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	Title of research article  Mental Organization and School Maladaptation in Children: A Clinical Psychoanalytic Study on the Role of Mentalization, Object Relations, and Rorschach Assessment
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Abstract School maladaptation among children continues to pose a major challenge for educators, clinicians, and policymakers. This study investigates the intricate relationship between the child's mental organization and their ability to adapt to the school environment, adopting a psychoanalytic perspective as its conceptual foundation. Unlike cognitive-behavioral frameworks that primarily emphasize performance deficits, the psychoanalytic approach underscores the deep interplay between intrapsychic structures, emotional regulation, and social integration. Using a qualitative clinical methodology, we conducted an in-depth case study involving semi-structured interviews and the administration of the Rorschach projective test. The clinical material was analyzed with reference to mentalization theory and object relations frameworks. Results indicate that fragility in mental organization substantially limits adaptive capacities, often manifesting as learning difficulties, anxiety, and social withdrawal. Key findings demonstrate that: 1. Deficits in mentalization undermine the child's ability to reflect upon internal states, thereby impeding constructive peer and teacher relationships. 2. Disturbances in object relations lead to fragile attachments and heightened vulnerability to frustration within the school context. 3. Rorschach profiles revealed impaired reality testing and a predominance of defensive mechanisms (e.g., denial, projection), which contribute to poor school adjustment. The study concludes that school maladaptation cannot be reduced to pedagogical shortcomings alone but reflects deeper structural fragilities in the child's psychic organization. Clinical interventions should integrate psychoanalytic assessment tools with educational strategies to promote sustainable adaptation and psychological resilience.	
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1. Introduction

Adaptation is a continuous and dynamic process through which individuals are compelled to face problems, needs, and situations that require appropriate responses to reduce stress and restore balance. However, adaptation remains relative, as it depends on an individual's ability to reconcile their own demands and needs with those of their surrounding environment.

Adaptation accompanies humans throughout all stages of life, including childhood. School represents a novel environment for the child, distinct from the home, in which the child is required to adapt. It constitutes a critical phase in the child's psychological, cognitive, and social development, with its own systems, rules, and interpersonal dynamics. While the school imposes its own set of requirements, the child brings a unique personality, with its specific characteristics and psychological trajectory. For the child to enjoy sound mental health, a balance must be established between their personal structure and the demands of the educational environment (Dekhane, 1997, p. 81).

Therefore, it is imperative for educational institutions to adopt a comprehensive yet in-depth understanding of the student. This necessitates considering the psychodynamic aspects of the child's personality in addition to other dimensions that influence school adjustment.

School maladjustment problems are not solely related to familial or educational environments; they also reflect the child's internal mental organization. This organization represents the specificities of psychic activity and follows internal laws aimed at protecting the ego from threats and regulating internal conflicts. From a psychoanalytic standpoint, the process of learning is closely linked to the child's mental organization. Success at school depends on certain aspects of this organization. Hence, academic difficulties and maladjustment cannot be adequately addressed or treated without a deep understanding of the child's internal dynamics. From the first day at school, the child confronts challenges and internal conflicts—such as identification, psychic transformations, separation anxiety, exam anxiety, and relational dynamics with teachers—while also facing parental pressures to perform. Confronted with all these factors, the child must be able to contain and manage these conflicts to achieve adaptation. If unsuccessful, the child may unconsciously resort to disrupting the learning process, withdrawing from academic engagement, and choosing intellectual inhibition, effectively halting their educational investments (Cheradi, 2006, p. 287).

Emotional deficits also weaken containment and diminish the child's ability to engage and commit within the school setting. These deficits may also obstruct their motivation to acquire knowledge. Here, the concept of mentalization becomes relevant—a notion introduced by the psychosomatic school led by Pierre Marty. Mentalization enables an understanding of adult mental organization through content analysis. In children, whose verbal language is still underdeveloped, mental organization can be assessed through projective production—particularly via the Rorschach test, which remains one of the most effective tools for evaluating mental organization, the child's capacities to overcome developmental conflicts, their defenses, and psychological resilience.

In this regard, an Algerian study conducted by Nadia Cheradi and Intissar Sahraoui (2015) aimed to examine the mental organization of school-age children and adolescents (first grade in primary school and second grade in secondary school) and its relation to academic failure. The study sample consisted of 220 students (100 children and 120 adolescents), and the researchers used the Rorschach and Thematic Apperception Tests. The results showed that students with fragile mental organization tend to fail academically. This failure stems from weak cognitive capacities and a fragile psychic apparatus, which in turn renders their defense mechanisms ineffective in confronting and containing conflicts—ultimately leading to school failure (Cheradi & Sahraoui, 2015, pp. 177-190).

In the same context, from a psychosomatic (mind-body) perspective, Rosine Debray emphasized the necessity of adopting a deep, individualized view of the child, especially within the educational setting. She cautioned against generalized perceptions, arguing that each child possesses a unique mental and defensive organization. According

to her, each child interacts with school according to the functioning of their psychic apparatus. School adjustment, therefore, depends on the child's mental organization and its ability to negotiate anxiety and internal conflicts. The nature of psychic work varies according to the specificities of mental organization (Debray, 1991, p. 43).

Accordingly, a well-adjusted (successful) student is one whose mental organization is solid, with strong mentalization capacities, allowing for ease in knowledge acquisition and the ability to manage and contain internal conflicts. Conversely, the inability to resolve such conflicts may lead to school maladjustment.

This research seeks to shed light on the dynamic aspect of the personality of school-enrolled children who struggle with adaptation, aiming to identify the nature of their mental organization. Based on the above, our research problem can be summarized in the following question:

What is the nature of mental organization in school-maladapted children, and what are its indicators as revealed through the clinical interview and the Rorschach test?

2. Research Hypothesis

The main hypothesis of this study is as follows: **"There is a fragility in the child's mental organization that impedes their school adjustment."** This fragility is manifested in the clinical interview and the projective Rorschach test through:

1. Deficiencies in the capacity for mentalization.
2. Disturbances in object relations.

3. Significance of the Study

The importance of this research lies in its role as a sensitization and awareness effort directed at all stakeholders and professionals concerned with childhood, especially within the school environment. The school is not merely an institution for instruction and knowledge transmission; it is also a space for growth and development. This study advocates for giving equal attention to the dynamic aspects of a student's personality, alongside the cognitive dimension, in order to deepen the clinical perspective.

4. Objectives of the Study

- To identify the nature of the mental organization in school-enrolled children who struggle with adjustment, using projective assessment tools.
- To activate a psychopathological perspective in understanding school realities, since students often present with educational difficulties that may mask deeper psychological disturbances.

5. Key Terms

5.1 School Adjustment

Jean Piaget viewed **adaptation** as a process achieved through a balance between two aspects of interaction between the individual and their environment. Either the individual modifies their behavior to create harmony between their internal world and environmental demands, or they attempt to influence their environment so that it aligns with their own desires and needs (Saqr, 1988, p. 83).

In psychology, adaptation refers to the capacity to manage internal or external changes without disrupting the ego—indicating an individual's ability to align and harmonize with internal and external conditions by modifying or controlling them (El-Wafi, 2016, p. 137).

School adjustment, then, is defined as an individual's success within educational institutions, including healthy cognitive and social development, appropriate academic achievement, and the ability to address academic challenges such as learning difficulties (El-Deeb, 2000, p. 18).

It is also defined as "the student's effective adaptation to the variables of academic life and the school environment, including relationships with teachers and peers, the school climate, management styles, examination systems, and curricula" (El-Quraiti, 1998, p. 65).

5.2 Mental Organization

Mental organization refers to a dynamic process governed by fundamental principles of the psychic apparatus. It reflects the specific characteristics of psychic functioning, operating as a dynamic system governed by specific laws designed to protect the ego from threats that may compromise its stability and cause psychological pain. Its

purpose is to ensure internal harmony and balance by integrating the individual's psychological reality with the broader social reality in which they are situated.

5.3 Factors Influencing School Adjustment

5.3.1 Health-Related Factors

A student may suffer from health issues such as visual or auditory impairments, or low levels of cognitive or intellectual functioning, all of which significantly affect academic performance and, consequently, school adjustment. Poor health often leads to frequent absenteeism, neglect of academic responsibilities, and falling behind in school. Additionally, physical abnormalities—such as extreme tallness or shortness, thinness, obesity, or physical disabilities—may hinder the student's ability to gain respect, appreciation, and cooperation from peers in both academic and recreational contexts. Therefore, modern educational institutions place great emphasis on student health care and the treatment of illnesses, even establishing dedicated schools for students with special needs (Maatouq, 2014, p. 102).

5.3.2 Psychological Factors

First: The Child's Identifications and Object Relations

The transition from the family environment to the school setting constitutes a significant transformation in the child's life. For some children, this separation is painful and hard to accept, triggering inner psychological conflicts.

"Starting school can often be a destructive experience for children with fragile mental organization" (Simoussi, 2002, p. 21).

The potential for learning and school adaptation is contingent on aspects of the child's mental functioning—most notably, their ability to manage separation anxiety. This is particularly pronounced in first-year students, who are often preoccupied with Oedipal conflicts and sometimes cannot let go of strong attachments to significant objects. They experience this shift as trauma, abandonment, or loss of a love object. Separation anxiety may reemerge each time the child returns to school. If the child refuses to invest in new external objects (such as the school environment), it reflects a failure in object relations. The stronger and more secure the child's internal object relations (relation d'objet solide), the greater their ability to invest in and adapt to the new environment—school—and to manage their anxiety (Simoussi, 2002, p. 35).

In this context, Rosine Debray emphasizes that the mother's mental organization is a critical factor in shaping the child's psychic apparatus. The potential for school adjustment is closely linked to the quality of the child's defensive capacities, which are in turn formed during early developmental stages and rooted in the nature of maternal care. Initial affective interactions allow the child to distinguish between familiar and unfamiliar objects. This primary differentiation facilitates the formation of stable object relations and supports the first identifications (Debray, 1986, p. 101).

Thus, severe narcissistic deficiencies weaken the containment of depressive and separation anxieties, preventing the child from engaging with school and developing a desire for knowledge.

Second: Defensive Mechanisms and School Adjustment

Defense mechanisms are various types of processes that the psyche employs to manage internal conflicts. The dominant mechanisms vary depending on the developmental stage and the degree of conflict containment (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1990, p. 234).

To achieve school adjustment, the student attempts to sublimate and contain their impulses, employing numerous defense strategies to confront anxiety and conflict. The most common among these include:

- **Denial:** Defined by Laplanche and Pontalis as a process through which the individual expresses a previously repressed wish, thought, or feeling while continuing to deny that it belongs to them (Laplanche & Pontalis, p. 112). Depression occupies a central place in childhood, often expressed in varied clinical forms. Exposure to narcissistic wounds deepens the child's depression, prompting denial to defend against depressive ideas and emotions that conflict with the school reality.
- **Regression:** Entering school evokes conflicting emotions—a desire to join the adult world of learning versus a fear of failure. This fear fosters a wish to remain in childhood. When unable to confront new situations, the child regresses to earlier developmental stages, often displaying behaviors such as thumb-sucking (Debray, 2000, p. 51).

- **Aggression:** This is a reaction to frustration aimed at the person or object perceived as obstructive. In school, academic failure may manifest as aggressive behavior or a rejection of success, which symbolically denies the child the status of being loved and protected. Aggression thus becomes a form of self-preservation and a means of maintaining a central role (Danon-Boileau, 1984, p. 115).
- **Projection:** According to Anzieu, projection is an internal, repressed perception that surfaces in consciousness as though it originated from the external world (Anzieu in Chabert, 1997, p. 19). Students often blame others (teachers, exam questions) to defend themselves psychologically.
- **Repression:** One of the core unconscious mechanisms described by Freud, repression involves keeping distressing thoughts, memories, or impulses out of conscious awareness to protect the ego from anxiety (Freud, 1951, p. 13). Children use repression to avoid painful experiences or memories that would otherwise provoke distress.
- **Rationalization:** The student attempts to justify their performance or behavior in a way that appears reasonable or acceptable—for example, claiming that poor health prevented academic success (Al-Malehi, 1989, p. 66).
- **Inhibition (Intellectual Inhibition):** In school settings, inhibition reflects an unconscious desire for failure tied to anxiety. It functions as a defense mechanism against internal deficiency, protecting the ego. In some cases, inhibition becomes symptomatic—hindering academic activity either partially or selectively. When unable to manage their anxiety and internal conflict, the child may unconsciously disrupt academic functioning and withdraw from educational investment altogether (Cheradi, 2006, pp. 257, 287).

5.3.3 Family-Related Factors

A child's behavior and academic performance are inextricably linked to their family environment, where the foundational stages of personality development occur. Even after starting school, the child remains influenced by family dynamics. Their ability to adapt depends on how well they can detach from previously invested objects (attachment figures).

The family's cultural and social status plays a vital role. For instance, a household lacking independence, leadership, rich language exchange, and effective communication with the child can negatively affect the child's early cognitive development. Since school later emphasizes written language and abstract thinking, the absence of such early experiences can hinder school adjustment (Misés, 2002, p. 6).

In many cases, the family environment suffers from narcissistic wounds, which deepen parental unawareness of the child's struggles. This can worsen the child's adjustment difficulties, especially when parents project their unfulfilled ambitions onto their children by pressuring them to succeed academically. This pressure can increase feelings of guilt in the child, who, in an attempt to protect themselves from such distress, intensifies their defenses and self-monitoring—harming their psychological and intellectual foundations, withdrawing investment, and ultimately leading to academic failure and maladjustment (Misés, 2002, p. 6).

5.3.4 School-Related Factors

First: The Role of the Teacher

The relationship between students and teachers is critical for school adjustment. It can either foster or hinder the educational process and plays a key role in resolving academic and psychological issues that arise during this developmental stage.

Teachers often hold an idealized image in the minds of children, who are eager to gain their approval. Teachers represent parental figures, and thus play a pivotal role in helping the child manage separation anxiety. If the teacher provides a sense of safety and serves as a suitable substitute figure, the child can develop a stable relationship. Experts emphasize that the greater the gap between maternal images and the teacher's image, the more difficult the child's adjustment becomes (Simoussi, 2002, p. 35).

The teacher's personality, awareness of educational and psychological dynamics, and positive interaction with students significantly influence their adjustment, motivation, and attitude toward learning.

Second: Peer Relationships

A child's relationship with classmates is rooted in a natural instinct for group affiliation, which originates in the family and extends to peer groups. Peer influence can often outweigh that of parents and teachers, as peers share common interests and experiences. Through peer interactions, the child forms friendships, gains a sense of identity

and importance, fulfills the need for belonging, and develops competitiveness, cooperation, and social energy—receiving validation and respect in return.

Third: School Climate

School is not merely a place for academic learning—it is a micro-society where students interact. Unfortunately, schools often fail to meet students' emotional and cognitive needs, neglect their developmental demands, and fall short of providing adequate support. This failure can provoke rebellion and lead to maladaptive behaviors—such as aggression, mockery, indifference, withdrawal, and lack of interest in studies—which negatively impact academic performance and overall adjustment (El-Deeb, 2000, p. 76).

Fourth: Curriculum Design

The school curriculum must be grounded in psychological principles, tailored to the developmental needs of each age group, and subject to continuous evaluation and improvement. According to modern educational theory, the curriculum encompasses all learning experiences offered by the school. For the curriculum to promote mental health and school adjustment, it must closely mirror real-life situations. The transfer of learning depends on the degree of similarity between classroom experiences and everyday life contexts (Hamdan, 1996, p. 46).

6. Operational Definitions of Key Terms

6.1 School Adjustment

School adjustment is defined as the child's responses to the established standards of adaptation—primarily reflected in the absence of academic difficulties, behavioral disorders, and relational or functional disturbances. These indicators were assessed through observation and clinical interviews.

6.2 Mental Organization

Mental organization refers to the indicators derived from the Rorschach test, specifically the presence of strong mentalization (containment) capacities and healthy object relations.

7. Methodological Procedures of the Study

7.1 Research Method

The study employed a clinical case study methodology, aimed at understanding the specificities of the individual and their psychological functioning as a whole. Roger Perron defines the clinical method as: **"A cognitive process of mental functioning that aims to construct a mental structure of psychological phenomena, where the individual is their primary source."** (Perron, 1979, p. 38)

7.2 Research Tools

7.2.1 Clinical Interview

According to Chiland, the clinical interview is defined as: **"A dyadic relationship that requires the presence of both the examiner and the examinee. The technique may be considered a form of supportive interaction due to its focus on the individual, their uniqueness, and singularity."** (Chiland, 1989, p. 22)

For this study, we used the semi-structured clinical interview—considered one of the most commonly used techniques. According to Chiland, it falls between the free clinical interview and the structured one. In this format, the examiner is nearly absent but actively listens to the examinee, allowing the latter to express themselves freely and fluently (Chiland, p. 119).

7.2.2 Rorschach Test

The Rorschach test is one of the most widely used and important projective tests in clinical psychology. It significantly aids in revealing individuals' mental processes and provides deep insight into their psychic functioning.

In this study, we used the Algerian Scoring Guide, adapted to the Algerian socio-cultural context, recently developed by Si Moussi and Benkhalifa (2021).

7.3 Study Location

The study was conducted at a private psycho-speech therapy clinic in the Wilaya of Relizane (the name and address of the clinic are withheld to avoid promotional disclosure).

7.4 Case Selection Criteria

- The child must be enrolled in primary school and aged between 6 and 11 years.
- The child must present with academic underachievement and difficulties in school adjustment.
- The child must have an average or above-average IQ and must not suffer from any physical or intellectual disabilities.

8. Case Presentation

8.1 Case Introduction

- “Haroun” is an 8-year-old boy with dark skin, black hair, and brown eyes. He is short in stature and speaks fluently and incessantly, with high emotional intensity and expressive hand movements. His facial expressions appear consistently sad. He comes from a low socioeconomic background—his father is a manual laborer, and his mother is a homemaker. He has an older brother, Ryan (12 years old), and a younger sister, Sirine (3 years old).
- He is repeating the second grade due to academic difficulties and reportedly suffers from secondary enuresis (source: the mother).
- He displays severe aggressive behaviors towards his peers at school.

8.2 Summary of Clinical Interviews

The interviews revealed the following:

- Haroun associates the learning process with pain due to physical and emotional abuse by both his family and his teacher, rather than with encouragement, motivation, or confidence-building. The extended school hours, dense curriculum, numerous homework assignments, and additional tutoring sessions outside of school have collectively diminished his motivation to learn, leading to frustration, anxiety, and stress that negatively impact his academic performance.
- His emotional needs are neither understood nor met by his family, which exacerbates his fear, anxiety, and frustration. This lack of emotional containment weakens his capacity to manage internal conflicts.
- He expressed distress about academic pressures and his family's unrealistic demands, stating: "I like studying... but this is my limit."
- Haroun exhibits a negative self-image and deep narcissistic wounds, intensified by peers mocking his short stature: "I'm scared... I'm afraid at night... I get embarrassed and scared when I make mistakes in class... My classmates tease me, they call me short."
- His future aspirations are actually compensatory fantasies that reflect his underlying insecurity: "When I grow up, I want to be a strong police officer with a weapon."
- He voiced frustration over the absence of recreational activities at school and his parents' denial of playtime, which not only stifles his natural need for enjoyment but also suppresses imagination, creativity, and symbolic capacity.
- He exhibits psychosomatic symptoms, including nausea and dizziness before going to school—indicators of the intense psychological pressure he experiences in that environment.
- The issue of enuresis was not mentioned by the child but was reported by the mother. It likely reflects a regressive defense mechanism and a disturbed object relationship, possibly stemming from jealousy of his younger sister, who receives more attention—an unconscious expression of hostility over his perceived loss of position within the family.

8.3 Rorschach Protocol Analysis

8.3.1 General Impressions

The protocol was marked by **inhibition**, evidenced by low productivity ($R = 11$), with a total response time of 17 minutes mostly spent on inquiry and selection. Emotional discomfort was predominant, alongside verbal hesitations and repetition of similar content (e.g., "a snake... a man... fallen from the sky") across multiple cards, along with several cancellations.

The child **rejected cards 9 and 10**, showing signs of **shock** with prolonged latency periods on cards I, III, VI, and VII—indicative of a repressive dimension and difficulty in processing both perceptions and emotions, along with heightened sensitivity to latent content.

Form responses dominated (91%), suggesting a strong defensive barrier against internal fantasy material, despite occasional impulsive intrusions (to be discussed later).

Human content responses were **low (H% = 16%)** compared to **animal content (A% = 83%)**, pointing to a displacement of drive-related content onto animals as a form of control. The overall lack of content richness reflected a **poverty of fantasy life**.

8.3.2 Qualitative Analysis

Cognitive Contexts: Haroun restricted himself to two perception modes: **global responses (G% = 90%)** and **partial responses (D% = 18%)**, seemingly avoiding more precise or cognitively demanding efforts.

The **high form determinant (F% = 91%)** reflects rigidity in thinking. However, the **low success rate of accurate form (F+ = 57%)** indicates that despite efforts to regulate perceptions and emotions through formal control, the ego was **not fully effective** in achieving this.

Initial difficulty was noted in card I, which he refused initially, showing a **latency of 35 seconds**. Although he later managed to provide a complementary response during inquiry—“A person with four eyes and wings”—this answer reflected a **persecutory theme** tied to maternal surveillance (“four eyes”), followed by a cancellation and replacement with a similar theme (“an animal with one leg”), again denoting **narcissistic fragility** and **distorted self-image**.

On card II, despite verbal reservation and high latency, Haroun gave a global, impressionistic, anatomical response: “It looks like a dove flying... its eyes are red, open with scissors in its belly.” This suggests **castration anxiety**, which he later repressed through another symbolic, depressive drawing of men falling from the sky.

On card III, after repeatedly rotating the card, he gave an incorrect and hesitant global response—“a red stinging water animal that goes back into the ground”—which appears to echo unresolved **castration themes** from the previous card. His complete avoidance of relational human imagery reflects **deep identification and relational difficulties**.

On card IV, he expressed discomfort and high latency (40 seconds), followed by a global impressionistic fear-based response—“a giant gorilla”—avoiding the card’s drive-related content, indicative of **uncontrolled anxiety and a threatened ego**.

Card V began with a stereotypical response—“a butterfly flying”—but was quickly canceled and replaced with “a man falling dead from the sky and a snake biting him.” This regression to **depressive and disintegrative themes** reflects a **fragile ego and vulnerable physical boundaries**.

Card VI followed a 48-second latency and discomfort. He gave a hesitant animal response—“like a snake in the middle biting”—then defensively froze the content, avoiding sexual imagery, particularly of the snake, associating it instead with a mobile phone.

Card VII saw a global sensory response—“a rising fire”—later canceled and replaced with anatomical violence: “a man with his back torn apart,” later canceled again. This sequence reflects significant **maternal object relation deficiencies**, fragile boundaries, and continued avoidance of human representation.

Card VIII responses included “a dead animal falling from the sky” and “a dead dove falling to the ground,” clearly **avoiding conflict and anxiety-provoking imagery**.

Card IX was **rejected**, reflecting **early emotional deficiencies in maternal attachment**.

Card X yielded two global responses with negative connotations: one anatomical with drive discharge—“a bone”—and another undeveloped symbolic content—“an animal rising to the sky.” These responses suggest **castration fears and separation anxiety**.

8.3.3 Conflict Dynamics

The intimate resonance index (TRI = 0/1) suggests limited expansiveness, not confirmed by the supplementary equation (F.c = 3/0). Haroun’s conflict resolution relied heavily on **avoidance and inhibition**, with minimal interaction between perception and emotion.

Color responses (RC = 36%) indicate **manic defense**. His failure to give human responses on most cards and the single anatomical human response during inquiry (“a man with his back torn”) reveals **empathic and relational difficulties** and avoidance of human interaction.

Human movement (K = 0) was entirely absent, emphasizing a **lack of fantasy elaboration**, self-acceptance, and severe relational rupture.

Only three **animal movements (Kan = 3)** were observed: one stinging aquatic animal (card III), one stereotypical animal (card V), and one in card X (“animal rising to the sky”)—each reflecting attempts to **regulate drive tension** and signs of unstructured inner conflict. The **anxiety index (IA = 25%)** was high.

8.3.4 Sensory Determinants

There were **no pure color responses (C = 0)**. Only two controlled color responses (FC = 2) were present, indicating **suppressed drives under cognitive control**, distancing affect.

One **form-shadow response** was found in card VII—“just smoke from the fire”—indicating **narcissistic fragility**.

Overall, the protocol **lacked fantasy richness**, with occasional anatomical answers and underdeveloped symbolic content, not suggestive of **social adaptation**.

8.3.5 Rorschach Summary

- The dominance of **form determinants** and **global processing** reflect rigid defenses and inhibition of emotional expression.
- The protocol reveals a **threatened self-concept**, **fragile identification capacity**, and **avoidance of human relational imagery**, with significant deficiencies in **maternal object relations**.
- The **poverty and superficiality of content** suggest a **depleted inner world and reduced fantasy life**.

9. Discussion of the Study Results

In what follows, we present and discuss the key findings of the study in light of our main research hypothesis, which posits that the child’s mental organization is fragile, thus impeding their school adjustment. This was evidenced through the clinical interview and the projective Rorschach test, both of which highlighted two core indicators:

- Deficits in **mentalization** (la mentalisation)
- Disturbances in **object relations** (la relation d’objet)

These deficits prevent the child from containing internal conflicts, ultimately compromising their adaptation to their environment and reducing their desire for learning.

9.1 Findings from the Rorschach Test

The Rorschach projective test is one of the most effective psychological tools for uncovering imaginative and fantasy-related content. As Sami-Ali explains, projection functions through a dual positioning that combines a perceptual interface with a fantasy-based, imaginal one (Sami-Ali, 1970, p. 28).

The results of our study revealed:

- **Severe deficits in mentalization**, as revealed by the Rorschach test, which helped identify the subject's mentalization capacities and their quality. The Rorschach protocol for our case was marked by a **deep impoverishment of fantasy life**, as evidenced by:
 - A **scarcity and superficiality of content**, indicating an impoverished fantasy world.
 - A **high reliance on form responses (F = 91%)**, suggesting dependence on external reality as a defense against the emergence of internal fantasy material.
 - A **complete absence of human movement responses (K = 0)**, reflecting **cognitive, imaginative, and creative constriction**, and an inability to contain internal conflicts.
 - **Neglect of sensory determinants**, with **no pure color responses (C = 0)**, pointing to **repressed affect**. Even color responses that did appear were of the controlled type (FC), further reinforcing the dominance of form and an effort to suppress and regulate drives.

- A **high anxiety index (IA = 25%)**, which, according to K. Chabert, does not reflect castration anxiety but rather a **failure in conflict containment**, and thus, a failure in adaptation (Si Moussi, 2009, p. 108).

Disturbances in object relations were also evident. In analyzing Haroun's Rorschach protocols, we focused on cards typically associated with object relations (Cards I, IV, VII, and IX), and found:

- **Shock and astonishment in response to emotional symbols** in maternally symbolic cards (I and VII), and outright **rejection of Card IX**, indicating **severe deficits in early object relations** and an unmet need for emotional containment.
- Responses reflected **perceptions of unsafe, threatening, poorly internalized objects**, often associated with fear and persecutory anxiety.
- The examinee displayed a **deep identification disturbance**, unable or unwilling to invest in object relations. No relational imagery emerged in Card III (often rich with such material), nor in the final inquiry phase. Even the human images produced in Cards I and V were quickly canceled and replaced by non-relational content. The single retained human image in Card VII was anatomical in nature, pointing to **fragile identifications rooted in primitive fears**.
- Overall, the subject's object relations were marked by **drive freezing**, with internal conflicts absent or split off.

9.2 Findings from the Clinical Interviews

Deficits in mentalization also emerged during clinical interviews, as demonstrated by:

- **Lack of emotional containment and attunement from caregivers**, which contributed to emotional deficits, increasing Haroun's anxiety, fear, and frustration, and weakening his ability to contain them.
- **Peer bullying at school**, which led to **aggressive behaviors, a negative self-image, and narcissistic wounds**.
- **Neglect of emotional, imaginative, and creative development**, both at home and at school. Haroun had no access to hobbies or expressive activities like sports, drawing, or crafts—stifling his imagination and creative potential.
- **Somatization**, a marker of poor mentalization in psychodynamic terms, was evident. Haroun verbalized this by saying, "When I go to school, I get dizzy and feel like throwing up..."—physical manifestations of anxiety and an inability to process internal conflict.
- **Unmet emotional and developmental needs**, particularly related to play. The child expressed frustration that schoolwork consumes his entire day, including extracurricular tutoring, leaving no room for rest or leisure.
- **Association of learning with punishment**, as Haroun experiences violence from teachers, parents, and older siblings involved in his education. This leads to ongoing school aversion, decreased motivation, and resistance to learning.
- **Excessive parental pressure** to improve performance, often at the expense of the child's actual capacities.
- **Family environment lacking independence, open communication, and emotional dialogue**. Without this type of mediation, the child cannot adjust to school as a new environment.
- **Curricula and programs that are unsuited to the child's needs**, overly intense and exhausting.

All of these elements have a damaging impact on the child's psychological and cognitive foundations (Kaour, Touati, & Lalle, 2024). They lead to **withdrawal of investment, academic failure, and maladaptation to the school environment**.

10. General Conclusion

Based on the results of this research—which was centered on an in-depth clinical study of a case and its relational and psychodynamic dynamics, and grounded in theoretical frameworks—we conclude that the school-maladjusted child who presents with learning difficulties, regardless of their type, exhibits a **fragile mental organization and deep deficits in mentalization capacities**.

This child faces daily relational conflicts both at home and at school, which he is unable to contain or manage in the absence of understanding, support, and emotional containment from his surrounding environment. The study showed that **unmet emotional needs** and **suppression of imaginative and creative abilities** negatively impact both

academic achievement and school adaptation. In some cases, the child resorts to **somatization**, generated by anxiety, as a way of expressing distress.

The lack of attention to the **psychodynamic and relational aspects** of the child's development harms their cognitive abilities. Thus, **psychological security is essential for achieving academic success and school adaptation**.

11. Conclusion and Recommendations

Educational processes and school adaptation in students are closely linked not only to cognitive abilities, but also—more fundamentally—to the organization and functioning of the psyche. The acquisition of knowledge cannot occur without **psychological balance**, which depends on the child's ability to resolve both early developmental conflicts (such as attachment issues) and more current conflicts related to asserting themselves in a new environment, namely, the school setting.

For a child to achieve conflict containment, they must be **sufficiently filled with thoughts, emotions, and representations**—a process referred to as **mentalization (la mentalisation)**. This ability is formed during the early years of life and is closely tied to the quality of interactions with primary attachment figures, as long as the attachment is secure (Chabot & Achim, 2015).

The **family and relational environment** play a critical role in fostering mentalization. Conversely, when caregivers emotionally neglect their children over long periods, it leads to **relational trauma** (Lallem, 2021), which prevents the child from developing robust mentalization capacities.

Therefore, professionals, educators, and caregivers should refrain from seeking "magical" solutions for improving children's learning capacities. **What children truly need is love, containment, a sense of security, and respect**. The more these needs are met, the fewer internal conflicts, fears, and traumas they will experience. A child who is regulated only by external boundaries, without regard for their internal world and conflicts, is bound to experience **personal and academic failure** (Si Moussi, 2009).

The following recommendations are proposed:

- Adopt a **comprehensive yet in-depth view of the student**, which includes consideration of the **psychodynamic aspects** of their personality alongside cognitive and behavioral factors.
- Schools should focus on **the child as a whole person**, not just as a student, by developing curricula that not only educate but also nurture **imagination and creativity**, including more opportunities for **art, drawing, and expressive activities**.
- **Reduce the intensity of academic programs** and increase access to **recreational activities, sports, manual crafts, and the arts**.
- Psychological and pedagogical training for teachers is **essential**, as is the strict enforcement of a **zero-tolerance policy on all forms of abuse or violence in schools**, given their harmful impact on academic performance and the child's mental health.
- **Increase and strengthen the presence of psychological screening and support units** within schools. These school health units should be equipped to provide **appropriate psychological care** and help uncover deeper psychological issues often hidden behind academic or behavioral complaints.
- **Strengthen the role of the family** and ensure close **coordination between the family and the educational institution** to better understand the student's emotional, psychological, cognitive, and relational needs—thus ensuring their psychological balance.

Findings

- **Mentalization Deficits:** Children exhibited limited capacity to understand their own and others' mental states, leading to misinterpretations of social cues and heightened interpersonal conflicts.
- **Object Relations Disturbances:** Case material highlighted unstable self-representations and fragile parental introjects, directly correlating with maladaptive school behaviors such as refusal, isolation, and oppositionality.
- **Rorschach Outcomes:** Projective indicators revealed marked instability in reality testing, weak ego boundaries, and excessive reliance on primitive defense mechanisms.

- Clinical Implication: Strengthening mentalization capacities through psychotherapeutic interventions could reduce maladaptive responses and enhance integration into the school environment.

Actuality of the Study

This research addresses a pressing issue in contemporary educational and clinical psychology: the rising number of children experiencing maladjustment in school contexts. By foregrounding psychoanalytic constructs such as mentalization and object relations, the study extends beyond traditional academic performance models and contributes to a deeper understanding of child development within educational institutions. The originality lies in the integration of projective techniques into school maladaptation research, offering new diagnostic and therapeutic perspectives.

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Ethical Considerations

All procedures were conducted in compliance with the ethical standards of the Declaration of Helsinki. Informed consent was obtained from the parents or legal guardians of the participating child. Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained, and the child's welfare remained the highest priority throughout the study.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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