

THE PERCEPTION OF SCHOOL DROPOUT IN PRE-UNIVERSITY EDUCATION. CASE STUDY: "MIHAIL KOGĂLNICEANU" THEORETICAL HIGH SCHOOL, SNAGOV, ILFOV COUNTY, ROMANIA

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Abstract

School dropout is a longstanding issue in many countries, with a profound impact on the lives of adolescents and society as a whole. Shifting from intervention to prevention is a more effective and efficient approach to addressing this problem. In this context, the study aims to explore the factors that lead to school failure, which often result in the negative consequence of school dropout. This topic was selected because school failure is an enduring educational challenge that continues to grow daily. Furthermore, every teacher inevitably encounters this phenomenon in their professional life, which is why we believe that all educators should be actively involved in investigating the causes of school failure and be familiar with a set of preventive measures aimed at combating or preventing school dropout. This research was conducted to identify the socio-cultural and family factors that, along with other individual and school-related determinants, contribute to the school dropout issue among students at "Mihail Kogălniceanu" Theoretical High School. A survey based on a structured questionnaire was used to collect the respondents' answers for identifying the number of students who dropout the school, the factors which determine them to do this, why they do not attend the school and how to reduce the absenteeism rate. The results proved that the main causes of school dropout are: family problems, the negative influence of the so called "friends", lack of school motivation, traditions of some minorities, lack of perspective after leaving the school, emotional and behavioural problems. To diminish this phenomenon special measures should be taken by improving education system especially in the rural areas.

Key words: education, school dropout, case study

INTRODUCTION

The issue of school dropout is complex, extending beyond the educational sphere to cultural, economic, political, and social dimensions that shape a society's core choices. It is characterised by the extreme devaluation of formal education and the erosion of learning motivation, signalling a mutual failure of adaptation—both the student's inability to meet school requirements and the school's inability to accommodate the student's individual learning needs.

School dropout constitutes a definitive act of disengagement, where students cease attending school and exit the educational system—regardless of the level reached—before obtaining a qualification, completing professional training, or finishing their study

cycle [2]. The effect of dropping out of school has serious consequences because the young person who has neither a professional qualification indispensable for his socio-economic integration nor the moral and civic training necessary to exercise the role of a citizen of a community practically fails to adapt properly to social life. By lacking such qualifications, school dropouts are more likely to become the unemployed of the future, posing medium- and long-term challenges for society while also facing significant personal losses [3].

Specialised research highlights the fact that the student/young person on the verge of dropping out is unable to adapt and function adequately in the class group, has below-average school results, does not set educational and professional goals, and shows

hostility towards adults and school authority representatives. As a rule, they usually come from families experiencing existential stress and do not participate in any activities organised by the school, whether formal or non-formal. In most cases, children/young people in this situation move away from school, looking for satisfaction in other environments, generally in dangerous ones for them (groups of young people who have no occupation). In conditions where the family no longer has time, resources or sufficient authority to help their child, he is exposed to marginalisation or social isolation [9].

From the perspective of economic costs, an insufficiently educated person is more expensive for society than a well-educated one because he has weak schooling and, as a consequence, a reduced ability to integrate into the labour market. In this case, the state supports the individual through various means of assistance (unemployment aid, heating aid, aid for disadvantaged people), etc.

Considering all these aspects, we believe that school counselling can be used to raise students' awareness of the benefits provided by acquiring the highest possible level of training in the field in which they will work.

Among the causes of school dropout frequently found among young people it can be mentioned some determinants such as poverty, unemployment, lack of information, low level of education of the parents, inadequate social protection measures, high costs for clothes, shoes and supplies, lack of housing conditions necessary for studying (many of the poor families live in houses without electricity and/or overcrowded), poor health, disorganisation of the family, lack of help for education from parents and the lack of control over children's activities in their free time [12].

The following cannot be neglected: the wrong mentality of some students, parents or social categories regarding the role played by the school in the education of children; the existence of poor school results, the limited educational offer from schools regarding the organisation of alternative and attractive forms of training, the lack of effective collaboration on the line of

eliminating/reducing school dropout between various stakeholders in education, including educational institutions, Local Councils, County Councils, Prefectures, and NGOs, the lack of a legislative framework that allows the establishment of educational classes primary to another form of education than day education, withdrawing the child from school to be sent to work or to take care of younger siblings/cousins [2].

When the students' parents decide to work in a foreign country, situations may arise in which the children, left alone at home, drop out of school. Practically, the departure of an entire family abroad causes children to withdraw from school.

As in the rural areas, where school dropout reflects a critical situation, it is important to research the causes which determine this phenomenon [13, 5, 10, 8] and try to find solutions to diminish its intensity and stop its extend [14, 6, 7].

In this context, the paper goal is to present a study case of school dropout in a high school situated in Snagov Commune, Ilfov County, Romania.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In order to carry out the proposed methodological approach, we determined that the general objective of the investigation is to analyse the situation of school dropouts in the "Mihail Kogălniceanu" Theoretical High School in Snagov commune, Ilfov County.

From the general objective, we derived the following specific objectives:

1. Identification of the number of students who dropped out of school in the 2023-2024 school year;
2. Highlighting the perception of school counsellors/mediators regarding the risk of school dropout;
3. Highlighting the reasons why some children do not attend school now;
4. Identifying the measures that could contribute to reducing the rate of absenteeism/abandonment;
5. Finding out how children who do not attend school spend their time.

Concept operationalisation:

- ✓ The role of the school in the life of the student/teacher;
- ✓ Causes of school dropout;
- ✓ Determination of the student's living environment;
- ✓ Determining the degree of satisfaction with the educational act;
- ✓ Determining the level of involvement of the student in the educational act;
- ✓ Educational attitudes and roles.

Research hypotheses:

1. A precarious socio-affective family climate is an important factor in the occurrence of school dropout;
2. The way in which the parents value the school is a determining factor in terms of the school results obtained by the child;
3. The busy school schedule negatively influences the student's attitude towards school;
4. The teacher's profile influences the intensity of course attendance;

Working hypothesis: School dropout is the result of socio-economic and educational factors.

To collect the data needed for the study, two questionnaires were designed and applied.

The first questionnaire was built from ten questions and addressed to teaching staff.

Questionnaire regarding the perception of school dropout - for teaching staff.

The first questionnaire was composed of ten questions and was addressed to teaching staff. The first five questions collected data on the respondents' gender, background, age group, years of experience in education, and qualification level. The following five questions primarily focused on the phenomenon of school dropout, its current relevance, the factors that may lead to students abandoning their studies, and the measures to prevent school dropout.

The second applied questionnaire was built from 25 questions and addressed to high school students.

Questionnaire for assessing the risk of school dropout - for students.

The first set of questions (from 1 to 3) was structured in such a way as to gather information about the gender of the

respondents and the background they come from.

The second set of questions (from 4 to 7) measured the degree of satisfaction of the respondents regarding the results obtained and the environment in which school activities are carried out. They had four answer options:

- a. Very satisfied;
- b. Satisfied;
- c. Dissatisfied;
- d. Very dissatisfied.

The third set of questions (ranging from 8 to 25) gathered information on students' interpersonal relationships, their collaboration with peers and teachers, their level of interest in studying, and the challenges posed by dropout and absenteeism. Respondents provided brief answers to these questions:

- a. Yes;
- b. Not.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

1. Description of the group of study participants

"Mihail Kogălniceanu" Theoretical High School is a reference educational institution in Ilfov education. The institution has implemented and continues to carry out projects aimed at enhancing the development of knowledge in the field of professional training, with a particular focus on anticipating the skills and qualifications required by the labour market, as well as exploring new methods of training and evaluating this training.

In this research, a total of 110 students from the 9th, 10th, 11th, and 12th grades, out of 517 enrolled in day high school education, along with 53 teaching staff members, were surveyed.

We can assess that the chosen sample provides satisfactory representativeness, even though not all students from the institution were included in the research.

2. Description of work tools

Rigorously carried out sociological investigations can bring to light important aspects of social reality, allowing decision-makers and institutions to adopt suitable ameliorative strategies

s for the identified problems. The present study aims to highlight the situation of school dropouts and the risk of dropping out at the level of the "Mihail Kogălniceanu" Theoretical High School. We aim to highlight the reasons why some of the students did not attend school, the activities/concerns of those who do not attend school, and the ameliorative measures proposed by school counsellors/mediators that could contribute to reducing the rate of this phenomenon [11].

To probe the profile of this phenomenon in pre-university education in the target group, we used the questionnaire method. This is a method or technique often used in descriptive research. Through the questionnaire, the selected group of people (called the sample) filled in the requested data and expressed their opinions regarding school dropout.

The conclusions of the investigation are based on the laws of standard mathematical statistics, which are based on the calculation of the frequencies with which different answer variants of each question appear and on the verification of the formulated hypothesis.

3. *The questionnaire*

The questionnaire is a technique and, at the same time, an investigative tool that consists of a set of written questions, ordered logically and psychologically, which, through the administration of the investigation operators, determines answers from the investigated to be recorded in writing [4].

In our research, an indirect survey using the questionnaire was employed, considering the advantages of this tool for gathering opinions. These include providing subjects with sufficient time to reflect before responding, eliminating the potential influence of the survey operator, and reducing errors in recording and interpreting the data, among other benefits.

In the compilation of the questionnaires, we had in mind the realisation of factual questions, as well as opinion questions that usually probe the inner universe of the individual, more specifically, the opinions of individuals and the subjective evaluations regarding the studied topic.

We built closed questions, starting from the premise that they ensure greater rigour and

solid validity of the research instrument, but also open questions with short answers. In formulating the closed questions, the criterion of completeness was considered, i.e. the possibility offered to each respondent to find the answer variant satisfactory for himself, from those proposed, the necessity of framing the answer variants in distinct categories and the possibility of providing univocal answers. The formulated questions are introductory, passing and with a moderate degree of abstraction. In making them up, I tried not to make them too demanding or boring. Through the form and content of the formulated questions and the language used, we wanted these investigation tools to be easy to understand and complete.

4. *Organization of research*

The theoretical basis of the research was carried out in December 2020 (theoretical considerations, construction of objectives and working hypothesis, creation of questionnaire models and their application).

The actual development of the research was achieved by collecting the data in the same time interval and then proceeding to the registration, processing and interpretation of the data.

5. *Verification and validation of questionnaires*

When checking the questionnaires, I mainly looked at three aspects: their completeness, accuracy and uniformity. Completeness refers to the fact that each question must receive an answer, and in the case of non-answers, their cause must be analysed. In the case of the present research, we only faced this problem to a small extent because some of the questions were closed.

As a rule, closed questions make completing and analysing the questionnaire easier. However, open-ended questions offer the advantage of providing a wide range of alternative responses, allowing researchers to gain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study.

The data were collected based on two questionnaires:

1. A questionnaire for teachers and managers;
2. A questionnaire for students.

To supplement the data obtained through the questionnaire, the school documents were used.

The analysis of the results was based on frequency distributions. The study focused on the following indicators, which can be found in the formulation of the questions for the questionnaire:

- ✓ The role of the school in the life of the student/teacher;
- ✓ Causes of school dropout;
- ✓ Determination of the student's living environment;
- ✓ Determining the degree of satisfaction with the educational act;
- ✓ Determining the level of involvement of the student in the educational act;
- ✓ Educational attitudes and roles.

This had a double purpose:

a. A quantitative purpose: obtaining information related to the structure of the class, the ethnic composition, the social status and the various risks to which the students of the class could be exposed - risk of dropping out of school, risk of family abandonment, risk of institutionalisation, risk of emotional abuse, risk of physical abuse, risk of social non-integration.

b. A qualitative aim: checking the degree of knowledge of the leaders of their own class.

6. Frequency tables - data interpretation

Questionnaire regarding the perception of school dropout - for teaching staff -

When asked about the actuality of the school dropout phenomenon, the teaching staff appreciated that at the level of Romania, the school dropout phenomenon is no longer so topical.

Analysing the responses of the subjects, we find that 45% (24 options) consider that, to a small extent, school dropout is still a current phenomenon, a challenge for the education system in Romania; 28% (15 options) believe that, to a large extent, the school dropout phenomenon is still current; 17% (9 options) consider that to a very large extent, the school dropout phenomenon is still current; and 10% (5 options) believe that the school dropout phenomenon is no longer current.

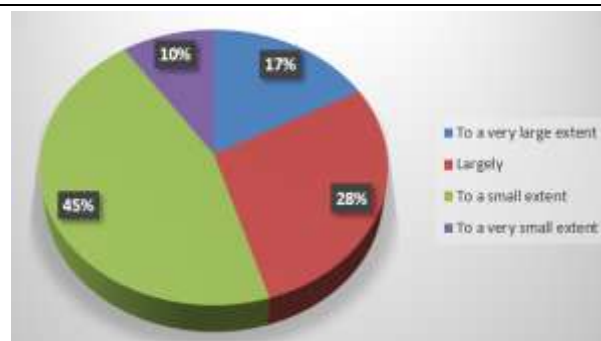


Fig. 1. The actuality of the school dropout phenomenon
Source: Own contribution.

To the question, "To remedy this phenomenon, it is necessary to know the causes that can lead to leaving the educational path. Mention a factor of school dropout noted in the unit of which you are a part", 58% (31 options) of the teachers believe that a main factor of school dropout is "lack of student motivation and adaptation difficulties"; 28% (15 options) believe that the "precarious material and financial situation of the family" is a factor in school dropout; 8% (4 options) claim that "lack of family involvement" is a factor in school dropout, and 6% (3 options) consider that "students' need for leisure" is a factor in school dropout.

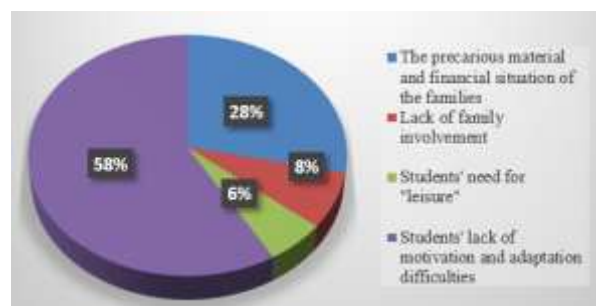


Fig. 2. Factors influencing school dropout
Source: Own contribution.

To the question regarding the influence of repetition on school dropout, 51% (27 options) of the respondents believe that repetition influences school dropout to a small extent, 28% (15 options) consider that school dropout is influenced to a large extent by repetition, 11% (6 options) consider that school dropout is influenced by repetition to an insignificant extent, and 10% (5 options) believe that school dropout is influenced to a very large extent by repetition.

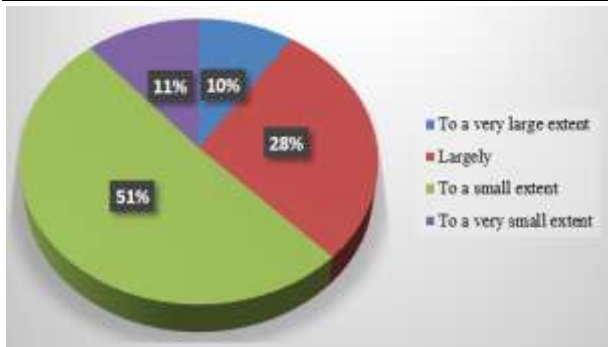


Fig 3. The influence of repetition on school dropout
Source: Own contribution.

To the question regarding the necessity of opening the school to the community, 70% (37 options) of the respondents believe that it is a very great necessity for the school to be open to the community through offers and services, 24% (13 options) consider it a great necessity, while 6% (3 options) maintain that the openness to the community is a small necessity.

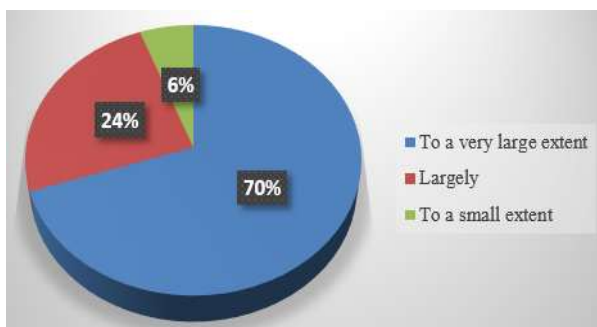


Fig. 4. The need to open the school to the community
Source: Own contribution.

To the question regarding the measures to prevent school dropout, 45% (24 options) consider that a good measure to prevent school dropout is to condition the allowance 36% (19 options) consider that special training activities for children from groups with a high risk of school dropout are an appropriate measure, 11% (6 options) consider that a good measure is to sanction parents who do not take care of ensuring the right to education, while 8% (4 options) believe that providing financial and material support to poor families would be a suitable measure to reduce school dropout.

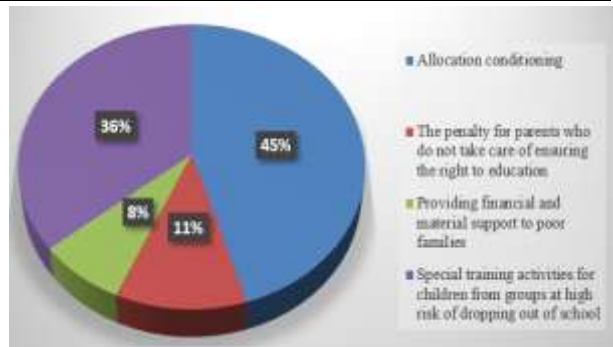


Fig. 5. Measures to prevent school dropout
Source: Own contribution.

CONCLUSIONS

School dropout is today a phenomenon encountered in all education systems. For teachers, the reasons for dropping out of school are primarily related to the children's family problems, the influence exerted by the so-called "group of friends" on them, the lack of school motivation, and the fact that they are made to work rather than learn. The information presented in this study is not new to the education system, but it emphasises the need for prompt and effective remedial measures to be implemented to reduce the school dropout rate. In the absence of these measures, the phenomenon of abandonment could increase, and this will have, as I stated at the beginning of the paper, negative consequences on society in the medium and long term. The implementation of modern technologies cannot be done with an unskilled or insufficiently skilled workforce.

It is strictly up to the school to take measures for students to participate in more attractive school activities, for students to care about their grades and for the accumulation of a large number of absences. The problems related to commuting, those related to the specific traditions of some minorities, or those related to the lack of perspective offered by the school due to its inadequacy with the labour market are not to be neglected either. At the same time, we made a special mention of the emotional and behavioural problems faced by some students. However, in these situations, solutions can certainly be found by the institutions responsible for these areas.

If, at present, children are staying at home or going out instead of attending school, some

appropriate legislative measures must be taken to rectify the situation.

The improvement of the dropout phenomenon undoubtedly depends on the measures that the school will adopt. Considering the class of students as a social group characterised by a complex system of interpersonal relations, the educator can make it an attractive environment. The quality of the climate and the cohesion of the group can make students stay away from school. Through learning methods and techniques designed to promote learning motivation, both at the microsocial and individual level, teachers can stimulate students to develop empathic skills and the feeling of belonging to a group.

To some extent, it depends on the teachers as well as the students who, for reasons that are within their control or not, do not drop out of school. If these students are encouraged to come to school, they are positively appreciated for this, and they arrive in time to have better and better results in education in conditions where the other members of the group have already reached the set performances, the results obtained will certainly be positive. For the student who has been absent from school for a while, the return is beneficial not only from the perspective of his academic progress but also from the perspective of the fact that the interaction with the other students in the class creates a favourable atmosphere of acceptance and sympathy, which ultimately leads to an increase in self-esteem and an anxiety reduction.

The family and the school are the main agents of socialisation for the child, and therefore, together, they can act to prevent and reduce absenteeism/abandonment and the integration of children who have faced such problems at some point.

Dropping out of school has major implications on the personal development of the individual and short-, medium- and long-term consequences on the development of human resources and the development of communities in general. Surely, as society develops day by day, the evolution/involution of this phenomenon will be highlighted, as

well as other ameliorative solutions that can be adopted for the benefit of our students.

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