities of student self-regulation in the student sample in comparison with the schoolchildren. The survey has analyzed the relevant correlations between the EE safety evaluations and its properties, the components of EE psychological safety with the considering the personal involvement and peculiarities of the student self-regulation. The study has established positive correlations between the engagement and self-regulation components among the schoolchildren as well as a drop in their level of engagement in the upper grades of secondary school. Learners are more vulnerable in evaluating the safety of EE in comparison with their parents and teachers. The components of psychological safety correlate with the level of individual development and with the ability for proper self-evaluation and evaluation of their own behavior and actions, for conscious planning and programming of actions when flexibility and modeling are of primary importance. The research has discovered that psychological security of learners in the EE is crucial for their safety and engagement. The more harmonious self-regulation a person possesses the more inclined this person is to perceive this environment as safe and conducive to development. Engagement and activity of the learners, their readiness to embrace the risks and responsibility for their life events and appreciate even the negative life experiences and the necessary condition for personal growth and development are important aspects of the EE safety.

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**Keywords:** Psychological safety, involvement, self-regulation, students, educational environment.



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## 1. Introduction

Psychological safety of the educational environment is actively researched in the modern science (Baeva, 2015; 2019; Zinchenko, 2017; Zotova & Rikel', 2017). Safety of students is often associated with their success and wellbeing (Dontsov & Perelygina, 2017), resilience and adaptability (Danilenko & Idan', 2018) which are so essential in the today's unstable and unbalanced world. The relevance of studying the psychological safety of EE is determined by the higher risks of its transformation, introduction of new educational concepts, changes in the conditions of interpersonal interaction triggered by new social challenges (for example, digitalization or an epidemic crisis, etc.). Research shows that wellbeing issues, various deviations, aggressive and violent behavior are not uncommon in the student environment (Bubnovskaya & Lysova, 2018; Lysova & Straus, 2019; Peled, 2019); this situation is related both to the age-specific peculiarities of the student community and to the objectively challenging living conditions; adaptation to these conditions requires more intensive psychological resources and psychological safety.

Research of psychological safety in education has established that it is a factor of favorable psychological climate (Aldridge & McChesney, 2018; Baeva et al., 2019; Bear et al., 2011; Konold & Cornell, 2015; Kulikova, 2016;) that provides for the academic, social and emotional performance of students and their critical thinking (Kozlova & Shcheglova, 2015); encourages efficient interpersonal relations, emotional support, cooperation, team and community spirit (Jin & Wang, 2019; Mooij & Fettelaaar, 2012); possesses a set of indicators and parameters (Danilenko & Idan', 2018); involves a specific behavioral scenario of acquiring safety (Krasnyanskaya, 2015) that is actualized depending on psychological conditions and psychological properties (anxiety, emotional comfort, resistance to stress, self-esteem, internality, self-perception, etc.).

## 2. Problem Statement

Readiness and ability for self-provision of optimal emotional experiences is instrumental in ensuring the psychological safety which allows a person to address the tasks and develop the qualities that form an individual system of self-regulation and constructive coping. The wellbeing, success and self-fulfillment of an individual are dependent on the social context and engagement (Shutenko et al., 2018) defined as the person's confidence that involvement in the events gives the best chances to find something worthwhile.

Research shows that "the processes of initiating and setting the goals of activity and managing the achievement of these goals is an important resource of sustaining the existence and developing the individual" (Morosanova & Aronova, 2008, p. 16); the self-regulation of a person is also important as its style provides for the person's success, wellbeing and interrelations with other individuals (Leontiev, 2016; Morosanova, 2001; 2017; Morosanova & Aronova, 2008).

The role of self-regulation, the connection between EE and engagement with planning of the person's activity goals, modelling the conditions for their achievement, programming the activity and evaluating the outcomes have not been reviewed by researchers on a system level; individual regulatory mechanisms have been mentioned indirectly thus requiring further study and verification.

### **3. Research Questions**

The research focuses on the relationship between the psychological safety of EE and person's engagement with regards to the peculiarities of the person's self-regulation as well as on the differences in evaluating the safety components of EE.

#### **3.1. Relationship between psychological safety of EE and engagement considering the peculiarities of self-regulation**

The survey aimed to confirm the assumption about the relationship between psychological safety of EE and engagement with regard to the peculiarities of self-regulation was conducted at the facilities of Far Eastern Federal University, Vladivostok and Asia-Pacific School, Vladivostok. The analysis included the results of random sampling of students (200 representatives), secondary sampling measuring the level of self-regulation: 33 representatives – low level (the values below 23), 111 – medium level (the values between 24 and 32) and 38 – high level (the values over 33); and continuous sampling of secondary school pupils (6th, 7th and 8th grades) of 74 representatives in total.

#### **3.2. Differences in evaluating the safety components of EE by its participants**

The data obtained from parents and teachers (74 and 10 representatives) have also been used to conduct a comparative analysis of the evaluation of EE safety components including the levels of security in the EE, the attitudes towards this environment and satisfaction with its properties.

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

In the light of foregoing, the goal of research was set to discover the most relevant factors of EE safety including the role of its properties, engagement and self-regulation in their development.

### **5. Research Methods**

Evaluation of students' attitude towards the educational system, its psychological safety and engagement in the university life was conducted with the method of "Psychological safety of education environment" (Baeva, 2006), its modified version for the university in combination with the scale "Kiselev's thermometer" (Marishchuk & Bludov, 1984); the scale "Commitment" in the methods "Hardness Survey" by S. Muddy, 1984 translated and adopted to the Russian sample (Leontiev & Rasskazova, 2006); mutual evaluation of students with the method of paired comparisons. The peculiarities of student self-regulation were determined via the questionnaire "Style of self-regulation of behaviour" (Morosanova, 2001).

Analysis includes the components of psychological safety of the EE: PSc – psychological security, PC – psychological comfortability, attitude towards EE, PS – psychological satisfaction of the EE, its properties (for the student sample considering the interaction with 1 – teachers and administrators, 2 – students; properties of the EE: Sf – safety, Sc – security, C – comfortability, S – satisfaction, PI – personal involvement in the life of the university.

The components of individual self-regulation include the following regulatory processes: PI – Planning, M – Modeling, Pr – Programming, ER – Evaluation of Results; regulatory-personal qualities: F – Flexibility, I – Independence; GLSR – General Level of Self-Regulation.

Analysis of the data and their distribution were performed with the methods of descriptive statistics; statistical significance of the obtained correlations was evaluated with the methods of correlation and comparative analysis including the parametric and nonparametric statistical criteria (Pearson correlation coefficient, Spearman's rank correlation coefficient, Mann–Whitney U-test, Fisher's  $\phi$ -criterion); factor analysis with the Bartlett's Test and Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Test); the regressive analysis with Linear Regression methods and Random Forest. The calculations were performed in the Python software.

## 6. Findings

The research results include the statistically significant correlations between the student engagement and self-regulation and the safety of EE and its components; the results were obtained from the student samples at levels  $p < 0.05$ ,  $p < 0.01$  and  $p < 0.001$  (tables 1-2).

**Table 1.** Statistically significant results of correlation analysis of EE psychological safety components and its properties

| Scales | PSc    | PSc1  | PSc2  | PC    | PC1   | PC2     | PS    | Scales |
|--------|--------|-------|-------|-------|-------|---------|-------|--------|
| Sf     | -      | .829* | .843* | .409* | .322* | .300*   | .443* | PSc    |
| Sc     | .474*  | -     | .399* | .299* | .253  | .162*** | .381* | PSc1   |
| C      | .380*  | .791* | -     | .383* | .285* | .337*   | .361* | PSc2   |
| S      | .454*  | .641* | .598* | -     | .640* | .680*   | .664* | PC     |
| PI     | .216** | .271* | .279* | .257* | -     | .346*   | .592* | PC1    |
| Scales | Sf     | Sc    | C     | S     | PI    | -       | .409* | PC2    |

Note: \*  $p \leq 0.001$  (.231), \*\*  $p \leq 0.01$  (.182), \*\*\*  $p \leq 0.05$  (.139)

The results of correlation analysis show positive relationships between engagement and EE safety ( $p < 0.01$ ) as well as security, comfortability and satisfaction with it ( $p < 0.001$ ). The correlation data are also typical of the group with medium self-regulation level ( $p < 0.001$ ). The group with low self-regulation level shows a relationship between engagement and safety ( $p < 0.05$ ); the remaining properties as well as the correlations in the group with high self-regulation do not reach critical values, probably due to the insignificant number of representatives with extreme values.

There is a strong correlation between EE properties, EE psychological safety components, particularly between its comfortability and satisfaction with its properties and psychological security.

Students with high levels of engagement are convinced that participation in the university life provides the maximum opportunity to find something worthwhile and feel really engaged in the university events while really enjoying their activities. They feel confident in themselves and embrace all new and interesting events around them. On the contrary, the students with low levels of engagement feel rejected and alienated from the university life; this situation affects their feeling of security and their evaluation of EE psychological safety.

It is of interest to note that previously our survey discovered a higher engagement of young males in comparison with young female students (Mann-Whitney U-test,  $p < 0.01$ ). Despite the fact that the students of both genders generally perceive the EE as a safe entity, the male students show a higher level of psychological comfort and satisfaction with EE than the female students (Mann-Whitney U-test,  $p < 0.01$ ).

In this respect, it is important to consider the forms of activities that the students are involved in and the year of studying. For example, the secondary school sample revealed a drop in the level of engagement from the 6th to the 8th grade (7.65, 6.81 and 5.28 respectively). Maximum engagement is ensured by the game activities (7.26), excursion trips (7.32), interaction with classmates in general (7.48), while the minimum engagement is the result of administrative sessions (6.02), readers' conferences (5.67) and free talks (5.47); educational services (6.93), lessons (6.82), school projects (6.68) and research laboratories (6.15) take medium positions.

The correlation analysis of EE psychological safety and its components with the peculiarities of student self-regulation revealed a positive relationship between the level of self-regulation for  $p < 0.001$  and the psychological security. In this respect, a tighter relationship between the level of self-regulation and the psychological security is observed in the interaction with teachers and administrators whereas the tighter relationship between the self-regulation and the psychological comfortability is observed in the interaction with students.

**Table 2.** Results of correlation analysis of self-regulation components and EE psychological safety

| Scales                   |      | PSc     | PSc1   | PSc2    | PC      | PC1    | PC2     | PS      |
|--------------------------|------|---------|--------|---------|---------|--------|---------|---------|
| Style of self-regulation | PI   | .036    | .036   | .025    | .164*** | -.010  | .095    | .208**  |
|                          | M    | .148*** | .076   | .169*** | .346*   | .116   | .272*   | .224**  |
|                          | Pr   | .083    | .115   | .026    | .189*** | .016   | .130    | .185**  |
|                          | ER   | .100    | .110   | .059    | .212**  | .107   | .086    | .264*** |
|                          | F    | .257*   | .270*  | .162*** | .328*   | .206** | .205**  | .139*** |
|                          | C    | .077    | .042   | .087    | .059    | .011   | .017    | .024    |
|                          | GLSR | .222**  | .206** | .167*** | .398*** | .132   | .267*** | .328*** |

Note: \*  $p \leq 0.001$  (.231), \*\*  $p \leq 0.01$  (.182), \*\*\*  $p \leq 0.05$  (.139)

Flexibility as a regulatory-personal property is directly correlated with all components of the EE psychological safety – psychological security and comfortability ( $p < 0.001$ ) as well as with the level of satisfaction ( $p < 0.05$ ). This property is more relevant in the interaction with teachers and administrators than with other students.

The major interrelated regulatory processes are positively correlated with the psychological satisfaction including the evaluation of results ( $p < 0.001$ ), modeling, planning and programming ( $p < 0.01$ ); with psychological comfortability, including modeling ( $p < 0.001$ ), programming and evaluation of results ( $p < 0.01$ ) as well as planning ( $p < 0.05$ ); with psychological security including modeling ( $p < 0.05$ ).

However, there were no statistically significant correlations found between the components of EE psychological safety and the independence that is positively correlated with flexibility ( $p < 0.05$ ) and planning ( $p < 0.01$ ). The positive correlation observed between this regulatory-personal quality and the

comfortability and satisfaction with EE in the student group of low self-regulation levels ( $p < 0.05$ ) requires further study.

In our study of the student sample the relationship between the components of individual self-regulation and engagement is random and not statistically significant. In the student sample engagement is positively correlated ( $p < 0.05$ ) with the general level of self-regulation (0.23), modeling (0.24), programming (0.24) and evaluation of results (0.29). Comparative analysis of secondary school samples has shown a tighter relationship of engagement with programming and result evaluation in the 7th grades.

Therefore, the components of EE psychological safety are correlated with the level of self-regulation, with the individual level of development and the ability for proper self-evaluation and evaluation of behavior outcomes, with the stability of subjective criteria and their evaluation, with the ability to notice the situation changes, with the adequate perception of relevant external and internal conditions of goal achievement in the present and future, and with the ability for conscious action-planning and programming. The interrelated ( $p < 0.05$ ) modeling and flexibility are the self-regulation components that are most relevant for achieving the psychological safety.

Analysis of the school sample has revealed statistically significant differences in the evaluation of safety components by learners, their parents and teachers calculated with the Fisher's criterion. Statistically significant differences in the evaluation of EE safety components are shown in Table 3.

As limitations of the criteria include the occurrence of zero values (absence of the negative attitude towards EE among the parents, of very high levels of satisfaction among the students, and of the satisfaction level below medium among the teachers or parents), the levels in the classification become more consolidated.

The parents evaluate the EE more positively than the schoolchildren with reference to the following components: the attitude towards EE – positive ( $p < 0.01$ ) and neutral ( $p < 0.05$ ); the satisfaction with EE properties – very high while the share of high ( $p < 0.05$ ) and medium values ( $p < 0.01$ ) is insignificant; the level of security in the EE – very high ( $p < 0.01$ ) while the share of high values is insignificant ( $p < 0.01$ ). The schoolchildren also show a higher share of medium values with reference to the level of satisfaction with EE properties ( $p < 0.05$ ) than the teachers who tend to give a higher evaluation of their satisfaction with the EE properties.

In general, parents show a more positive attitude towards the EE while their satisfaction with its properties is high in comparison with teachers and learners. They offer a higher evaluation of their children's security levels in the EE while the children's evaluations of all EE safety components are lower in comparison with their parents and teachers. Teachers tend to give high and neutral evaluations of safety components thus proving the vulnerability of children in the evaluation of their safety and the necessity for developing their personality resources for maintaining the feeling of safety.

After the relationships between safety, engagement and self-regulation were established, a factor analysis was performed in order to determine the relevant factors of safety. The data's applicability for the factor analysis was defined with the Bartlett's Test and Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Test, that proved the conformity of the data obtained (.000 и .62 respectively).

**Table 3.** Results of comparative analysis of EE safety components evaluation by pupils, their parents and teachers, Fisher's  $\phi$ -criterion

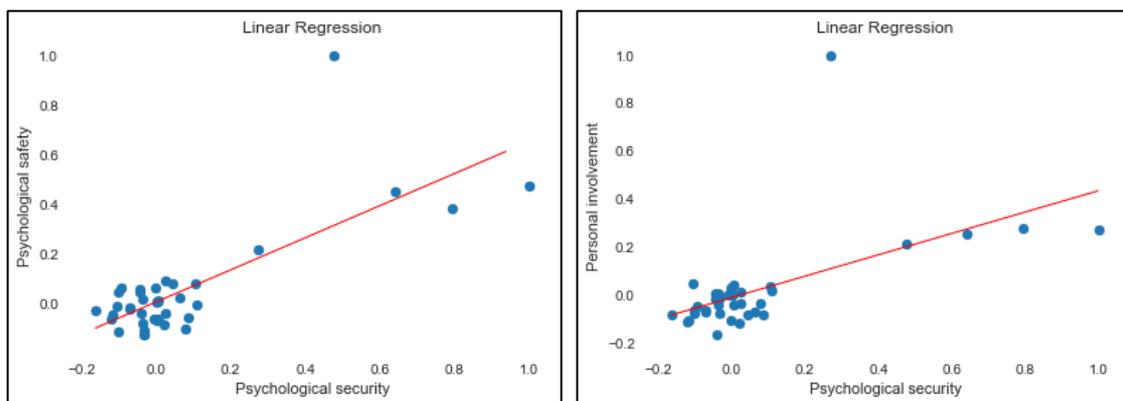
| Categories                         | Level of manifestation | Pupils and parents | Teachers and parents | Pupils and teachers |
|------------------------------------|------------------------|--------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
| Attitude towards EE                | Positive               | 2.859*             | 1.324                | 0.071               |
|                                    | Neutral                | 1.74**             | 0.632                | 0.217               |
|                                    | Negative               | -                  | -                    | 0.199               |
|                                    | Neutral+Negative       | 2.853*             | 1.321                | 0.071               |
| Satisfaction with properties of EE | Very high              | -                  | 1.291                | 0                   |
|                                    | High                   | 2.19**             | 0.398                | 0.671               |
|                                    | Medium                 | 7.36*              | 1.359                | 2.232**             |
|                                    | Below medium           | -                  | -                    | -                   |
|                                    | Very high+High         | 9.246*             | 1.362                | 3.149*              |
|                                    | Medium+Below medium    | 9.422*             | 0.934                | 3.238*              |
| Level of security in EE            | Very high              | 3.406*             | 0.401                | 1.261               |
|                                    | High                   | 3.406*             | 0.398                | 1.264               |

\*  $p \leq 0.01$  (2.31), \*\*  $p \leq 0.05$  (1.64)

The quantity of the factors was determined with the Kaiser criterion and the scree plot diagram that resulted in selecting 10 and 8 factors respectively. The varimax rotation of 10 factors showed that 2 factors had no significant loadings: these factors were dropped out. The varimax rotation of 8 factors considering the correlation analysis of psychological safety, self-regulation and engagement showed a high factor loading on three significant variables that explain 24 % dispersion: psychological security (Sc) – .904; the general level of self-regulation (GLSR) – .903 and psychological comfortability (PC) – 0.864.

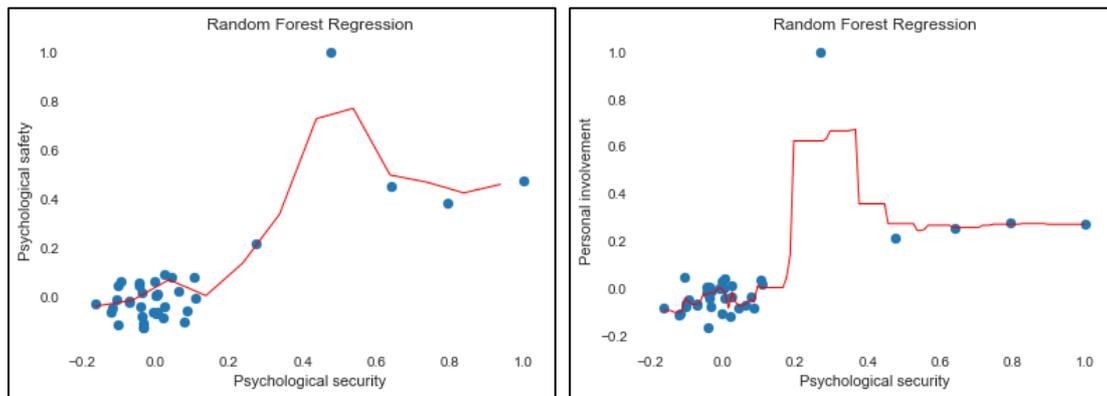
Among these variables, the factor “psychological security” carries a greater relevance for the EE safety (.542) and engagement (0.334). The general level of self-regulation and psychological comfortability did not show high relevance for engagement or EE security components and its properties except for the tight relationship between the psychological comfortability and psychological satisfaction with the EE (0.684). Thus, psychological security has remained the most relevant factor for the EE safety.

The relationship between the factor “psychological security”, engagement and EE safety was established via the regressive analysis with Linear Regression methods (Figure 1) and Random Forest (Figure 2).



**Figure 1.** Linear relationship “psychological security-involvement”, “psychological security safety”

The method of linear regression did not show a tight relationship between the factor “psychological security”, EE safety and personal involvement in the university life (determination coefficients 0.583 and 0.334 respectively). The Random Forest method showed a significant relationship between these factors (determination coefficients 0.957 and 0.901 respectively).



**Figure 2.** Relationship “psychological security-involvement”, “psychological security safety” (Random Forest)

The factor “psychological security” is a stronger determinant of EE safety than of the personal involvement in the university life.

## 7. Conclusion

Analysis of safety with consideration to the components of EE psychological safety and its properties has shown that participation in the university or school events and processes is of great importance to learners. Our survey results complement the findings of other researchers who emphasize the necessity of cooperation, team and community spirit and emotional support for safe and comfortable life in the EE (Jin & Wang, 2019; Mooij & Fettelaar, 2012).

However, other researchers also observe that significance of the educational context (climate of EE, its attractiveness, and attitudes towards this environment and other participants of the educational process) are of greater importance to the schoolchildren (Baeva et al., 2019; Mooij & Fettelaar, 2012) whereas psychological and personal-regulatory properties (for example, resilience, coping strategies, adaptability, self-esteem, etc.) and working with them are more relevant to the students (Baeva, 2015; Bubnovskaya & Lysova, 2018).

In general, the survey has revealed the relationships between the scale evaluations of EE safety, its properties as well as of the EE psychological safety components including the psychological security, psychological comfortability and satisfaction with the EE considering the personal involvement in the university life and peculiarities of the student self-regulation. Psychological security of learners in the EE is relevant both for the individual’s safety and for their engagement.

In this respect, the more harmonious self-regulation a person possesses, the more inclined this person is to perceive the EE as a safe entity that encourages development. With the students, a greater role is assigned to the level of regulatory flexibility that is their ability to adjust the system of self-

regulation in case the internal and external circumstances begin to change; individual levels of perception of relevant external and internal conditions and the degree of their perception and comprehensiveness are also important. The same degree of importance is placed on the active participation of students, their interest in the university events and their readiness to embrace the risks and appreciate even negative life experiences as the necessary condition for personal growth while realizing the responsibility for their life events.

In the future research it will be important to verify and interpret the obtained matrices of inter-correlations and relationships of scale evaluations of safety and its properties with the components of EE safety components as well as the relationships of self-regulation and personal involvement with the properties of EE psychological safety obtained in the group of learners with different levels of self-regulation by comparing them with the results of correlation and comparative analyses of the students and schoolchildren data. The correlation between the engagement and personal-regulatory resources and the safety of EE is also of interest to researchers as well as the question about the necessity of considering the personal peculiarities of learners for ensuring their safety.

However, studies of safety and the tools of its self-sustainment are limited by the singularity and unexpectedness of cases, the challenges of synchronizing and integrating the style-related features and individual strategies of a personality as well as by ethic issues and possibly improper methods of surveying that can be harmful for the test subjects and compromise the reliability of research outcomes.

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