

The causes of school drop-out among scholars in rural areas

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Abstract

One of the problems facing European countries is that of early school leaving among young people, especially those from rural communities. The phenomenon of school drop-out among school pupils is a reality that we are facing today's Romania and is constantly increasing. The health crisis generated in the pandemic context of SARS COV-2, as well as the measures taken by Member States to reduce the spread of the virus, has been the context for intensifying this phenomenon. Romanian schools have become unable to have the infrastructure necessary to carry out normal school hours, because the space is an improbable one and does not obey the necessary measures of social distance. The passage of schools into the online regime in Romania has made the shortcomings of the Romanian school worse. I will analyze this topic from the perspective of a qualitative analyses based on some interviews realized. The general objective of the research is to identify the causes of school drop-out among the existing rural schools and how was affected the rural pupils of moving school courses in an online system of teaching.

1. Preliminary analysis: Causes of school drop-out among rural school population

The health crisis generated in the pandemic context of SARS COV-2, as well as the measures taken by Member States to reduce the spread of the virus, has been the context for intensifying this phenomenon. Romanian schools have become unable to have the infrastructure necessary to carry out normal school hours, because the space is an improbable one and does not obey the necessary measures of social distance. The passage of schools into the online regime in Romania has made the shortcomings of the Romanian school worse.

“History has shown that countries that have experienced major crises have managed to overcome them through massive investments in education,” said Professor Remus Pricopie (SNSPA Interview) and for this reason, it is important to continue to invest in the education of Romanian pupils. They must continue to learn in normal conditions, despite the fact that courses are now developed in the online system and both Government and schools must sustain children with IT equipment for better online conditions of study.

The phenomenon of school drop-out among school pupils is a reality that we are facing today's Romania and is constantly increasing. Statistics by sociologists in recent years show that this phenomenon has increased and the number of early school leavers has increased significantly. One of the most vulnerable social groups is the rural population, where the school drop-out rate is higher than the urban population. Early school leaving is also an important indicator of the performance of the education system and its gaps in educational attainment levels.

Viewed from another analysis point of view, this indicator also highlights some aspects of social and economic life, which can influence people's access to education. In recent years, the issue of early school leaving has become a common topic of analysis and debate. On the one hand, educational policy documents propose concrete strategies to improve the phenomenon, in line with European strategic targets. On the other hand, education practitioners (managers, teachers, parents alike) or the media often raise questions about early school

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leavers or assess the overall efficiency of the Romanian education system from this perspective (UNICEF, 2012).

1.1. Objectives

The general objective of the research is to identify the causes of school drop-out among the existing rural schools, and we will use a model of bad integration of pupils in Vrata commune, Mehedinti county, Romania. Here we found disadvantaged people, with poor conditions of leaving and poor access to the educational system. This general objective may be complemented by the following specific objectives: the understanding of the phenomenon of early school leaving among the school drop-out from the countryside and its area; the causes of school drop-out among school pupils; the drivers of early school leaving; ways of preventing and reducing the phenomenon; the consequences of the school drop-out and the prospects for this phenomenon.

Starting queries/assumptions:

As research is intended to be qualitative, hypotheses related to the issue under consideration can be integrated. The aim is to make sure that, on the basis of interviews with respondents, the scale of the phenomenon of early school leaving in rural areas is taken into account and that it is understood, to identify the causes of early school leaving and to identify the factors that favor it. The mentioned measures include identifying the consequences of the school drop-out and identifying ways of preventing and reducing the phenomenon.

Hypothesis 1 - the most common cause of early school leaving it is the lack of family material resources and poverty;

Hypothesis 2 - early school leaving occurs most often in the case of students in rural areas;

Hypothesis 3 - early school leaving hinders the professional development of the individual making it unable to adapt to the demands of the labor market.

Research methods

As the research method used for this research, a qualitative perspective of research will be used, applying an interview guide to respondents. The interview will be semi-structured, starting from 8 pre-defined questions, with the possibility of asking the respondent and additional questions to get more into the research.

Questions in the interview applied:

1. *What do you mean by dropping out of school?*
2. *How do you judge the frequency of school drop-out?*
3. *What are the main causes of school drop-out?*
4. *Under what circumstances does early school leaving occur more frequently?*
5. *What are you thinking of the people who exert a certain influence on the school leaver?*
6. *How can we prevent this school phenomenon?*
7. *How does early school leave influence young people's social and professional development?*
8. *How do you see the evolution of this phenomenon?*

The sampling used in this research work is homogeneous because similar cases have been used, on the basis of which a normal and similar variation is illustrated on a case-by-case basis. The sampling unit refers to the selected cases in Vrata, Mehedinti county and is one of an individual nature, carried out at the level of the person.

Difficulties encountered

Difficulties encountered during the qualitative stage of research on early school leaving and early school leaving in rural areas have largely emerged at the data collection stage. Some of the local authorities refused to cooperate and therefore I managed to interview only two people in the school, about the situation of the school drop-out in the town under consideration. The teachers asked to send the material by e-mail, which is why the completion of the sheet was in places where it could not be carried out or supervised.

Another difficulty we encountered during the course of research was that of people's reluctance to respond to interviews, some of those with whom we discussed, did not want to attend the interview. I also faced the refusal to have recorded the interview, but also the transcript of the interview, while the respondent was telling about the phenomenon I interviewed. The difficulty involved the remembrance and transcription of the answers based on the notes I managed to draft on the draft. Many of those interviewed refused to record interviews because they

were afraid of their processing and the purpose of the research they carried out, although I explained to them from the very beginning that the answers would remain anonymous and would not be used for purposes other than those presented.

Last but not least, a difficulty in interviewing a real school drop-out case was the fact that the subject concerned refused to give an interview about the problems he faces and the reasons why he chose to leave school.

2. Interpretation of interviews : Secondary data analysis.

2.1. Definition of early school leaving

The phenomenon of early school leaving is one of the top topics on the educational policy agenda in Romania and in the European Union. Confirmed as a serious social problem among the underdeveloped and developing countries, early school leaving in Romania has grown in recent years, especially in rural areas. Over the last 10 years, the school drop-out rate in Romania has fluctuated: in 2004 it stood at 22,9%, then fell to 15,9% in 2008 and then increased to 16,6% in 2009. In 2009, out of a total of 27 EU Member States, Romania ranked 6th among the highest school drop-out countries (16,6%), with two positions ahead of Bulgaria (14,7%), but well behind Malta, Portugal and Spain. Countries with a drop-out rate of more than 30% (Commission Staff working Paper, reducing early school leaving, accompanying document to the proposal for a Council Recommendation on policies to reduce early school leaving, p.71). At European level, trying to define the phenomenon of early school leaving is more difficult due to the numerous and different definitions used. This phenomenon is subject to different concepts, so it is quite difficult to compare the data collected by various institutions, since they do not use the same indicators. Thus, the school drop-out rate for the same country may differ depending on the international body that monitored the phenomenon. In addition, questions may arise such as: how long must you have missed a student at school to consider that she has abandoned school – a few weeks, a few months? Should it or not include those who choose to enter the labor market, those who resubscribe to courses as adults, or those who do not have cognitive capacity to obtain a high school degree? As migration is on the rise, particularly in the European context of the free movement of people, are those who go to another country and continue their education there registered in national systems as people who have abandoned school? (http://ec.europa.eu/education/school-education/doc/earlywp_en.pdf, visit 9 Jan 2018, Page 7). These are only a part of the questions that have not yet been found to have a unified answer. Moreover, what happens to those who, although no longer learning, no longer accumulate any information, are forced to stay in school - the reticent? Being physically present does not automatically mean knowledge or skills acquisition (Annexes to the draft Policy Paper on early Education Learning, Netherlands, Rotterdam, page 22). The question of those with low educational attainment who, in some education systems, are forced to choose another educational institution that offers them a qualification that does not necessarily reflect their talent is also raised at the level of refining the concept of early school leaving (How many times has it not happened in Romania that “problem” students have been made to move to a lower school or to a vocational school?) (Annex to the draft Policy Paper on early Education Learning, Netherlands, Rotterdam, page 33).

The Eurostat definition of early school leaving refers to an early school leaver aged 18 to 24 who has not received an upper secondary qualification and who does not receive any other form of education or training. The definition was accepted by all Education Ministers of the Member States of the European Union at the Council in 2003 (EU 15, when the European Union had not yet seen its first enlargement wave) (early school leaving in Europe guide, p. 17).

The OECD definition of early school leaving also refers to early school leavers who are between 20 and 24 years of age without a lower secondary education qualification. and that is not part of any education scheme. European Commission definition: children leaving school early are those who have not completed their second education (Council recommendation on policies to reduce early school leaving, p. 28), Commission staff working paper, reducing early school leaving, accompanying document to the proposal for a Council Recommendation on policies to reduce early school leaving, p. 59).

2.2. Causes of school drop-out in rural areas, in literature

In the experts' view, early school leaving is a multi-rooted process. (Hunt, 2008, pp. 20-22). To really understand the causes and trends of the phenomenon, an interdisciplinary approach is needed, both theoretical and empirical. The youth Forum Jeunesse (Annexes to the draft Policy Paper on early Education Learning, Netherlands, Rotterdam, page 514) lists four comprehensive factors leading to early school leaving.

The individual characteristics - Demographic characteristics (sex, ethnicity) play an important role: Men and ethnic minorities show high predisposition when leaving school. Then, the results of the Pisa 2003 suggest that those with low cognitive abilities (e.g. those repeating classes) tend to have low results and are more likely to

abandon due to low motivation. Another factor is participation and identification – participation in hours leads to identification; those who have a low level of self-identification with school start to stop enjoying them at school and finish by leaving it.

Family characteristics - Studies show that children from families with low educational attainment or low socio-economic status are much more likely to leave school early. Thus, the human capital of the family of origin matters very much. Similarly, the social capital of the family has a great influence: children who come from single parents or who do not have a very good relationship of communication with parents are more at risk of school drop-out.

The characteristics of the school - This is the only place to intervene directly at government level; it is much less likely that pupils in homogeneous schools (also ethnically) will leave school – they receive the same education and thus feel „similar”, with little social distance between them.

The characteristics of the company - Whenever there was economic growth and a shortage of labor, the school drop-out rate has increased. This was the case when - they had a great deal of employment opportunities for unskilled labor.

2.3. Analysis of good practices for preventing rural school drop-out in Romania

Considering that until the change of the communist regime there was not much public talk about the issue of early school leavers, early school leaving was reported as a social problem in Romania in the '90 years in the press and in the academic world. The development of the phenomenon has increased significantly since 2000, which has also led to intervention to prevent and combat the problem and to help people at risk and to drop out of school. In the period 1990 -1995, the national solution found for this problem was to guarantee the state allowance only for children attending compulsory education.

As the problem worsens, involvement in combating and preventing the phenomenon has also increased. In this context, intervention has taken place at all levels of action, both bottom-up and top-down, from educational establishments and local authorities. The intervention was also carried out at national level through the Ministry of Education, but also at European level through strategies to reduce early school leaving. At school level, good practices have been implemented to prevent and reduce early school leaving, which consisted of educational activities to increase the attractiveness of the school and increase the educational involvement of pupils. Empirical studies in Romania (Voicu, 2010:25-29) and literature reveal some good practices to prevent the phenomenon in areas with high school drop-out rates. These include: partnerships between school, family, community, based on collaboration, involvement, support; teams made up of community members involved in the school reintegration of children; extracurricular activities (excursions, performances, museum visits, thematic contests, etc.); classroom accountability, open relations and support between colleagues; valuing students in difficulty through extracurricular educational activities to increase their attachment to the school; informing and advising parents on children's needs; raising awareness of the benefits of appropriate education, implementation of second chance education programs for those who abandoned school and school advisory activities, advising pupils and parents to access and funds legal allowances.

The practices listed above are broadly applicable and can be adaptable both in rural areas with a high incidence of early school leaving and in urban areas. The vast majority of these good practices call for the involvement of the community, local authorities, but most of all for the involvement of teachers and parents. The last two are key actors in implementing good practices, as they are in constant contact with pupils and can draw the attention of competent bodies (authorities or non-governmental organizations) to potential needs for intervention.

On the other hand, the measures to prevent and reduce the school drop-out in the rural areas in Romania are not only a matter of authorities and key players at the level of each community, but also of trans-national, European actors. With its integration into the European Union, Romania was given the opportunity to intervene in preventing and stopping large-scale school drop-out through projects co-financed by the European Social Fund and carried out by the sectoral Operational Program Human Resources Development.

3. The qualitative research analysis

3.1. Causes of early school leaving and early school leaving according to results research

The responses from those interviewed also showed the trend of increasing school drop-out rates, which was also highlighted by previous studies and reports from professionals, and that the main causes of school drop-out among children were: precarious financial situation (poverty), the family (especially when we talk about families where parents have not completed any form of education), but also the student's background. It was also noted that in order to reduce the school drop-out rate, there is a need for state involvement through concrete measures,

financial incentives to support the student, but also for more involvement of teachers in motivating the student to attend classes and not to leave school.

An understanding of the phenomenon of early school-leaving and its inclusion, which are the causes of early school-leaving, which are the drivers of early school-leaving, and how to prevent and reduce this phenomenon, what are the consequences of the abandonment on the child and what are the prospects we have on this phenomenon are the objectives to which we aim to find a response from the analysis and interpretation of the results collected from the interviews on the ground.

After analyzing the answers received from the respondents, we can say that the phenomenon is aware of and all respondents know the meaning of the term. Most respondents defined early school leaving as “[...] *leaving all levels of education before completing primary, secondary or secondary school or obtaining a qualification*” (quoted from the collected responses). The development of this claim was more or less explained by the respondents, depending on their age, their degree of training or the information luggage available to each of them. It was found that pupils’ responses were simpler, while teachers tried to provide a broader definition.

The next question of the interview referred to how the respondent assessed the frequency of early school leaving. The general trend of respondents was to say that the phenomenon of early school-leaving is on the rise and some of them have even seen its increase over the last few years. Another general trend for respondents was to point out that school drop-out is mostly found in rural areas, but also that “*The state does not have specific measures and will not be able to monitor this phenomenon*”, also due to other problems with the this phenomenon has an impact on rural areas and on the rate of growth, as well as on the lack of methods for combating early school leaving, as seen from the point of view of their effectiveness.

From the answers that respondents gave us to the question “*What are the main causes behind school leaving?*”, we can say that all those interviewed have identified as the main actors causing school drop-out, family influence and lack of material resources. The best practice model of the family on the teenager has been found to have a significant impact on the decisions it takes in its personal and professional course. The low level of parent education also sets a precedent for the child, and their lack of involvement in school life and non-participation in meetings with parents can cause parents to lack understanding of the importance of education for him or her. The family can influence the behavior of the child when one of the parents or, in most cases, both parents are gone abroad because in these cases, in most cases, the child remains unattended or supervised by persons who do not have parental authority and in this case the child's self-regulation in decision-making is close to 100% (which is not very encouraging).

The second factor mentioned above in the analysis and interpretation of interviews is the lack of material resources of the. This factor is manifested in two forms: Either the child cannot attend school because of lack of requisites, clothes, means of transport, or because he has already become a source of income for the family.

The issue of abandonment among Romani people, “*increased unemployment among parents, quality of primary, secondary and secondary education, lack of schools and teachers in disadvantaged communities*” was raised in the marginal discussion (passage extracted from the interview).

The question “under what conditions does early school leaving occur more frequently?” he emphasized that the phenomenon of abandonment occurs most frequently among the rural population and the lack of financial and moral support from parents. The idea was highlighted by all respondents to the interview and 1-2 respondents underlined that this phenomenon is triggered mainly by the Romani population where the trend is to abandon education, to the detriment of early family life, marriages from an early age, etc.

In the question “*Who in your opinion are those who exercise a certain influence on the school leaver*” all respondents stressed that the main people who exert a significant influence on them are: the family (especially parents), friends or family of teachers and the education system itself, and to a lesser extent.

On the question “*How can we prevent this school phenomenon?*”, respondents consider that the most important tool is young people’s training programs during class hours, but also of after-school programs through which they could be helped and assisted by specialized persons. Another significant part of respondents stressed the importance of providing financial incentives to encourage pupils and motivate them to fine-tune at school.

One of the interviewed respondents underlined that “*The teacher must explain to them how important education is; teaching classes in a most pleasant way, in a way that makes the student want to come next time and not abandon the school; try to treat everyone equally and make them all feel important at school*”. From this we can infer that the teacher has a significant influence and impact on the student. For the student, the teaching staff is a model of moral conduct that he tries to imitate and multiply. At the same time, the student observes and punishes through his own filter the small mistakes a teacher can make with or without intention. One of the examples is the tendency not to treat all students equally by the teaching staff or simply the fact that the good student is

praised and the one who does not perform very well is put in the corner and given as a negative example to the class. This behavior can have serious repercussions on the pupil, not taking care of him or even causing him marginally to leave school because he thinks he is unable to keep up with the class standard. In this case, I believe that the teacher or the homeroom teacher should talk to him and see what the problem of his motivation is, what is his social and cultural background, and what alternatives the school can offer to him so that he does not get out of it. The role of teachers is also to try to explain in particular to students from disadvantaged backgrounds or those whose parents do not have education, why it is important and how it will help them later in their daily lives.

To the question *“How the young person's social and professional development influences the early school leaving”* the answers were varied and several aspects were taken into account in relation to the negative social, professional and even emotional effects of the young person's harmonious development. One of the interviewed teachers claimed that the school drop-out *“simply stopped the development of the school drop-out suddenly. From a social point of view, it will gradually close in it, lose its own trust in its capabilities, not adapting to new groups and living in its world, making it difficult for them to think openly and adapt to change. In terms of employment, it will always be very limited, and it will be very difficult to find a job (perhaps in agriculture, in the field of work), and will never be able to take a career. In terms of employment, it will always be very limited, and it will be very difficult to find a job (perhaps in agriculture, in the field of work), and will never be able to take a career.”* In terms of employment, it will always be very limited, and it will be very difficult to find a job (perhaps in agriculture, in the field of work), and will never be able to take a career”.

The answers to the question *“How do you see the evolution of this phenomenon?”* we can link them to the question of how we judge the frequency of school drop-out, and the particularities and similarities of this question can be linked to those of the previous question. Most respondents consider that this phenomenon is growing and that the state is currently unable to stop or at least discourage it. Only one respondent is optimistic or at least hopes that *“the school drop-out rate will decrease in the next few years or at least stagnate, as we have seen that the importance of this phenomenon has started to be signaled and a number of projects have been implemented to combat it”*.

4. Conclusion

This qualitative research confirms the problems of research: The most common cause of early school leaving is lack of family material resources and poverty (confirmed problem), school drop-out occurs most frequently for students in rural areas (confirmed problem) early school leaving also hinders the professional development of the individual, making him/her unable to adapt to the needs of the labor market (confirmed problem).

The responses from those interviewed also showed the trend of increasing school drop-out rates, which was also highlighted by previous studies and reports from professionals, and that the main causes of school drop-out among children were: precarious financial situation (poverty), the family (especially when we talk about families where parents have not completed any form of education), but also the student's background. It was also noted that in order to reduce the school drop-out rate, there is a need for state involvement through concrete measures, financial incentives to support the student, but also for more involvement of teachers in motivating the student to attend classes and not to leave school.

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