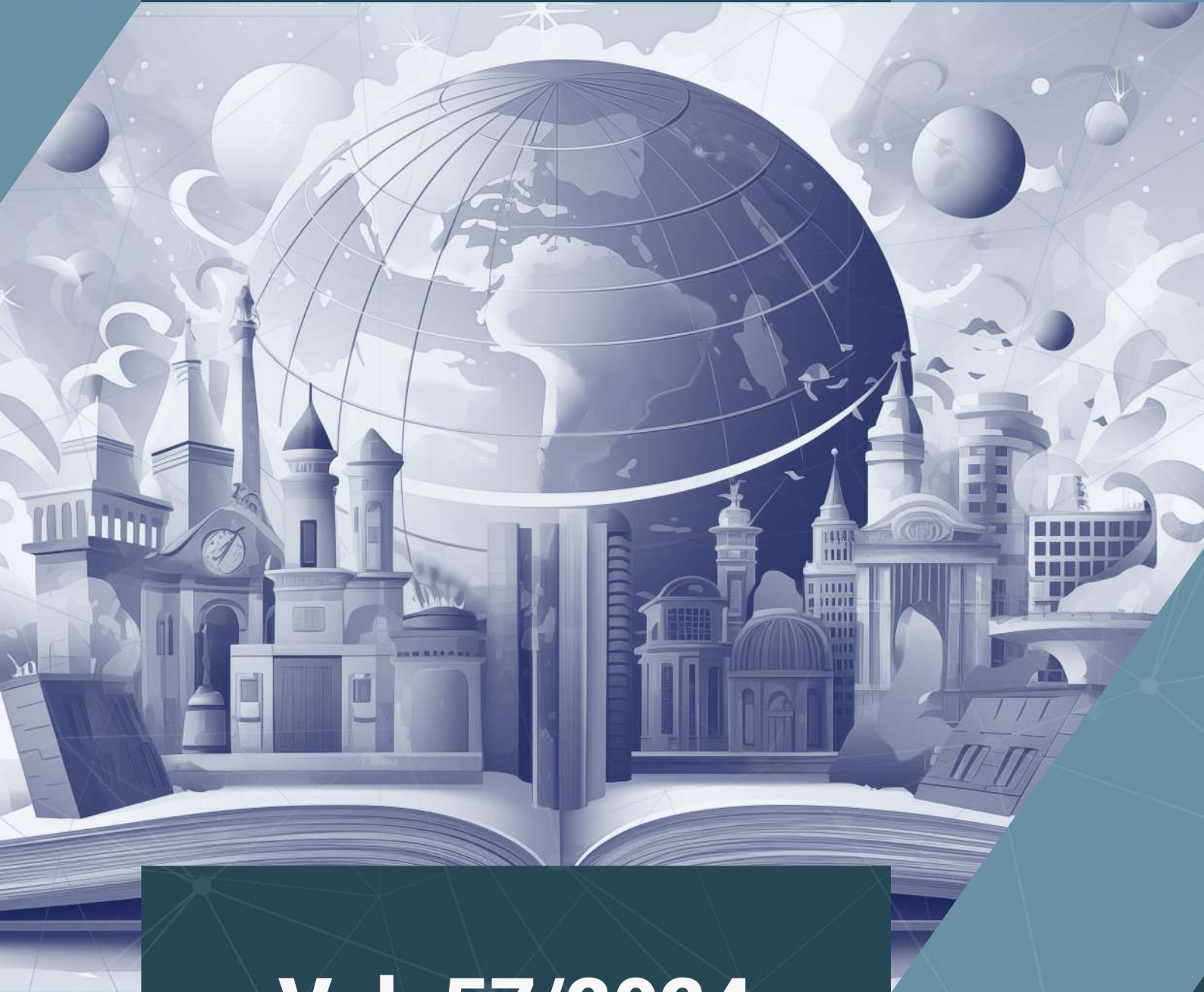




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The Utilization of Sociometric Tests in Identifying School Integration Challenges Among Students with Immigrant Parents

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Abstract. The purpose of this study is to investigate how sociometric relationships are configured within the primary and secondary school group that have immigrant parents. The analysis of the specialized literature was carried out based on clear selection criteria, both chronologically and of the variables. Statistical analyses, including correlations and frequency calculations, were conducted for the research variables. The study also clarifies certain procedural aspects in the application of sociometric tests. Our study included four school groups, two with 4th-grade students and two with pre-adolescent high school students. Parental emigration is a phenomenon that can have significant negative effects on the school integration of children who are left behind. They may experience emotional stress and anxiety that can affect their school performance. Some may also face financial difficulties, resulting in material shortages necessary to participate in school activities. The overload of tasks and household responsibilities can lead to their stigmatization in school groups. Our study examined three dimensions of school integration: partnership in work activities, participation in leisure time activities, and leadership within the group. The results of the research indicate a poor sociometric positioning for the children of emigrants, who are often rejected by the group for work activities, ignored in terms of spending free time, and overlooked for leadership roles within the group. Even if there are situations where some of them gain followers, they are also among the students rejected by the group. Most of them are ignored or rejected by the more socially prominent students in the class, indicating the difficulties of school integration faced by children after parental emigration.

Keywords. Parental emigration; left- behind children; school integration; sociometric test

1.Introduction

Migration is a non-uniform phenomenon, it can be predictable and partially controlled, but it's shaping is conditioned by political, economic, social, geographical factors; it has visible effects on demography, by directly affecting the composition and size of the population both in the host country and in the country of origin. From the research carried out, in a world strongly marked by globalization, observing the international examples and the entry of our country into the international labour force circuit, it seems that the phenomenon will not die out in a short time but will have a long course (Andreescu et al., 2016). Analysing the characteristics of

external migration in our country, it is mostly economic, most of the emigrants being determined by financial reasons, the purpose of migration being a better paid job. According to UN reports on international migration flows, in the period 2007-2015, Romania ranked 2nd in the world, after Syria, in terms of emigrants, registering approximately 3.4 million Romanians who chose to leave the country for resettlement, for work or for other reasons. With the accession to the European Union, the option of accessing a job in developed countries encouraged Romanian citizens to move freely in search of better working conditions and higher remuneration. In the period 2009-2020, the figures ranged between 150,000 and 250,000 emigrants, referring to the annual frequency of exits from the country (Eurostat source). In the 2016-2018 period, emigration experienced an important increase due to the opportunities that the foreign labour market offered, a peak of the phenomenon being recorded in 2017, when 73,996 families from Romania temporarily left the country, leaving their children at home in the care of other people. And in this situation, of the emigration of the single parent, starting from 2019 there is a decrease in the number of families involved in the migration process until 2021, including, most likely, caused by the restrictions during the Covid-19 pandemic.

2. Structural and functional changes in the transnational family due to emigration

Certain modern ethnomethodologists describe the family in the postmodern period as a social artifact that loses its cohesion, vibrancy, values and fidelity in the context of ideological changes of a religious, social, economic, ethical nature or those that describe human freedoms that extend to sexual orientation, professional and gender (Iacobescu, 2022). If the family has high financial potential, educational concerns increasingly involve extracurricular activities that parents mediate: paid meditations to support school performance, sports, recreational-cultural activities in various clubs, circles, organizations. Parents put emphasis on supporting the learning of a foreign language from the preschool period and on the development of digital skills, buying their children various technological devices: phones, tablets, laptops, computers connected to the Internet. Some ethnomethodologists opine that family is a term imposed by society and its conditions, a term that has manifestations inconsistent with the classic definition through the existence of couples who cohabit temporarily or for a long time, single-parent families or even married couples who live separately. Today's family is a multifaceted reality, with various socio-educational aspects, shaped by the action of internal and external factors in a complexity that makes it interesting for various fields of study: sociological, economic, political, demographic, psychological and last but not least , pedagogical. The family environment is the first school in which to learn to relate to others, where the child needs to find encouragement to explore and experiment, to communicate and collaborate, thus discovering the advantages of belonging to a group. The family environment lays the foundations for the child's socialization through the relationships built and cultivated between its members, as Maria Voinea points out: "the family constitutes the framework for achieving sociability, the premise for learning the desirable norms, the expected behavior models" (2005, p. 41). In the complete, healthy family, concerned with children's mental development, they satisfy their needs for new experiences that nourish them cognitively, developing their language, knowledge of the world around them and environmental phenomena through games and rules. The family is the first environment where children receive attention, enjoy recognition and appreciation, are valued, but it is also here that they learn the first norms of coexistence, the first duties and responsibilities that will lead to the gradual gaining of independence from the help of parents as the first instance of socialization (Boboccea, 2022). As it grows, the child's social space expands, human interactions take on a larger scale in the environments it attends: kindergarten,

school being the most important values for the developing personality. In the family, he forms his first attitudes of independence if he is encouraged to explore reality and the environment. He will become empathetic, brave or, on the contrary, aggressive or obedient depending on his experiences. The period of the formation of the child's personality overlaps with the period in which he receives the primary education, the strongest in value, creating thoughts, notions about himself, about others and about life. In the nuclear family, the departure of one parent is a stressor for the other, who has to take over the household responsibilities. The physical burden and overload, the pressure of professional duties, household duties, child care, social and economic responsibilities can have repercussions at a psychological level. Migration involves making a decision that is weighed at length by family members (adults). The impact is clear, immediate, but also has late effects that occur in stages. The recent history of our people does not have a cultural model of migration, so the risks that arise are numerous. Relationships between spouses change when one of them leaves, difficulties multiply by taking over the duties and responsibilities of the departed; the emigrant also feels the burden of leaving, of the constraints that led him to choose the path of foreignness, of the fact that he "sacrifices himself" far from home; the set of intra-family relationships deteriorates, so the functionality of the basic microgroup of society is shaken (Miftode, 2006). The material standards that families are looking for are important: home renovation, permanent furnishing with furniture, modern accessories, electronic equipment with modern technology, purchasing clothes, a powerful car, purchasing vacations. This constant yearning for more or better keeps adults constantly engaged in work and chronophagous activities.

3. Effects of parental emigration on the socialization of children left at home

With the departure of the parents to work abroad, with the aim of economic recalibration of the family, there are changes of both a structural and functional, affective nature in the life of the members of the transnational family who remain in the country of origin. In the present research, we are interested in the effects of parental emigration on the socialization of children left at home. The situation of children who have one or both parents gone abroad is extremely difficult, each individual case being, beyond the statistical aspects we refer to, of a psycho-emotional depth and an overwhelming complexity. Regarding the situation of children who stay at home with one of their parents or with other caregivers, numerous problems have been recorded at the international level that have affected their lives, from a mental, physical, health or relational-emotional point of view. A study by the Soros Foundation Romania (2007, p. 15) reveals the migration situation in which the children left at home find themselves: the first to intend to leave and materialize this intention quite quickly are the men/fathers, the average age being 35 years, followed at intervals of several years by women/mothers, who decide to follow the same path of emigration. Previous studies have indicated that these children may experience a number of difficulties in their daily lives and in the school environment, emotional and psychological problems such as anxiety, depression and feelings of abandonment (Hannum, 2003). Children of emigrants experience greater loneliness and low school performance (Lu & Zhou, 2013). They have difficulties in maintaining relations with the departed parents, because of the distance, the limitations of communication. The lack of physical interactions, of emotional connection increase the risks of problematic behaviors such as involvement in delinquent acts, consumption of harmful substances, addictions. Many times the parents lose control over these children in favor of powerful entourages. Children left at home feel the negative impact of separation from their parents on school performance, leading to absenteeism, decreased motivation and learning difficulties. A study carried out in

communities with an emigrant population in Mexico highlighted, through multivariate results, the increased probability that in emigrant families there is at least one child with academic, behavioral or emotional difficulties (Lahaie et al., 2009). Children between the ages of 10 and 15 left behind after their parents emigrated, in rural China, experienced the feeling of abandonment, 16.1% suffering from distress in the context of the precarious existence of some factors to protect the parent-child relationship. Trauma is felt more strongly by primary school children, with 1.7% more situations than secondary school children (Man & Cao, 2020). The absence of parents from the family for a longer period of time has a significant negative impact on the school results of children left at home, in the short and long term. A survey found that maternal migration significantly increases the risk of vulnerability to physical or sexual abuse and aggression (Brown, 1993). Avoided children reach adolescence with personal and school adjustment difficulties, consider themselves unworthy and unacceptable, beliefs provoked by the rejection of primary care. Important studies find that boys are more affected than girls who stay at home, with caregivers tending to be more protective of girls than boys (Zhang et al., 2015). Other studies contradict results that have shown that girls are more likely to be affected by parental migration (Meyerhoefer & Chen, 2011). Other research provides evidence that boys, more than girls, tend to neglect school if the migrant parent is the father (Antman, 2011). However, there is little research that distinguishes between the effects of migration on school adjustment according to the gender of the migrant (Antman, 2013). Preadolescents exposed to parental emigration have poorer educational results than those from non-migrant families, the effect being stronger in the case of maternal emigration, their school results decrease as their age increases towards 17 years (Marchetta & Sim, 2021). Studies show increasingly frequent situations of neglect in which children become victims and suffer emotionally, educationally, physically, suffer various abuses, are exploited through work or sexually. A new profile is emerging in schools, that of children left at home without parental support. The migration phenomenon seen as a value model by the young generation and the negative effects in terms of schooling are worrying: the decrease in motivation for learning or school dropout.

4. School integration

In the school environment, the child must respond to some normative rigors and some learning rules claimed by the school programs. At the psychological level, the balance of these actions is directed to an important extent by the teaching staff who designs and directs the learning process. School adaptation, viewed from a social perspective, represents the complex of tendencies, adjustments, assimilations and accommodations of the individual, who has a behavioral profile built in the family environment, which he will make more flexible according to social trends. This reconfiguration that the individual is willing and able to bear ensures his integration into the community (kindergarten, school, group of friends, etc.).

5. Research methodology

5.1. Study questions

1. What is the sociometric status of students with immigrant parents?
2. How is the sociometric popularity of students with emigrant parents configured in terms of affective, friendship relations with other members of the school group?
3. How is group preference configured for choosing students with immigrant parents as partners in learning activities?

4. To what extent do children with immigrant parents show organizational and social dominance behaviors in the school group in order to enjoy the choices of peers in the role of class representative/leader?

5.2. The sociometric method

Sociometric techniques are for the relevant data related to the socio-affective structure of the group, to the interpersonal relationships between students-students, students-teachers, teachers-team of teachers, information that can favor or block the instructive-educational process. Using the sociometric test as a tool, we use a series of questions through which students express their attitude towards their colleagues in terms of liking/disliking, attraction/rejection. The answers are evaluated by a numerical rank, organized in a numerical expression (sociometric matrix) and a graphic representation (individual sociograms, group sociograms, histograms). In principle, in the analysis stage of the data obtained during the research, we focus on "decomposition (decomposition) of the data into constituent parts and revealing the elements and structures characteristic of the whole" (Agabrian, 2004). Sociometric instruments capture the formal and informal aspects of student group relationships, providing sociometric information about both individuals and the group. The sociometric method allows "the measurement, ordering and graphic presentation of some social and psychosocial phenomena" (Wiese, 1966 apud Cauc, 2007), by applying sociometric techniques being able to determine: the sociometric status of a student in the school group, his location in the relational field, his membership to certain subgroups; the psychological structure of the group; the existence of subgroups; the perception of the group members towards a certain individual; the preferences, rejections, indifference shown between the group members; group cohesion. The purpose of constructing the sociometric test was to identify and analyze the psychosocial hierarchies within the groups of students, the roles that the children have, the cohesion of the group, the preferences that the children have for each other; for our study it is important to evaluate and analyze to what extent parental emigration correlates with a negative status of children in school groups. Sociometric techniques are based "on the abilities of individuals to discriminate (or choose) people or things in their environment. It emphasizes the way in which the participants, the actors of the research, opine about the researched phenomenon, their intentions and perceptions gaining a privileged position. Children are given three options that describe feelings and perceptions they may have about relationships with fellow children. They have only one option to choose from, the one that suits them best. The need to associate individuals in the group, to interrelate and shape the structure of the group, at the same time as attempts to respond to the demands of the environment and to act on it are specific elements of the adaptive process. In formal groups, such as school groups, two categories of relationships can be identified: those of a formal type, which manifest themselves in the official framework of the school and operate according to official regulations, and informal relationships that appear spontaneously, have different durations and intensities depending on the variability of the relational field. Through sociometric analysis, subgroups, leaders and relationships can be identified that formal contexts and educational activities cannot reveal to teachers. Analyzing the relationships of sympathy/antipathy, indifference/isolation, teachers can develop psycho-pedagogical strategies that optimize the social integration of children, increase the cohesion of the school group, confirm and strengthen friendships, and integrate those who are excluded or isolated.

5.3. The sample of subjects

The research took place in 2023 on four school groups, two at primary level and two at secondary level from Romanian schools. For the application of the sociometric tests, the students and their parents were informed and the research was carried out based on their informed consent. All ethical standards were respected, no student was put in critical situations, which could damage their image or disturb their peace.

Table 1. Characteristics of the sociometrically tested groups

		Residential environment	total students	girls	totally girls with immigrant parents	boys	totally boys with immigrant parents	Arithmetic mean of ages
Group 1	primary	urban	16	6	2	10	3	9.82
Group 2	gymnasium	urban	22	9	1	13	3	13.40
Group 3	gymnasium	rural	20	10	1	10	4	12.04
Group 4	primary	rural	17	8	2	9	3	9.94

5.4. Methodological standards in the development of the instrument

The sociometric test used in our research fits into the model proposed by Levandoski and Cardoso, (2013), being composed of six items, three of them referring to positive assessments, based on attractions and three referring to negative assessments, based on rejections. In our test we opted for limiting the number of nominations to three options, thus limiting the preferential expansion for a more rigorous analysis, a methodological procedure that had many supporters (Coie et al., 1982; Cameron et al., 2018). The requirements that built the questionnaire followed three dimensions: spending free time, partnership in work, popularity in the group as a leader. Two items were constructed for each dimension.

The social domain "spending free time" is oriented towards the preferences shown by children in choosing play partners or spending free time. "Childhood social skills are a strong predictor of school adjustment" (Wentzel, 1991), with peers' prosocial behaviors helping accepted children tend toward higher school performance while rejected children tend toward academic at-risk (Wentzel & Caldwell, 1997).

Spending free time (recreations, the moments before and after classes, the time spent on the way to/from school or the free time spent outside the school program) does not involve cognitive aspects, has a little restrictive character and a high degree of freedom.

The criterion by which children choose their play or free time partner is affective in nature (relationship during breaks involves relaxation, fun, lightness in communication, sharing of common interests).

The requirements of the "*partnership in work*" field require children to make choices for educational activities that require the mastery of certain work techniques, cognitive and psycho-motor capacities. The criterion by which the work partner is nominated is a functional one and also implies a dose of trust in the teammate, in his communication and cooperation skills, recognition of work potential. School activities involve setting clear goals, meeting work conditions, finding solutions, and solving problems, all of which represent aspects of

intellectual achievement (Wentzel et al., 1991). The selection criteria in this situation may be different from those stated in the first field: involvement in the task, knowledge possessed, speed of work, seriousness. School activity partners receive and provide support, cooperate and share workloads in order to respond as best as possible to the demands of the teaching staff.

The assignment of the role of "head of the class/class leader" is carried out by the teaching staff and students, by choosing a representative of the group who meets the sum of characteristics that this role entails. The choice of the leader is found under the influence of the psycho-affective and behavioral atmosphere in the respective class, the particularities of the group being determinants of the selection and appointment of the class leader. The position of authority that is formally assigned to him is distinguished by organizational responsibilities, sociability, communication skills, proactive attitude, involvement in school activity and a moral-civic conduct. The selection criterion is hierarchical.

The sociometric test highlights whether within the group of students there are subgroups, cliques (Mihu, 1967), each with its own leader. Informal leaders exercise a type of spontaneous influence that is accompanied by increased popularity, appreciated by peers due to talents, passions, artistic or sports skills. The teacher's knowledge of the informal leaders and the subgroups requires further research into the criteria on the basis of which the respective subgroups were established and function.

6. Interpretation of the obtained results

The study based on sociometric tests carried out on the four school groups, two of the primary level, the 4th grade and two of the secondary level, the 6th grade and the 7th grade, highlights what we initially assumed, namely that the students with emigrant parents have, as an effect of parental separation and the lack of physical supervision and affection from parents, difficulties in relating and integrating into school groups. We support this view through descriptive statistical analyses, frequencies and correlations.

Table 2. Frequency according to the gender of the children participating in the study

Level	Frequency	% percent out of the total	Cumulative %
0	33	44.0 %	44.0 %
1	42	56.0 %	100.0 %

Code 0 is the female gender, code 1 is for the male gender

Table 3. Frequency according to the gender of the emigrant parent

Level	Frequency	% percent out of the total	Cumulative %
0	56	74.7 %	74.7 %
1	11	14.7 %	89.3 %
2	5	6.7 %	96.0 %
3	3	4.0 %	100.0 %

Code 0 - no emigrant parent, code 1 - emigrant father, code 2 - emigrant mother, code 3 - both emigrant parents

Among the sociometrically tested students, 14.7% have an emigrant father, 6.7% have an emigrant mother and 4% of them have both emigrant parents.

Table 4. Frequency depending on the status of the child (with immigrant or non-immigrant parent)

Level	Frequency	% percent out of the total	Cumulative %
0	56	74.7 %	74.7 %
1	19	25.3 %	100.0 %

Code 0 - children with non-emigrant parents, code 1 - children with emigrant parents

In the analysis of correlations we used Jamovi, version 2.2.5, the Pearson Test and we operated with the coefficients from tables 101, 102, 103. The interpretation of the value of the coefficient r was made according to the model of Hopkins (2000) as follows:

- Very low, negligible level ($r < 0.1$)
- Low level (0.1 – 0.3)
- Moderate level (0.3 – 0.5)
- High, high level (0.5- 0.7)
- Very high level (0.7 – 0.9)
- Excellent level, almost perfect (>0.9)

The value of the coefficient r is found in the interval -1 and +1, 0 is the null value of r . The signs + and – indicate the direction of the interval towards which the relationship between the variables tends and the numerical value of the coefficient shows the intensity of the relationship. Correlation coefficients with a positive value indicate a direct correlation between the variables, and those with a negative value indicate an indirect correlation between the variables (one increases, the other decreases).

Table 5. Correlation matrix between Isp friendship, child status with emigrant parent, and gender of emigrant parent

		immigrant parent	child with an immigrant parent	Isp friendship
immigrant parent	Pearson's r	—		
	95% CI Upper	—		
	95% CI Lower	—		
child with an immigrant parent	Pearson's r	0.838	***	—
	95% CI Upper	0.895		—

		immigrant parent		child with an immigrant parent	Isp friendship
	95% Lower CI	0.754		—	
Isp friendship	Pearson's r	-0.462 ***		-0.411 ***	—
	95% Upper CI	-0.263		-0.203	—
	95% Lower CI	-0.624		-0.584	—

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

The status of a child with an emigrant parent correlates negatively with the index of preferential status in the "spending free time" dimension, being statistically significant. The gender of the emigrant parent correlates strongly at the lower bound with the preferential status index from the friendship dimension.

Table 6. Table of correlations between Isp work, status of a child with an emigrant parent and the gender of the emigrant parent

		immigrant parent		child with an immigrant parent	Isp work
immigrant parent	Pearson's r			—	
	95% Upper CI			—	
	95% Lower CI			—	
child with an immigrant parent	Pearson's r		0.838 ***		—
	95% Upper CI		0.895		—
	95% Lower CI		0.754		—
Isp work	Pearson's r	-0.352 **		-0.317 **	—
	95% Upper CI		-0.136		-0.097
	95% Lower CI		0.536		-0.507

	immigrant parent	child with an immigrant parent	Isp work
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Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

The correlation between the preferential status index in the "work partnership" dimension and the status of a child with an emigrant parent has a moderate value, it is negative, indirect with $r = -0.31$ and statistically significant (** $p < .01$). The correlation between Isp work and the gender of the emigrant parent is moderate in value, negative and indirect ($r = -0.35$), statistically significant (** $p < .01$). A strong, positive and direct correlation is between the variables gender of the emigrant parent and the status of a child with an emigrant parent ($r = 0.83$) and strongly statistically significant (***) $p < .001$.

Table 7. Table of correlations between leading Isp, status of child with emigrant parent and gender of emigrant parent

		immigrant parent	child with an immigrant parent	Isp leading		
immigrant parent	Pearson's r	—				
	95% CI Upper	—				
	95% CI Lower	—				
child with an immigrant parent	Pearson's r	0.838	***	—		
	95% CI Upper	0.895		—		
	95% CI Lower	0.754		—		
Isp leading	Pearson's r	-0.291	*	-0.346	**	—
	95% CI Upper	-0.069		-0.129		—
	95% CI Lower	-0.486		-0.531		—

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

The correlation between the leader Isp variable and the emigrant parent's gender variable is negative, indirect, significant. statistical (* $p < .05$). The value of $r = -0.29$ indicates a minor correlation. There is a moderate, negative, indirect correlation, $r = -0.34$, statistically significant (** $p < .01$) between the Isp leader variables and the status of an immigrant child.

7. Answers to the research questions

1. What is the sociometric status of students with immigrant parents?

The indicators of sociometric status (Iss) for students with immigrant parents have average values between 0 and 0.28, compared to a maximum value Iss of 0.87 recorded for a

child with non-immigrant parents from the tested groups. The arithmetic mean of the sociometric status indices for all tested dimensions, at the level of all tested groups, is 0.18. From this point of view, we can state that the sociometric status of the students with emigrant parents in the tested groups falls within the lower limit of the interval, towards the average. This sociometric analysis only takes into account the choices that group members received from their peers. 0 is the minimum value indicating that a student received no choices on any of the tested dimensions. Regarding peer group sociometric status as a ratio of choices to rejections, the Isp values of all tested groups fall between -0.56 and +0.87. The mean Isp for students with immigrant parents across all test dimensions is 0.006, close to the null or controversial value.

2. How is the sociometric popularity of students with emigrant parents configured in terms of affective, friendship relations with other members of the school group?

The sociometric popularity for students with emigrant parents, in the domain "spending free time" is negative (average = -0.17), which indicates that these students have some difficulties in making friends or being liked by their peers. Regarding spending recreations, informal socializing moments within the school or extracurricular, Isp reveals that on average, these children are rejected by their peers.

3. How is group preference configured for choosing students with immigrant parents as partners in learning activities?

The sociometric popularity of students with emigrant parents is also negative in the "partnership in work" dimension, with an average value that indicates an easier rejection than in the first dimension (average = -0.11). This aspect justifies us to state that parental emigration affects to a lesser extent the work involvement and cognitive abilities of the children who stayed at home. Many times, as we identified in the analyzed studies, remittances support learning and provide children with greater educational opportunities and material comfort to prevent school dropout and educational failure. The range in which Isp work for students with emigrant parents is -0.33 and 0.2, with 2 positive values, one null and 17 negative.

And here, according to the sociometric analysis, 85% of students with parents who have gone abroad are rejected by the collective.

4. To what extent do children with immigrant parents show organizational and social dominance behaviors in the school group in order to enjoy the choices of peers in the role of class representative/leader?

The sociometric popularity of students with emigrant parents, in the school groups to which they belong, in the "class representative" dimension registers an average of Isp = -0.16. The range of values obtained is -0.75 (the lowest value) and 0.26, with four positive values, two negative values, and fourteen negative values. The standard deviation of the indices is 0.26.

The average of the group also indicates rejection of students with emigrant parents by the group, in only 20% of cases they were considered suitable for the role of leader. These results indicate that some of these children have managed to gather followers around them.

8. The conclusions of the study

The sociometric test applied to the four school groups, respecting all the ethical conditions of the research, without interfering with the tested students, without suggesting certain answers or manipulating the variables in favour of the research, indicated the three dimensions tested, for students with emigrant parents, negative values in terms of preferential status indicators. The sociometric status is also low, which reveals that they are only occasionally among the preferences of their classmates, having few followers.

We can state based on all the analysis of this study, carried out at the level of school groups and at the individual level, for children with emigrant parents, that the variable parental emigration is indirectly associated with school integration and adaptation in terms of socialization in the school group.

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